

BETTY WELTER – THUMB NAIL SKETCH OF MY LIFE

I was born in Bassano, Alberta. My father was with the C.P.R. (Canadian Pacific Railway) and the irrigation project from Patricia to Brooks. Alkali took over the farm and Dad's garden and we moved to the Grande Prairie area in 1928 and I am still here. Mother and my sister and I came on the train – over a 24 hour trip then, and Dad traveled with the animals and all our worldly possessions in a box car. This took 8 days from southern Alberta to the Dimsdale siding.

We lived in a log house that dad moved from the original Clifford buildings by Flying Shot Lake. Three years later we moved to the south end of the lake and in another log house from the Clifford homestead. Our neighbours could never agree as to whether this was the old hospital or police barracks, but it was home to us for years and it burned down in 1956 just after Dad had retired and sold the farm and moved into town.

I took my schooling at the one room Flying Shot School through to Grade 8. Correspondence courses for our high schooling were just starting, so after a year's break I took Grades 9 and 10 by correspondence through the Western Canada Institute. I started Grade 11 but when my Mother died I quit in order to assist Dad with the family and farm. After another year's break I attended Vermillion Agricultural College for 2 years (1939 to 1941) and obtained a Home Economics degree. I returned to Grande Prairie and cooked at our hospital in 1941 and again in 1943 and 1944. Dad had market gardens so I was well occupied there in between other jobs.

I was married in August, 1944, and almost immediately attempted to feed the multitude at the first Grande Prairie High School Dormitory in the recently vacated officers mess down at the barracks. Of course the war was still on and it was very difficult to get utensils, etc. to start such a big venture. We had 56 students plus 56 food ration books to look after so I wasn't idle. Jack was at the airport working on the runway extension from October 1944 to September 1945. I finished at the Dormitory in July and worked at Archibald's store by the Royal Bank that winter.

JOHN METT (JACK) WELTER

Jack had a chance to apprentice in Sexsmith in blacksmithing but his father said "No, stay on the farm and work". The day after he turned 16 he left home and never returned to the homestead. The other three did odd jobs on farms, etc., Mary leaving shortly after and eventually moving to Oyen and marrying Herb Lockhart. Carl married Exeree Minard from Bezanson and lived in the Sexsmith area.

Jack moved to a farm in Bezanson for several years doing farming in general with horses. His wages were \$15.00 a month for the six summer months and his board and room for the winter. He lived in a small log house and ate with the family in an adjoining house.

Several years later he moved into Grande Prairie and worked with the town in various positions – putting in water connections with a shovel and auger (no back hoe then), driving the street grader, cleaning the town water tower, mechanic, and mostly carpenter during the summer months. Jack worked for Jim Leadbetter who was a very clever carpenter and also quite strict. You had to do things correctly, and preferably the first time shown too, Jack recalls. He certainly learned a good deal while with Jim.

Jack was employed at Moon's saw mill on the Smoky River during the winter. The cook house could serve wild meat then and Jack was the supplier on many days. There was no hunting season then and there was lots of game. The boss would come to the bunk house after supper and tell him he was excused regular duty the following day and was required to bring home some meat. As was previously stated he was a crack shot and loved hunting and traveling those river banks by horseback, snowshoes or skis depending on weather conditions.

Jack joined the army in the winter of 1942 in the Engineers and was sent to Petawawa and Ottawa for training. His youngest brother, Willie, was also in the Engineers and was sent to Europe with a truck convoy. Jack developed foot and leg problems and was discharged that fall and returned to Grande Prairie during harvest time. Later he had a job to build a huge barn in Bezanson. The total price for his time and expertise was \$15.00 plus his board and room – at least he had a job and a place to live. This was before any power tools so building was all hard manual labour.

We were married in August, 1944, and Jack got a job as rod-man at the airport when the runways were being extended as part of the war effort. The winter of 1944 and '45 was very severe with about 4 feet of snow on the level and temperatures in the -30 and -40 F. range day after day. He was out in that deep snow and severe temperature all day long and had to dress and eat accordingly. That job ended in September of 1945 – the runways were finished and the war was ended.

He was back with the town off and on when needed. In 1946 he started with Union Tractor as heavy duty mechanic and trouble shooter on the road. The Grande Prairie branch of Caterpillar was the only one north of Edmonton and they serviced all of Northern Alberta and up into the

North West Territories. Seismic work was just starting in the area so there was lots of work and breakdowns. Jack's starting wage was \$.75 per hour but he had to purchase a lot of heavy duty tools during those first few years. He had car mechanic's tools but not the larger ones needed for Cat repair. Jack was with Union Tractor until the company closed down in Alberta in 1957 which was quite a blow to all employees all over.

Jack went on his own working for previous customers for several months as he was described as one of the best diesel mechanics in Alberta. However he didn't have a shop for winter repair of any sorts. In 1958 he started with the Department of Highways in similar work as repair man and trouble shooter on the road. This was a smaller area from Fox Creek north to the B.C. boundary and anything needed east and west. He retired in June of 1974.

Jack was a very good carpenter and built our first wee house in 1944. He built onto same in 1950 and 1952. It was still too small so he planned a bigger one to be built two lots farther east. He gave a contract to Angel Construction for the shell only and we moved into same in November 1954. No doors on anywhere except the bathroom and exterior ones of course. He built the kitchen cupboards in the attached garage by sections during the winter and in his spare time. We had 6 double wooden egg crates stacked on their sides for kitchen cupboards for the first year.

Jack had planned the large house with full basement to contain some suites to rent. These were built in spare moments with some outside help and we had two suites downstairs and one over the garage. So our house now contained 22 rooms and was finished.

Jack then decided to build a 7 room, two story duplex to the east of us and got that covered in the fall of '61 and worked indoors all winter to finish same. He built the cupboards there too. We now had four lots that had to be attended to with lawn, gardens, hedges, etc. He built a small greenhouse where I started all my bedding plants for years.

Jack loved the outdoors, hunting, fishing, camping, etc. and was very knowledgeable about same and a real conservationist. He was also a very good marksman and helped to build the gun range south of town and was made an honorary life member.

He liked to travel and camp and we started with a borrowed tent, then he made a tent trailer which we used numerous times. We traveled through California, to Disneyland, Victoria, Alaska, Two Lakes and many points in between. We graduated to a holiday trailer for more adventures, all the six children came with us as long as they were still at home and could get away. They all had their paper routes and later on summer jobs.

Jack had a poor winter in 1976 and '77 with colds, flu, pleurisy, etc., and was hospitalized for some time. He suffered a severe heart attack on March 17, 1977 while in hospital and was air lifted to the University of Alberta Coronary unit in a severe blizzard, He had double pneumonia while in the city among other ailments. He returned to Grande Prairie and was hospitalized again as pneumonia had returned. He was discharged on May 2nd and still a very sick man – he

had lost about 40 pounds and couldn't drive nor do very much after eleven weeks in hospital. He made a good recovery over the summer, gained weight, walked further every day and was allowed to drive again by fall.

We bought a small motor home and traveled quite a bit. Jack was on medication, and very careful about diet but doing quite well. We traded the Shasta Motor home for a Triple E 'Chippewa' and so enjoyed that for several years. Jack's heart had suffered permanent damage and his breathing was affected. He was put on oxygen when needed. He did get hunting a few more times – yes even took the motor home – comfort you know!! He had a few set backs and was hospitalized several times in the '80s. The last two years weren't very comfortable, he was on oxygen a lot and his strength was failing. He did get out nearly every day for a walk and determination was the key. He had a fatal heart attack on February 23, 1987, while walking on Main Street in Grande Prairie – he had just turned 74.

MY PARENTS

My father was Archie Smart from Fishponds, Bristol, England. Both mother and father were born in 1886. They both attended their standard schools of their areas until the end of their eighth stanza. This was the limit of most children's formal education at the turn of the century, so I was told.

My father immigrated to Canada at the age of fifteen; his older brother, Sid, was his sponsor. Sid was already well established in Melfort, Saskatchewan area in house construction. The brothers didn't agree very well so Dad was soon on his own drifting and working from one area and job to another. He worked in Alberta before it was a province but didn't stay at this point. He was in California and worked in the horticultural area of the World's Fair in San Francisco. My father had a real flair for anything to do with gardening and could literally make anything grow and bloom.

Dad ventured further south and worked on the Panama Canal during its construction, not sure in what department or area or what year. He contracted malaria fever and was hospitalized for days and almost died during this ordeal. I was on a cruise in November, 1990, and we passed through the Canal. This was the 75th anniversary of the completion of the Canal and many signs, placards, etc. were visible from our ship, the Royal Princess. As we watched from the deck, I kept wondering just where he had been and what he had done and also in what year

Dad returned to Canada about 1910, I believe, and was employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway in southern Alberta on the huge irrigation project. There are many black and white snaps in the family album of his various camps, grades, groups of workers, bridges, etc., mostly without any information on the back, unfortunately. They lived in tents summer and winter and all the dirt work was done with horses, fresnoes [sic], slip scrapers and best of all, hand shovels plus hard work.

He joined the Canadian Engineers in 1915, I think, and was sent to Halifax briefly and on to England for training in many areas. He was eventually with a Bridging Unit in France and Belgium traveling by barge on the canals repairing bridges, etc., from the bombing and shelling. He was wounded and sent back to Canterbury, England army hospital. That's where he met my mother.

Dad returned to France shortly after my parents were engaged, and the war, in general, went very badly in 1917 for the allies. Both my parents were almost convinced they were not likely to see one another again. Mail was weeks in transit and parcels even longer. I remember Dad telling us there were ninety some men on the repair barge at its beginning of traveling the canals. When peace was declared, there were twenty some of the original crew alive and on board, Dad being one of the twenty! Was it luck or what.

This barge and crew were close to Bruges in Belgium on Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, and what a day that was indeed. Everyone was so sick of war, death, injuries, air raids,

bombings, rationing, sickness and continually being wet and cold. Today it would probably be classed as undue stress.

Dad was discharged early in 1919 as this unit apparently continued on repairing as before, but in peace time now. After a brief holiday in England with both his family in Bristol and mother's family in Canterbury, he returned to Canada. His destination was Calgary, Alberta. The C.P.R. had kept or found a job for him and he continued on with the irrigation project. His headquarters were mostly in the Bassano area, I believe. The push was on to complete the project, finish the aqueduct and thus bring more virgin land under cultivation. I wish I could remember the figures my father quoted regarding cubic yards of concrete used in a day – mixed by hand and shovels then as well.

Letters continued back and forth across the ocean with increasing regularity. Weddings [sic] bells were ringing louder all the time in my father's ears. He decided he couldn't bring his bride to Canada to live in a tent so he built a small two room skid shack. This could be moved across the prairie wherever camp was set up.

The big day was set, in June, 1920, with the wedding to take place in Calgary. Mother was 'sent for' and came across the ocean by boat – eight days on the water. They had some delays and change of course as many icebergs were spotted. They landed in Halifax and had a seven day train trip across Canada. After traveling short distances in England, Mother said she certainly wondered where in the world she was indeed going.

Poor father was trying to arrange a very small wedding on her arrival in Calgary. Can't you imagine his anxiety over all these delays? It was truly a small wedding as they knew no one in Calgary. They traveled to Banff by train on a honeymoon trip, swam in the Cave 'n Basin even in 1920 and had a marvelous holiday.

Dad had to return to his job, so down to Brooks area by train where the job was now. Their first little house was waiting for them, fresh paint job and all. Some of his buddies from work had also been busy and had nailed a very large plank right across the doors and windows. On it was printed in large red letters 'For Me And My Gal', Poor mother didn't quite know what to make or think about western Canada at this time.

Dad had been the 'lively bachelor' in the area before and after the war and knew everyone for miles. Besides settlers were almost non-existent as the area was still classed as open range. Cowboys were present fairly often herding large herds of cattle and horses. Women were few and far between. Dad's camp had a lady cook and helper, mother had little female company. The west was rather wild and horse and cattle rustling was quite common at the time. Horses especially were in great demand across the border as all the delivery wagons were pulled by horses in the cities, thus being a valuable item.

Mother had a very different style of life during her first year in Canada as did so many war brides. She often laughed about it in later years and certainly longed for her home in Canterbury

complete with large brick house, yard, garden, flowers, fruit trees, etc. on many occasions. She adapted very well and took the prairies, hauling water in barrels, outdoor plumbing, coil oil lamps, blizzards, etc. in her stride. She told stories, humorous incidents about herself that I can remember. One of her favourites was that she was going to surprise Dad one night for supper with a delicious apple pie. Poor Mother had never seen dried apples before and no one told her she had to soak them first. Needless to say, it wasn't a success. Dad was not impressed – poor Mother.

They had a good marriage complete with many 'ups and downs' as the saying goes. They were excellent parents to we three children and we have many very happy memories indeed. They worked together and also very hard and we were a happy family. This was one World War I marriage that was very successful as both my parents were in their 30s [sic] at the time.

MY SISTER BARBARA

Barbara was born in Patricia, southern Alberta, on October 19th, 1922. She was born at home on the farm with a local doctor covering two births on two farms at the same time.

Barbara started school in mid October at Flying Shot School once we got settled on the Owen's farm in 1928. She continued on through Grade 8 and took high school by correspondence. While I went to Vermillion for two winters, Barbara, Charles and Dad managed on the farm and she continued with correspondence. In 1941, when I returned home, it was Barbara's turn to finish her schooling. She had to attend a high school for Grade 12 to have access to labs etc. and boarded and worked for a family in town. She graduated from G.P. High School in 1942, completed a secretarial course and immediately began work at the Treasury Branch for a few months, then the Bank of Montreal, and finally with the American Armed Forces Secretarial Pool at the Airport.

She met her husband Doug Barrett from California who was in the Signal Corp and stationed here. Doug's newspaper background led to him starting a very popular base newsletter while in Grande Prairie. They were married here in December of 1944 and traveled to Truckee, California, by train. This was Doug's home, and Barbara joined Doug's family in helping put out the family newspaper there whilst starting her family. Doug returned to Grande Prairie as he was still in the Service, and would often walk out to the farm to see Dad or come to the dorm and have supper with Jack and I – a very enjoyable time for us.

Doug returned to California after the war and worked with the family newspaper in Truckee, later they moved to Sacramento and finally Berkeley, raising a family of 4 girls – Kathryn, Sheila, Phyllis and Patricia. The whole family drove back to our area in 1959 for a holiday. Doug died in 1986 and Barbara resides in Berkeley at the present time.

From Margaret – As children, we remember the parcels from our California family – always containing exciting treasures that had not made it north to Grande Prairie stores. We also remember the car trip with our home made trailer to visit our California cousins. Since then, the warm hospitality of Aunt Barb, Uncle Doug and their daughters has been much appreciated by us all as we and now our children have journeyed south.

MY BROTHER CHARLIE

Charles Frederick Smart was born at the Grande Prairie hospital on October 4th, 1930. Poor Mother had a very difficult pregnancy and spent the last month in hospital plus two weeks after he was born. Our family were so excited to welcome them both home just before my sister's 8th birthday on October 19th. He was a bonny wee blond baby with big blue eyes and was adored by us all.

Charlie attended Flying Shot school in Grades 1 to 8. He couldn't get accepted in the High School in town for Grade 9 as they had no room. My father inquired at St. Joseph's Separate School and he was accepted there. He rode his bike every day 6 miles each way when the weather permitted and stayed with Jack and I a lot in stormy weather and through the winter months. He graduated and was interested in joining the R.C.M.P. He applied and was tentatively accepted, passing numerous interviews, personality tests, security, etc., but was just under the 5'8" height requirements then. Dr. G. O'Brien suggested he go to work in the lumber camp for the winter, as he was still growing. He was employed at the Ross Lumber Camp for the winter and still not the required height come spring. He went to Edmonton and worked for the Edmonton Journal on the night staff over the summer. He had a tiny attic room on the third floor of an apartment and sleep or rest was almost impossible during the summer months. He decided journalism wasn't for him and returned to Grande Prairie.

He had several small jobs still hoping to meet the height requirements for the R.C.M.P.. He finally lost patience and joined the Navy as height didn't matter with them. He was stationed in Cornwallis N.S. for basic training and apprenticing as an electrician. He was very happy with life in the navy, advanced to Halifax and was stationed on the 'Ontario'. He had several long training sessions at sea – all around South America, through the Panama Canal and was stationed at Esquimalt, B.C., for several months. He had ten days in Hawaii with their ship and crew as guests at the American naval Base over Easter in 1952.

Charlie had met a legal secretary in Halifax, Sheila Holland, and they were engaged early in 1953. Wedding plans were being made for the spring of '54. He had finished 3 years of training and had a month's leave to look forward to here at home.

MY EARLY CHILDHOOD and MY EATON BEAUTY DOLL

I was born in Alberta at the Bassano Hospital, which was about 45 miles from where my parents lived and close to Brooks. Hospitals were very scarce in southern Alberta at that time and ladies traveled up to Bassano by train and waited for the blessed event. There were no phones in the area either so I was over a day old before my father knew his first born had arrived. Far cry from today with fathers in the delivery room.

I was christened at Brooks in an Anglican Church by Bishop Howard Mowll when I was about four months old. The bishop had gone to school with my mother in Canterbury, England, years earlier and had been stationed in Eastern Canada. He came west on his holidays after Mother had informed him of my arrival. I have a small snap of the christening party outside the wee church – the bishop, mother, dad, and me in Mom's arms.

Christmases seem to be some of my most vivid memories as a pre-schooler. We lived one and a half miles from Patricia, a very small hamlet close to Brooks. We were in the irrigation area now and far better than the bald prairie. However, small trees had to be planted and Christmas trees seemed to be non-existent then. My fourth Christmas, we were invited to my sister's godmother for dinner and gifts. Mrs. Havens had a large wash tub on the porch full of barley and the Christmas gifts were hidden in it. I can still remember the feel of digging in that cold, scratchy barley for our presents and the mess – horrors! I haven't a clue what my gift was, just how I got it.

My fifth Christmas was a very exciting occasion indeed, and how well I remember that one. We lived in a farm house with wood stoves and Dad was always up first to get the fires going and the kettle boiling – then call Mother. My younger sister, Barbara, and I were wide awake on this special day, of course, and were just waiting for the house to be warm enough and Dad to call us. When he did call, we literally flew out of bed and into the front room. A huge Eaton Beauty Doll was my gift that year and she was exquisite indeed. She had lovely long, curly hair, brown eyes that closed when I laid her down and tiny little teeth in her very, very lifelike china head. She was precious indeed and was wearing a pale blue hand knitted dress that Mother had made. The rest of that Christmas, gifts, etc., is a blank – my beautiful doll was it.

While my parents were having their cup of tea, mother exclaimed “I'm so tired, it must be very early”. Indeed it was as Dad had read the clock backwards or something and it wasn't even 5 a.m. So Mother was vindicated and Dad was teased and felt rather sheepish. We all went back to bed for an hour or so. I took my doll and laid her very carefully beside me. Sleep wasn't for me then even though it was pitch dark in the room as I was far too excited. I decided to name my doll Dorothy.

Dorothy was my constant companion for years to come. Mother taught me to sew, knit and crochet and how to design clothes for her. Dorothy had some quaint garments indeed, created by my small fingers from material I could salvage from Mother's piece bag. At least I was learning at Mother's knee in our spare moments and I really enjoyed this.

Incidentally, I still have the doll and she is still beautiful. Her arms and legs are jointed and have an elastic going through them. The elastic deteriorated in time, my poor doll came apart and I was very upset. We moved several times, but I always kept all the parts in a box. After I was married and living in Grande Prairie, a very dear friend said she could repair her. My friend Louise was a real crafter and liked working with dolls, especially Eaton Beauties. She was gladly presented with the box of pieces and some new elastic. She phoned me a few days later saying I could pick her up. Louise had done a great job and my doll looked just like new. She had re-done her hair, made her a small pair of nylons from some of hers and the original little white shoes were still in use. She was now wearing a lovely pale blue satin dress, which was lace trimmed as well as were her undies and slip. I certainly appreciated Louise's work and expertise.

My doll still graces the dresser in my apartment neatly wrapped in clear plastic – she is still beautiful.

MEMORIES OF GRADE ONE

My Grade One was spent in a two room school at Patricia, Alberta, one and a half miles from our farm home. We had a long driveway lined with cottonwood poplars that held the snow in winter and also blocked my view of the road. The neighbour children traveled with a horse and buggy to school. How I watched for that white horse named 'Jimmy' and his charges as I strode down the driveway with my lunch box. One and a half miles alone across the bald prairie seemed to take forever to a six year old somehow. A ride in the buggy with fellow students was far more attractive.

One rather cold and blowy day, late in the fall, I somehow missed these children so I trudged on alone. Suddenly in the distance I saw this huge hound racing towards me and I was petrified – a very small and badly frightened child all alone on a road with no place to run to or hide. I can still see him in my mind to this day. I put my little lunch box down on the road and stood on it – why, I don't know – and screamed and screamed. The hound paid no attention to me at all standing on my lunchbox as he raced across the road about ten feet ahead of me. He had his nose to the ground tracking something and ignored me completely. I can remember watching him disappear in the distance. I couldn't decide whether to run home or continue on to school. After careful consideration, I decided it was closer to the school than home and furthermore, the hound was running away from me so I went to school. I can't remember if I was late or not. I do remember almost begging for a ride home though.

At home that night, I certainly had a tale to tell the family as I was still frightened. Dad explained to me that several men in the district kept these huge hounds to hunt coyotes for their pelts. They probably wouldn't hurt me and obviously this hound was hot on the trail of a coyote when it crossed my path that morning. Dad did slightly reassure me.

School was fun and I was anxious to attend every day, rain or shine. Practicing for the Christmas concert was so exciting and each day brought new involvement even to a six year old.

How we worshipped our teacher, Margaret Lange, from Medicine Hat. I can see her now at the front of the classroom. The flapper dress was in style then and even today if I could draw, I could picture her in great detail. She wore the prettiest dresses and always looked so beautiful as I remember.

This was a two room school, so Grade Ones weren't allowed to do or take part in many activities during recess or noon hour. The 'bigger kids' were more involved with sports, insect collections, relief maps using a salt and flour mixture for mountain ranges, etc. I can remember being allowed to carry the 'poison jar' for a neighbour Grade Four boy working on an insect collection. Tom, with his soft, floppy hat (that all boys wore then) in his hand, would stalk a poor, unsuspecting butterfly, grasshopper or whatever and pounce on it. I had to try and get the often times mangled creature out from the folds of the cap and drop it in the jar. If it was squashed or

too small, we would try again. How important I felt but was probably more of a nuisance at times – but I did learn a lot about insects.

After Christmas, the year seemed to end very quickly somehow. I can't remember any special events really during this time. My report card saying I had been promoted to Grade Two was a very important document to me; besides I had turned 7 in May and was growing up.

My father had market gardens as well as grain farming and livestock on our irrigated farm. The alkali was ruining the land as the farmers didn't understand at that time just how much water to put on or how long to leave it on. I can remember walks to the fields with my parents and Barbara, my younger sister, and Dad being very worried over the plants curling up and dying. We didn't understand their concern, of course, but knew something was wrong, even with our young minds.

Dad and Mother had had enough and the Peace River area was opening up to settlers and looking very attractive. Dad came up by train first to look things over in several areas and was very favourably impressed. So we moved to Grande Prairie in September, 1928, by rail with a box car full of animals and settlers effects. This box car was put on the siding in Dimsdale as this was closer to our farm than Grande Prairie.

I started Grade Two in October, 1928, at Flying Shot School, which was on our land and just up over the hill.

A VERY EARLY MEMORY

We lived in the irrigation area at Patricia in southern Alberta when I was a very small child. I'm the eldest of the family and seemed to be Dad's helper right from the beginning. He had market gardens so, of course, spent a great deal of time planting, weeding, cultivating, picking, etc. I had my little pail or small hoe right beside him and probably more often than not, was more of a nuisance than a help. I didn't think so and dearly loved being out there where the action was. I had my own tiny garden spot long before I went to school. My wee rows were never as straight as Dad's no matter how hard I tried. I can remember being given a few odd cabbage plants at transplanting time for my garden. The blessed things wouldn't stand up like Dad's and no wonder, as they were probably mauled to death after each being planted several times in rapid succession. They still weren't up straight – oh well! Mother was calling, it was bedtime.

One day I especially remember as I was going with Dad to deliver the fruit and vegetables to Jenner and Eidersley. I was just past four years old and going on delivery with Dad was important! The produce was picked and prepared the day before to be all ready for an early start the next day. Such excitement as Dad's old touring car, a model T, I believe, was loaded with peas, beans, new potatoes, lettuce, strawberries and so on. Mother had to check that my hands and face were clean, then a hasty good-bye to her and my sister and we were off.

Roads weren't very good as I recall and very bumpy. It seems to me we just headed across the prairie after we passed the last farm in the irrigated area. I disliked the prairie and its dry barrenness and much preferred the greenery and trees even at that early age. I suppose the scenery wasn't very exciting and I fell asleep in the front seat beside Dad. I can also remember how hot those black, hard leather seats were against very small bare legs. There were no seat belts or kiddies car seats in those days in any car.

A very loud and blustery thunderstorm arrived in a hurry before we reached Jenner. The noise woke me so I'm told and I was very frightened and glad my father was present. Of course, I wanted to know what was happening when Dad stopped the car. As stated earlier, it was a touring car and open all around. It had heavy black curtains that clipped on with big domes when necessary and these were stored under the back seat out of sight. They certainly were this day as Dad had piled all the vegetables and fruit on top of them. This was my explanation to my question as to why we stopped to put them on. My answer was, so I'm told, was "Oh what a pesky nuisance". I was teased about this for years and the phrase became sort of a by-word in our household.

Poor Dad – he was trying to keep the produce and ourselves dry as much as possible, and fish the curtains out and clip them on in the rain. I crawled under some boxes by the back seat (being quite small) to dig these curtains out. They were attached eventually and we weren't as dry as before, nor as clean. The soil on the prairies was similar to soft lard after a few minutes in a hard downpour. My dainty print dress and matching panties and white socks looked dreadful and I was very upset as we hadn't even arrived at Jenner with our wares. I don't recall when or

how we arrived, how we sold the produce or where really. The fact that we were both dirty and muddy worried me far more.

It was a long day for me and I was very glad to arrive home – we were much later than expected because of the muddy conditions. Mother was a bit worried about us and also very glad that we were safe and sound, though a bit bedraggled to say the least. My bed was very inviting that night and I didn't need to be told that it was long past my bedtime. This was once that I wasn't scolded for getting dirty. In fact, I was quite proud afterwards as Dad said "I was a very good helper".

THE BEAN EARTHQUAKE

This happened in our garden in Patricia when we were young children. My father had market gardens here and saved his own seed on many occasions. Barbara, my younger sister, and I were out with Dad while he was planting his garden, pestering him no doubt as well. He had a tobacco tin of string bean seed left over and gave it to Barbara for her garden. Away she went. Barbara was about four and a half years old.

We had a large drooping elderberry bush on the edge of the lawn that provided a lot of shade. Barbara decided to plant her beans under the shady branches of this bush. She dug a small ditch about a foot long with the fire shovel. She then put in a layer of beans and a layer of dirt and continued until the ditch was full and the bean seed was all gone. Then she watered same very well and left the spot. She never said a word to anyone and promptly forgot all about it.

Beans germinate very quickly. There were also several layers of beans. My parents were walking around the lawn and noticed these big bumps and wondered what it was. We did have a lot of wild mushrooms in our area especially with the irrigation. They thought this was going to be a very large mushroom maybe.

Mom and Dad watched this spot for several days while the eruption grew bigger and bigger and still had no explanation. After several days a few bean shoots popped through from the top layer to be followed by a huge upheaval of all the beans planted on top of one another. Mother thought this very amusing and it was fondly referred to as the earthquake under the elderberry bush.

WHAT FLOUR SACK

My father was with the irrigation project in the Brooks – Bassano area for some time before enlisting in Calgary and going overseas in 1915 to serve in the First World War. There were very few women in the area then and it was quite a 'wild and woolly' spot in Alberta according to my Dad. There were very few settlers as it was referred to as a dried out area with only prairie wool, tumbleweed, buffalo beans, flowers, meadowlarks, jack rabbits, badgers, antelope and gophers about. The irrigation project was progressing for that area but was rather on hold during the war years.

Dad returned in 1919, war was over and now work progressed more rapidly on canals, ditches, sluice gates and the Bassano Dam. He had met my Mother overseas and they agreed to be married when Dad got established once more in Alberta. He built a little two room 'skid shack' that could be pulled across the prairie from job to job. He sent for my Mother in June 1920; she came out by boat and train from Canterbury to Calgary where they were married. The railway had now progressed to Bassano. How they traveled from the station to their wee house I have no idea, probably by horse and democrat. I can imagine my Mother coming from Canterbury with its lovely trees, shrubs and flowers, and working in London to being transported by these means across the bald prairie. It was bare and bald too – as Dad often said, you could see a jack rabbit coming from the time he left the Manitoba border as there was nothing in between.

As work progressed on the irrigation project, more settlers arrived, rail lines extended to Brooks, some small hamlets sprung up and mail was arriving more frequently. Most of the south was classed as 'open range' with lots of cattle, horses and cowboys galore. The saddle horse was one of the main means of travel or else a democrat. Dad knew everyone for miles around, he was very outgoing and good looking with lovely blonde curly hair. Many in the area had worked for him from time to time on the project. He received lots of ribbing when he built his little 'skid shack' and brought his bride to the area, and now he was starting a family.

I arrived in 1921, born in Bassano as this was the nearest hospital. It seems that I was quite a novelty as very few babies or children were in the area at that time. Dad tells of one embarrassing moment that took him weeks to live down and get used to being a family man.

The story goes that he had to go into the hamlet for the mail and some food one Saturday night – I believe it was Patricia. It was a cold blizzard night and he rode horseback. Mother and I were at home of course where she was preparing for my bath and had my wee clothes laid out close to the stove. Dad asked for a flour sack in which to put his purchases, mail etc. This could be tied to the saddle. Flour came in strong white cotton sacks at that time and these found numerous uses in a household.

The wee store was full of cowboys – bachelors all – having fun as was usual for a Saturday night. Dad picked up the mail (Mother was always anxiously waiting for letters from England of course), the needed groceries and stated he had to get home. This statement produced lots of teasing and ribbing from the bachelor crowd and they said he was really getting domesticated

when he had to hurry home. Dad apparently told the store keeper “Oh I’ll put everything in this flour sack as I’m on horseback”. Poor Dad – instead of pulling out the promised flour sack from his pocket he produced a cute little white baby nightgown nicely embroidered, complete with lace, etc. Can you imagine the guffaws and roars of laughter from the local crowd? Now they were firmly convinced that Archie was fully domesticated.

Dad said he was very glad to get out of that store and return home that night.

POSTPONED TRIP BUT WORTH IT

As previously mentioned, the school fairs became a very important part of our lives in our public school years. In 1933, I was quite fortunate and had the most accumulated points in the girls [sic] department at our fair held in September. The grand prize for both a girl and a boy was a week all prepaid at the Vermillion School of Agriculture the following July. I was overjoyed and had ten months to look forward to this, make plans and just wait impatiently for the time to come. Towards spring, we received some information by mail regarding dates, items required and what our program would cover for the week. Can you imagine what this trip meant to 'country kids' who had probably never been to Edmonton or been on a train or bus on their own?

Mother decided I had to have some new clothes for this important event. Again, poor Mother, as I must have been the bugbear of her existence – I was extremely thin as a teenager and extra tall for my age. She had great difficulty keeping me covered as my sleeves and skirt lengths were always too short. Had I only known, mu [sic] skirts were or could have been the forerunner for the mini skirt of today. However, girls didn't dress like that then and were never in slacks or pants. I can recall wearing boy's big overalls around the farm as they were much better for crawling fences, riding bareback and doing chores and also being laughed at by the other girls in the district – I didn't really care.

Plans were made early as to what I needed, new material purchased somehow as money was almost non-existent. Mother was an expert at making over everything for us and we never had a 'store bought' garment for years. The good old flour and sugar bags made our underwear, slips and sometimes nightclothes.

1934 had a terribly wet spring and summer, causing very high water on the lakes and rivers. The only way to Edmonton was by train which wound along the shore of Slave Lake. The lake rose higher and higher and the railway was flooded for miles and all trains cancelled. How we listened to the news twice a day on the little Marconi battery radio in hopes the water would recede allowing the trains to run again. It didn't and I can remember receiving my first telegram which said the trip was cancelled for all Peace River area winners. It seemed as though the end of the world was close at hand for me. I was devastated indeed.

The first train and mail through after the flood carried a letter stating our trip would be honoured the following year. That was some relief, but now I had another whole year to look forward to this week and how I hoped that blessed lake would recede for good. This was certainly to be the trip of my life up to this point anyway.

1935 and spring eventually arrived and it was much drier with no flooding along Slave Lake. We received our travel instructions, so now planning began again in earnest. We had to report to the train station in Grande Prairie a little early to meet some other winners and our chaperone, Mr. Dickson, a teacher from Beaverlodge. There were about twelve of us from twelve to fifteen years of age and more were picked up en route – this group were the winners of two years. The

train trip was about twenty hours and we were in the day coach and so up almost all night. Some did fall asleep. I remember the awe of our lunch being served by a black waiter in the dining car as the train lurched along.

One of the boys had a pack of cards and we played for a while, some had books but it was quite rough and hard to read. The boys got a little bored and started to tussle, it was a hot day and we had the windows open in the coach. The conductor had issued us some pillows and, of course, the boys got into a mini pillow fight. Ken had got thumped from behind unexpectedly and swung around to launch his pillow at his assailant. Alas, the boy ducked and the pillow sailed right out the window. Poor Ken almost expired on the spot as he couldn't do a thing about it. I can remember watching the plump white lump fade away in the distance as the train rumbled on. I'm sure he envisioned being billed by the N.A.R. (Northern Alberta Railway) and all sorts of punishment coming his way. I don't really know where Mr. Dickson was – anyway we never heard any more about this incident and the boys certainly quieted down. Residents living beside the tracks often walked the tracks as it was higher and drier than many roads. Can you imagine the surprise and wonderment of some homesteader walking along to come upon a nice feather pillow complete with white pillow case way out in nowhere!

I'm sure we looked a bit bedraggled upon arrival in the Edmonton train station. After a few minutes spent in the train washroom, we all met Mr. Dickson in the hallway. He instructed us how to claim our luggage, find the proper street car and proceed to the bus station. We were tired, but the excitement was growing every minute. We checked our luggage in the lockers at the bus depot as we had a four hour wait for the next bus to Vermilion. So off we went, had a meal somewhere but I don't remember where, and went on a short street car tour of the City of Edmonton. Radio was still quite new so we were taken to visit a broadcasting station but again I don't remember which one. We had to go on an elevator, a first for most of us – remember we were from a relatively new rural area. There were too many of us for one elevator, so we filled two lifts. Our group minus Mr. Dickson arrived at the proper floor first. We trundled off all eyes and ears and were met by a young and not too friendly man who said "Where in hell did all you kids come from?". We answered very shyly "Mr. Dickson told us to get off here". His reply was "Who is Mr. Dickson and where is he?" By this time the second elevator had arrived complete with Mr. Dickson and the rest of our contingent. The former introduced himself and us and our tour continued. It was all so new and interesting to us and we left feeling quite confident that we knew nearly all about radio and broadcasting. Just the view out the window from way above the city made us think we were miles high – in reality we were probably at about the sixth floor. The landscape out the hay loft door on the farm was quite a height to us previously.

Back at the bus depot we retrieved our suitcases from the lockers and were on our way again. We were really tired by now and many fell asleep much to Mr. Dickson's relief, I'm sure. The bus was certainly another first for nearly all of us as we had few highways and no buses in the Peace River area at this time.

Our arrival at the college was a real milestone in our lives. We were assigned rooms and roommates, given a timetable for classes, had a tour of the campus and so on. I don't think

anyone from the Peace River area needed to be persuaded to go to bed that first night – we were exhausted.

The week on campus was very busy; many activities had been planned to keep our group well occupied. We had grown to about sixty, I think, with winners from many areas in the northern half of Alberta. Olds had a similar program, I believe, for the southern part of the province. We ate in the dining room, had a seating plan and had to be quite well dressed for a six o'clock meal. At breakfast and lunch we could appear in our clothes required for our given classes.

We girls had to make quite a plain blouse for ourselves, with pattern supplied and instructions being the same for everyone. Most of us had done some sewing with the machine, but our expertise was very limited. Mother had a hand machine with a handle for power that I had learned to use, and I had never used a treadle machine before. It was quite a challenge and that machine was secretly cursed or blessed under my breath, believe me. We had some crafts, P.T., games, tours downtown, impromptu concert plus a movie at the theatre in Vermillion. The town was about a mile away from the college. We had to wear and model our blouse for our formal class picture taken by a photographer from downtown. Yes, we were big time operators indeed. We could order copies of this formal picture for about fifty cents I recall.

We had a farewell banquet plus some sort of social afterwards. I met a young lad from the St. Paul area who I thought was rather special. He was also a lot taller than me, had red hair and freckles and could really lambaste that soft ball. He came to stand beside me in this formal picture – why – who knows. Incidentally, he showed up at our farm one day about two years later and I hardly knew him. He had grown about a foot and had been riding the rods looking for work as were dozens of boys in those years. I introduced him to my family and mother promptly made him a hearty meal and this was devoured very quickly. Those fellows didn't eat very regularly and had little or no funds. After a short visit, he left as he had come, on foot, and I never heard of him again. I was soundly teased for days much to my annoyance – after all I had known him only a week over two years previously. Autograph books were quite the fad, and certainly made the rounds that week. I can't even put a face to many of the verses and rhymes in mine now, but it was fun then.

We all hated to say farewell to our new friends. We packed our bags for home with much less enthusiasm than when they were assembled the previous week. We had a super time indeed and had certainly grown up a lot. I was quite impressed with the college at Vermilion and thought then it would be a good school to pursue. However, nursing was still uppermost in my mind, so it was just a passing thought for something else then.

The return trip home was rather uneventful, we knew all our gang quite well now and chattered probably non stop. Our families were waiting for us at the station and we were transferred back to their care. I'm sure Mr. Dickson heaved a sigh of relief. He had taken good care of we 'farm kids' as we were referred to and, what's more, he arrived home with the same number he had started with. We felt we knew him quite well after that few days, and he had taught some classes at the college that week. Our families became quite good friends later on. We certainly

had some tales to relate to our friends and relatives in the next few days. Each student had so many happy memories to savor in our minds during the days to come. The postponement for a year was well worth it I thought, as did the others.

The next day was a regular school day and our teacher was very interested in our winnings and achievements in all areas. Now all we had to do was wait for our prize money to arrive which seemed to take forever to me.

We were able to purchase our winter clothes for several years with our winnings which our parents appreciated. We needed new winter coats and Mother ordered the coating from Eaton's – the part that bugged me was that my sister and I had to have the same fabric. Mother showed us she could cut to advantage from one piece rather than two and our funds were limited. I agreed but still wished to have a different fabric.

We were learning with our parents at home and we were certainly well occupied and had our articles to use or wear later on. These are happy memories indeed. These school fairs provided a good learning experience for students and teachers in the rural areas.

A Near Tragedy

The spring of 1935 arrived early and very rapidly with a strong, steady and warm southwest wind. We had been making plans to go to town as this was the day the baby chicks were to arrive on the train. No hatchery here at the time so chicks were ordered from Edmonton weeks in advance. These day old chicks arrived in a very sturdy, 50 to 100 size cardboard box lined with excelsior plus holes in the sides and lid to allow for air during transit. We lived seven miles from our train station and they had to be transported home by horse and wagon. Box covered up with blankets for some warmth, I held the box on my knee hoping to lesson some bumps from the very rough road due to spring breakup.

Dad and I left home with the usual list of weekly errands to be attended to before train arrival time. The closer we got to town the worse the road conditions got and more water everywhere. We lived southwest of town and had to cross Bear Creek. That bridge was the one and only one then save the trestle railway one a bit farther south. Horrors! As we came over the hill the entire Bear Creek flat was under water as the creek had overflowed it's [sic] banks. It was a huge roaring, noisy mass of swirling muddy water full of huge ice slabs, driftwood and junk in general being rapidly swept along its way. Now the bridge deck was just above this churning mass and our horses sensed the danger. "Polly" hesitated and snorted whereas "Topsy" was really spooked so Dad had to urge them on right now with the flip of the whip. The bridge was shaking slightly from the force of the rapidly moving water and debris in it. Relief – we were across and now to do the most important errands and be at the station when the train arrived.

I can remember running to the Post Office and the drug store for weekly papers while Dad was at the grocery and hardware shops. I'm sure some shoppers must have wondered why this tall, skinny blonde girl was tearing around the town. I knew anyway and had an urgent job to do and in a hurry too.

To the train station as the train was arriving and slowing to a stop. Dad knew Mr [sic] Card, our station master, and he was always very helpful and considerate. Dad explained how urgent our mission was and to get the chicks right now and across the bridge in case it was swept away. As soon as the baggage car door opened Mr. Card requested the box of chicks, through the check out counter, onto the wagon and on our way home.

Bear Creek had risen another two or three inches and seemed to be moving faster than ever. What tension – would the bridge break away and go down with the rushing water – a frightening possibility. The horses knew they were headed for home but were still very leery of the flood conditions. Topsy again protested about proceeding and certainly let us know too. Dad definitely used his driving expertise and voice encouragement and we were across that shaky bridge – relief indeed! I'm sure my father received a few more grey hairs that day.

As we bounced along the rough road on our way home we couldn't help but think how fortunate we were to be on the right side – our side of that Bear Creek bridge. There were no phones in the area, nor radio station and absolutely no way of letting Mother and family at home know what conditions were had the bridge gone out or where we were, alive or not, plus the

precious chicks. We had several head of stock at home and no chore man. There were two fresh cows and neither Mother or my sister could milk them. Our little log house and barn yard never looked more attractive and secure to us than on this very stressful day. I'm sure the baby chicks were more than ready to be warmly housed and fed also. Yes, we had survived a near tragedy in the early days on the homestead.

Incidentally [sic], the bridge held and didn't float down the creek. It is still in about the same spot but was replaced with a larger, higher and sturdier structure years later. The water in this creek was barely running last fall and one could easily walk across same. Some of us "old timers" can only marvel at the power of "Old Mother Nature" with memories of years gone by.

THE VERMILION SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE

In 1939 I was able to attend the Vermilion School of Agriculture to take a two year home economics course. This course, for farm students, commenced in early October and finished in April and was an alternative for students without Senior Matriculation. Once accepted the girls had to make uniforms and aprons for class time at home, another task to be fitted into busy farm activities.

Now at eighteen years of age, I was almost ready to leave on my huge adventure by train and bus to Vermilion. In addition to being very nervous, finances were a bit of a problem as the grain crop hadn't been sold in early October. Board and room at the college was \$24.00 a month plus a few extra dollars needed for fabrics, library and social fees. We could pay by the month after initial registration. My dear old Uncle Charles in Los Angeles sent me a cheque for \$50.00 in early October and what a gift that was – it paid two months board. My one small suitcase (borrowed from Dad) was packed with my worldly belongings plus I carried my skates – an old black second hand pair – and my winter coat.

Dad bought me a return ticket to Edmonton on the train day coach – I can't remember the price. The trip took over twenty-four hours. On arrival in the city I had to get across from the train station to the bus depot by taxi, use a bus depot locker (which was twenty five cents then) for my possessions and wait for four hours for the next bus to Vermilion. I did get over to the Department and Fifteen Cent Store for a look around, bought some lunch and waited. I was one lonely farm girl wondering what I was getting into believe me. I didn't know a soul in the city and I knew I wouldn't get home again until April as funds did not permit a Christmas on our farm. I was missing home and small brother Charles already and April seemed a long way away.

After a three hour bus trip I arrived at the college along with over 200 other students. Soon we had our room assignments, also time tables, met our roommates and found the dining room and felt more or less at home. Most of us had a lot in common – we were farm kids with very limited finances, not used to electric lights, telephones, daily papers and city life in general. However, we soon became one large happy family and learned to work and play together.

Seems to be missing a page

was very proud of my efforts as well. None of my family could be present as I accepted my diploma and came second in my class.

April arrived all too soon and now the rush was on to complete projects, prepare for exams and pack up our belongings once more. This was to be the last class going through the college as the CWACs (Canadian Women's Army Corps) were taking it over as a training center for as long as needed. We were glad to be going home with our projects all completed and useable. These two years were some of the busiest, happiest, and fruitful years of my life. We returned to our families with many new skills and ready to contribute to our communities.

Letters from home to Betty

Grande Prairie, Alberta

December, 1940

Dear Betty,

Thank you for the stockings Betty but they were a bit too small. Barb put another inch or so on them. The concert is coming along fine. I am in two plays: the first one is called "Christmas Eve at Mulligans". I am Mr. Jones in it and the other one is called "What Became of The False Teeth. I am the doctor. Bart said it doesn't rain but it pours because we went for 5 or 6 years without a flashlight now we have two because Dad is going to fix up the old one and I will have it for my very own. Dad and I went to town and traded Baldy off for another horse. Dad got the best of the trade. He is very lively and mates Polly to a 'tee'. We are going to call him 'Tom'. P.S. Badgie and your little Black Devil are fine (kitten).
With lots of love, Charles.

Dec. 6, 1940

Dear Betty,

Have you escaped the flue yet. We have managed to get a nice dose of it. I am over it and so is Charlie but Barb is in the middle of it now and we hope she will soon be better. Well Betty. How is every thing going with you? Well I hope. I am sending \$10.00 hoping that will pay your Board till the Holidays. Regards the money end of it, I don't know what will happen. We still cannot sell any wheat. We got a 2 bus. quota Dec 1st and in our case means 50 bus. Nothing. I have not sold any thing to the (?) yet, but I hope to before spring. We will have a hard time to make out so please be as careful as you can. I know you are not a spender, but you understand, when I can sell things we will be in not too bad a shape. When you get your rebate put as much as you can on the January Board, let us know just how you are for money and we will try our Best and make the grade as easy as we can for you, as that you know.

Gusty has a fine Bull calf and is going to be a good cow this winter I hope. I traded off Baldy and got a pretty good old horse – he pulls any way. I have just got 110 bus. of feed chopped at Tissingtons so we will be all right for feed for a while. The pigs are fine and I want to keep 3 sows and butcher one in January and one for Betty if we have to. I am going to start and haul my wood tomorrow if alls [sic] well. The Sleighing is good now. Hens are just starting to lay – we got 16 yesterday and they look well.

Well girlie be good, and we will always be looking for letters from you. I wish you were here for Christmas so do you? Don't buy any present stuff for us Betty we understand. Make it up next year all you want.

Best love from Dad

January 5, 1941

Dear Betty,

Thank you for the dart game. I sure have lots of fun with it. And all that advice about how to load it was unnecessary because I knew anyway....

We had Helen and Gerard down for New Years and we used silver it looked very attractive. I have been going to the bush during the holidays. Betty your chickens laid 27 eggs on Saturday and it was 30 below and laid 26 eggs on Sunday which was 40 below.

With lots of love, Charles

January 18, 1941

Dear Betty,

We got your letters last night and notice your request for money. Now you must have known that you wanted this some two or 3 weeks ago. Why did you not let me know in time. Its [sic] just lucky that I have that much on hand now, we are very hard up here and are not able to sell any wheat or anything else for that matter and I am sending you \$10.00. You will have to make do with that – it leaves us with nothing now till I am able to sell something, and I don't know when that will be. I am afraid that we over stepped our finances last fall in letting you go out. You don't say how much you owe on Board or in fact you never seem to have time to tell us anything regarding the Money End till you are out; just be a little more careful and let us know ahead, even if it interferes with some of your social life, today I have to make a trip on purpose for this and I don't think it very funny as I am busy myself. Hoping this finds you well as we all are and that you can get along with this amount.

Best love, Dad

February 21, 1941

Dear Betty,

I received your letter on Friday. Thanks for the valentine, it is very cute. Did you get mine yet, if so did you like it? We had a valentine party at school and a valentine box. Lorraine Partlow was post mistress and appointed other pupils to help her. I got 20 valentines, and a lot were boughten [sic] ones. We had lunch, there were three cakes there I think and lots of cookies and candy.... We have a little rink by the side of the barn, and have a lot of fun skating. We have about six inches of new snow and it is good skiing. With regards to your letter about the hockey can't you tell your hockey players to behave themselves. (You said there were penalties than players! [sic]) And anytime that a sister of mine tells me what to eat and what not to eat I'll have my head examined. Your kitten is the prettiest cat I ever saw. Barb calls it the powder puff pussy.

With love from Charles.

RETURNING HOME

I graduated in April, 1941, from a two year home economics course at the Vermillion School of Agriculture. I traveled back to Grande Prairie by bus to Edmonton and a sixteen hour train trip on the least expensive day coach around by Slave Lake home. There was no through road by Valleyview then.

The war was really gaining speed and the train was full of soldiers and airmen returning from leave or being transferred. The far north was being opened up very rapidly for the Alaska Highway and DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line so there were many express cars full of freight. This in turn meant more handling and longer stops at the station so the train was usually hours late arriving – we came to expect it and also accept it after all it was war time! Odd as it may seem we girls didn't seem to be worried or frightened at the time although we were outnumbered about ten to one I'm sure. Things got a bit rowdy at times mind you in the coaches and more and more lads found themselves handcuffed in the "Smoker" till they fell asleep or sobered up. We avoided this area and went on our merry way and lived to tell the tale as this story proves.

My father met me at the station, also my younger brother Charles. I was so excited and delighted to be home once more as I had left in early October and couldn't get home for Christmas – funds did not permit. My sister, Barbara, was very glad I was present also as she and Dad had been managing the household through the winter and were eager to relinquish those duties. Besides I was supposed to have all the latest methods and ideas, recipes, short-cuts plus scads of energy and enthusiasm to put into practice.

I love the farm and the animals and Dad had market gardens so your work was truly never done. Of course I had to go out right away to meet all the farm creatures as I had certainly missed them too. The collie dog, Buster, almost wagged his tail off trying to greet me. My dear old cat, White Paws, had a batch of the softest, cuddliest, wee kittens in the hay loft. She blinked at me and purred loudly as she kneaded the hay and air as her babies were busy nursing. Yes I was home as I climbed down the ladder with the sweet smell of hay and the animals in my nostrils. After all it had been over seven months since I had left. The horses and cows all looked up as if to greet me in their own way. No colts this year but several new calves had arrived and were a few stumps about or else we could stand on the bottom strand of the fence and clamber up. Poor Dad was always complaining how the staples were out of posts on the bottom wire in so many places. The cows got the blame for reaching through the fence and stretching their necks for the extra long green grass on the other side. I have often wondered if he ever caught on as to why the strand was loose. I'm sure he did but he never told me anyway. Besides I always said it was quicker to catch Polly and chase the animals to the yard than it was on foot – he had to agree. The dog always had to come along as well and always found a rabbit or squirrel to chase. The pasture was full of different birds and their songs and chirpings were so musical. After a few days back in the country routine I had soon located several wild duck nests en route, plus a prairie chicken or partridge nest. Robins, numerous sparrows, red winged

blackbirds close to the sloughs were very common. I sort of checked on them all in passing, keeping the dog close to me so he wouldn't disturb the mother birds.

Spring soon advanced into summer as did the green house, cold frame garden and the current crop of new animals. The old saying 'never a dull moment on a mixed farm' is truly an understatement. Yes, I certainly missed the extremely busy and hectic schedule of the college and the companionship of the nearly 200 students. However letters took a fair bit of my time and were also very welcome indeed. Yes, I was truly glad to return home to the farm.

COOKING AT THE FIRST DORM

1944 and 1945 was quite a year. I had cooked at our Grande Prairie hospital in 1943 and 1944 and resigned that spring and returned home to assist with spring work. Besides Jack and I were going to be married in August. The war had been on since 1939 and rationing was the name of the game – more and more items were unavailable in the stores. The favourite excuse was “sorry, it's being used for the war effort”.

We had a very small wedding on August 24th and went on an eight day camping trip by the Wapiti River – about where Proctor and Gamble built the mill – just miles of peaceful river then. Gasoline was rationed, and tires were very scarce, so going that far was almost the limit. About August 22nd I noticed an ad in the paper looking for a cook for the proposed dormitory opening in September in the recently vacated officers' mess. I was very interested in this proposed dorm as we had received our high school by correspondence at home on the farm, the only way then in our area. I answered the newspaper ad.

When we returned from camping, I had an answer by mail (no phones in our area) saying they wanted an interview immediately. I went into the office, above the present Royal Bank, then a two story building, and met Mr. Carl Johnson, school inspector for this area. Betty Tissington was the secretary. They hired me and my salary was \$130.00 for a full 30 day month, no time off, plus our board and room.

I went down to the Officers' Mess with Mr. Johnson to see where I was to attempt to feed the multitude. Well, I soon decided it was very well named, as it was truly one big mess. Believe me, I certainly did wonder what I had got myself into. The kitchen in the bar of the H had one eight foot shelf at eye level, two very tall windows on the west side, no shades or covering, a large and badly abused old cast iron wood and coal cookstove, one small delapidated [sic] electric fridge, two galvanized kitchen sinks, small hot water heater, small pantry plus mice, tiny bathroom and one store room – half of which was to be our living quarters. The north wing of the H hut was to be the dining room and the south wing the boys' dormitory.

I was never a quitter and decided to try and restore some order, get things rolling and make it look just a bit like a home.

Along with 58 students came 58 ration books as sugar, preserves, tea and coffee, butter, meat, etc. all had their own colour coded stamps. There was a War Time Prices and Trade Board office above the Commerce Bank – now Andres Jewelers – with which we had to deal. They furnished me with a cheque book for each rationed foodstuff. I had to issue said cheque for the given number of coupons required to cover food delivered, plus balance each cheque book every month. They also had large sheets on which 100 dated colour coded stamps had to be pasted in their special spots. These sheets had to be handed into the Wartime Prices Office once a week. This was all supposed to be done in my spare time.

We could use some produce from the students' parents at market value and did procure some honey, lard, potatoes, root vegetables and eggs. The merchants were so helpful and cooperative to us at the dorm and put many things our way. I had known most of them since I was a little girl as Grande Prairie was pretty small then and you knew nearly everyone. I was most grateful to them all.

The school district wanted me to take stock of food stuffs over Christmas holidays. They certainly breathed easier to find the students were being fed for just under the \$15.00 charged.

Menus were made up a week in advance and I tried my best to give the students a balanced, nutritional diet as well as trying to stretch rationed foods. One became quite crafty with rationing and scrimped a bit on sugar, butter, etc. in the recipes. Sometimes I could squeeze out enough for a batch of fudge on student dance nights or 'sock hops'. Candy and chocolate were very scarce, sometimes we could get cocoa or walnuts which helped the fudge situation and the students seemed to enjoy it and certainly didn't complain.

Winter went quickly, with lots of snow and cold weather. War conditions were improving in Europe and V.E. day was declared in May. Food restrictions were slackening off but ration books were still needed until after V.E. day, as I remember. Some items were returning on the market making possible a bit more variety with the menu.

The school year ran into July to make up the required number of days. I had to take stock thoroughly to close out the year. Very few dishes had been

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V-J DAY: AUGUST, 1945

I was returning on the bus from a two week holiday with friends in the Brooks area, southern Alberta, on V.J. Day. It was a very warm typical August day and our trip was quite uneventful when all at once a very loud bang got everyone's attention and right now. The bus driver pulled over to the shoulder and got out to investigate. We were close to Olds at this point. An inside dual tire on a rear wheel had blown. The driver said all was well and he would get it repaired in Red Deer, also that the passengers would have an extra ten minute break because of this blow-out. So away we went but soon encountered cars racing towards us and passing, horns blowing, people waving and shouting and truly a general uproar.

Red Deer was like a mad house at 3:00 p.m. on what usually was a rather quiet time of the day. The bus depot was locked up tight, yes every door, and our poor bus driver was not amused. We soon learned from passers by that peace had been declared and Japan had surrendered, hence all the excitement. The café was also closed so we passengers just stayed on the bus and waited. The driver found a pay phone somewhere and tried to summon help. Several boys in uniform were gathering at the depot as all servicemen had been granted a seventy-two hour pass from several bases in the area. These servicemen were very excited and most had a case or two of beer and were certainly ready to celebrate. The bus driver really hesitated about letting them on as liquor was strictly prohibited on coaches. He couldn't get the tire repaired but hopefully at the next stop. The war was over so he took the boys on board and we were off again, late of course.

Some friends were meeting me in Wetaskiwin as I was spending a few days there. That town had gone wild also so my friends didn't mind that I was late. Their celebrations were well underway. Everything was closed here too and I remember being really hungry. My friends were on foot, which was not uncommon during the war – there were no tires, no gas and often no car. They lived across town, were planning to meet me and go on to a big celebration and dance at the armories. So I agreed, didn't mention my hunger, and we were off on foot to the barracks, suitcase and all.

Wetaskiwin had a large army training base with dozens of soldiers of various ranks and ages. Nothing made any difference that night as everyone was so sick and fed up with the war, its sadness and heartaches, rationing and shortages in general. A very lively band was playing and doing their

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and gave a loud "woof" when he found us. We were kneeling for the first prayer and he nearly bowled over the one closest to the aisle. He was put outside and ordered to go home which of course he didn't and instead barked several times during the service. My friends were annoyed and a bit embarrassed – he wasn't.

About half way through this special service something made me sneeze and sneeze. I never have any trouble with allergies, hay fever or whatever, but there was something dreadful in that

church. I just couldn't stop, my eyes and nose were running so I got up as quietly as possible and left. I was a mess indeed and almost lost my voice as well. I decided to go right outside even though I knew the dog would loudly greet me. I hung onto his collar and tried to calm him down, keep him quiet and stop sneezing. Once outdoors, I improved a bit, the service ended, and we all walked home.

The following day I boarded the train back to Grande Prairie where my husband met me. Similar celebrations were held here too according to our local paper. Not for Jack, as the airport work had to continue regardless. As you see, V.J. weekend was quite exciting and a very memorial time in my young life.

MY WORST CHRISTMAS

Christmas 1953 was very sad, miserable and very difficult for my father. Charles, my only brother, had been killed in a motorcycle accident in Halifax on October 18 that year. My poor father – he was devastated and I'm sure a part of him also died that day. It was extremely hard on all of us but I was so busy with my four little ones that I just didn't or couldn't dwell on the tragedy as life had to go on.

We were supposed to go out to Dad's for Christmas dinner, weather permitting. Dad adored my children and just loved to stop and visit or have us come out. Charlie's buddy Andy, who was in the Air Force, had leave over Christmas and had been invited to have dinner with us on the farm. Dad and my step mother, Maude, thought he had a friend with him so they were invited also. As it happened this was incorrect and Andy was alone. We arrived as scheduled and the children were all so excited as all children of 7, 5, 3, and 5 months are! Grandad had a Christmas tree of course and gifts for everyone so excitement reigned supreme. Some order was restored and the dinner now had top priority.

Maude had the table set beforehand for everyone with the extra plate for Andy's friend. I started to remove this extra plate once Andy arrived and realized we didn't need it. Maude wouldn't let me, Dad stepped in and she blocked him also. Some stupid Irish superstition about removing a plate from a set table. So we all sat down to Christmas dinner with this empty plate. Poor Dad – we all felt so sorry for him and he did his best to be cheerful and carry the conversation, be host, grandfather, etc. It just seemed like a pall over the meal as Charlie had only been gone seven weeks. Andy had quite a time as well sitting beside this empty chair. Why that blessed place couldn't have been taken away I'll never know and guess I never will. My children were a bit too young to realize this with the excitement of Christmas, Santa, the tree, gifts and so on. My husband, Jack, was quite upset as he was very fond of Charlie who had stayed with us a lot while attending high school in town. Jack couldn't quite figure it all out either and was very annoyed with Maude over the incident. She had an extremely stubborn, I'm always right attitude and would never stand being corrected over anything.

The dinner did end, dishes done, and children were busy with their new gifts. En route home I tried to explain to Jack how we attempted to remove the place setting to no avail. He was annoyed and couldn't understand Maude's superstitions.

The next time Dad came into our house in Grande Prairie, which was a regular occurrence, I told him how sorry we all were for that unnecessary episode on Christmas day. He just looked at me and said he could feel our annoyance and tears came to his eyes – poor Dad. Truly it was a sad Christmas for us all but it could have been much more enjoyable if Maude would have only co-operated.

CHARLIE'S ARRIVAL

Early in the spring of 1930, Mother told us that we were going to have a new baby in our house in October. What excitement, I can still sense it now. Barbara, my sister, was one and half years younger than me and, of course, I don't remember her as a baby. Mother was busy during her spare moments on the farm making baby clothes. She was a beautiful seamstress, and knitting, crocheting and fancy work was truly therapy for her. We were so interested in these cute tiny garments being made, a bit different from our doll clothes. Mother had a heart condition and a birth at her age proved a bit of a problem. We all knew about babies, at least we thought we did. I was nine and can remember being very concerned at times over Mother's poor health. She had to rest and lie down a lot especially when it was hot outside – July and August were the worst. That seemed to be an extremely long summer to me as I was so anxious for that baby to arrive.

We started school in September as usual and Dad was cutting grain with horses and binder. The crop was very good too, but the depression was getting worse and the price was dropping daily on all varieties of grain. Mother had to be hospitalized in early September and we were both upset and excited all at the same time. We had no phone or car and traveled the seven miles to visit her with the horses and borrowed democrat, not every day either. The weather took a dreadful turn for the worse, first heavy rain and then snow plus a strong northeast wind causing much drifting. The stooks were almost buried in no time. Poor Dad, how he managed at times I still wonder; crop snowed under, prices falling rapidly, Mother poorly in hospital and two small girls to look after. He also had a large payment due on the farm – revenue supposed to come from the crop. How can you sell a snowed under crop of anything?

All of the previous winter's clothes had been carefully washed and stored away as usual in the spring, but we didn't know exactly where. What a search by Dad and I in all the cupboards and drawers for stockings, overshoes, caps, mitts and winter coats. To know Mother was worried about us as well seemed to help somewhat and nothing could be done about it either. The cutter replaced the democrat for transportation and we all went in to see Mom on Saturday. These were our first visits ever to a hospital as far as I can recall so everything was so interesting to two wide eyed small girls. Mother was so glad to see us and we had so much to tell her and so many questions to ask. We made a list of where some things were that hadn't been located and how to do a few things as well. A nine and a half year old wasn't an expert housekeeper – at least this one wasn't. Mother had always assigned us duties and we worked with her all over the house so knew a bit about cooking, etc. Being on our own was a different story, but we survived somehow. Dad did manage to get a girl to come for a week or so to look after us. This wasn't satisfactory in many ways and she didn't stay. She was a hopeless cook and not very ambitious and so returned to town and we were alone again. The weather got worse, snow deeper and all the time the prices were falling. Dad blamed the Bennett government for most of this which we were too young to understand.

My brother, Charles, arrived on October 4th, 1930. A neighbour who lived about three miles away and had a phone came over the next morning to tell us. Were we excited or what! We had

a baby brother and Dad had a son to carry on the Smart name. Off we went to town again with the cutter to visit Mother and baby this time. I can remember the nurse holding him up so we could see him through the nursery window, such a tiny pink bundle.

Now, of course, we couldn't wait until they came home and those twelve days certainly dragged endlessly as far as I was concerned. Dad brought Mother and Charlie home in the cutter about October 17th. The roads were very drifted and the field of stooks level full of snow, one would never know that stooks even existed there. At least the grain in the stooks was far safer than what was left standing as it was finished.

It was Barbara's eighth birthday on October 19th, Mother and baby were home so our house seemed to settle down a bit. It was Mother's birthday on October 9th which was spent in hospital and we couldn't even get in that day. Charlie was a good baby and I just worshipped him more and more. Now that I had a live baby to look after and mother, my doll Dorothy wasn't nearly so attractive. Dad was able to get some help for Mother as she still wasn't herself and now there was one more to look after every day.

About October 21st the sun started shining, warm west winds blew day and night and the snow began to disappear. Marvel of marvels, the Chinook continued so soon no snow was left and things started drying up. Dad had purchased a John Deere tractor, one with the lugs plus a lot of noise. A neighbour had a separator and they started threshing first our crop and then that of other neighbours. They had a really good dry run way on into November and put a lot of bushels through that machine. The fellows on the bundle racks had quite a time as the days were so short in November and it was hard to see in the fields and some stooks were missed in the gloom.

The weather was mild and Dad ploughed with the tractor on into December with hardly any frost. In fact, we had very little snow the rest of the winter. Why it all had to fall in September and October, only the weather knew, it seemed. It also didn't seem quite fair that Mother had to be hospitalized for six weeks during such unusual weather either. However, we all enjoyed our baby brother so much and soon forgot about being alone. The family had increased to five from the four we had been for several years, a very happy adjustment indeed. We teased Charlie in later years over the terrible commotion he caused to arrive when the weather was so upset and very unseasonal.

TURNING POINT IN MY LIFE

June 1934 in Grande Prairie was an extremely wet month and my sister and I were trying to complete Grade 8. The depression was about at its worst and our winter boots were full of holes and we didn't own summer waterproof footwear. We walked the two and one half miles to school in bare feet which my parents didn't approve of as they were afraid of injuries. We carried our shoes and socks, washed our feet upon arrival and proceeded into the schoolhouse.

This was our first encounter with departmental exams, each sealed in its big brown officious looking envelope to be opened just previous to the given writing time. We were quite apprehensive over the first exam but gradually relaxed as the days went by. Seems to me we had about eight exams and had mixed feelings when the last one was written.

We had too many students in our one room school to allow Grade Nine to be taught. We couldn't get to town to attend high school and no funds so it appeared as if our formal schooling was finished. We thanked Miss Foy, our teacher, for her help and patience with us and left very down hearted indeed. Many of the other students were whooping and yelling, caps in the air and so on – school was out. But not us, as we were in tears as we wended our weary way home for the last time from our little white school house.

Summer was very busy as usual and we didn't brood too much over school or lack of it. We were very down hearted though come September when we couldn't return with our school pals. Mother had lots for us to do in the special projects line. I was outside with Dad nearly all the time as I enjoyed the animals very much and was 'the biggest' – that statement bugged me most of my junior years. We eventually got the crop off – farming with horses was much slower than jumping on the tractor and turning on the key.

Snow came early as I recall, and so the winter work did likewise. We hauled some firewood out of the bush, fence posts and rails. As I stated, we had plenty to do so no boredom by any means.

We had neighbours just around the corner of the lake with a big family and not too much money to work with. Mr. Howes walked down early in December asking Mother if I could go up and help them for a few days as Mrs. Howes was ill in bed. Mother said "Oh, of course Betty would help – she could go back with you now and make supper". I did this and got along fine as I knew the six children and had looked after them a bit previously. The baby was walking but still in diapers – and not pampers either! I had to sleep at home, no room at the inn, so walked back and forth over a mile night and morning. Mrs. Howes seemed worse in a few days so was eventually taken to town in the sleigh to see the doctor. I kept the children, three were in school and three still at home. The kiddies were quite concerned about their Mother and were anxiously waiting for the parents to return. Alas – Mr. Howes came home alone. Mrs. Howes had been put in isolation – scarlet fever had been diagnosed. The poor children were very upset and I can remember trying to comfort them and dry the smaller one's tears. Seems to me I made a batch of fudge which they enjoyed before walking home that night.

Such consternation when I did arrive home and relayed the news of scarlet fever in that household. None of our family had ever had it nor was the inoculation against it very common then. After a long family discussion my parents decided that I couldn't leave this family now as they certainly needed someone to look after them and I had been exposed as had my family by my returning at night. I reported as usual the next morning but asked to go home at noon so we could all go to town in the afternoon to be inoculated. I don't remember if their family was or not – they had to stay home from school a week.

It was a bitter cold day and we bundled up with scarves, mittens, etc. for our trip with the horses. Dad had several tanned cowhides that we used for robes and large rocks were heated in the oven and wrapped in burlap sacks and put on the floor of the cutter to keep our feet warm. All went well and we didn't have to wait too long at the Doctor's office. There were no telephones in the country so no appointments could be made and there were no health units. We did our shopping and were home before dark.

A few days after the inoculation we started to break out with the worst hives one could imagine. My face swelled and ears stuck out as if I had the mumps. As the swelling went down my body, my hands and fingers looked like Mickey Mouse's paws and the hives were about the size of quarters and raised up – and the itch – horrors. I can feel it now. One day Mother wouldn't let me go to work as I was running quite a fever and the family had to manage by themselves. I did go the next day and the swelling reached my feet in the afternoon and I couldn't get my shoes on. I walked home that night in my overshoes only. Barbara, my sister, didn't swell as badly nor did Charlie, my four year old brother. No we didn't get Scarlet Fever, but it was questionable as to which was worse – the disease or the cure. We were positive that blessed doctor had doubled the amount of serum because of our direct contact. Needless to say he wasn't one of our favourite businessmen in town after that. None of the rest of the Howes family got scarlet fever either.

I continued housekeeping at these neighbours as well as a fourteen and a half year old could. I never seemed to get finished and worked far harder than I did at home – certainly I got tired. I would go up at eight in the morning and be home about nine at night. The water had to be carried in from the well or we melted snow for washing on the good old scrub board. With three in school and lunches every day the bread disappeared like magic. I had baked bread many times before but not in the quantities this family of eight needed – they had a hired man as well. I can remember walking home one night and deciding that I was going to get more education or training somehow – this was not for me for evermore. I had always wanted to be a nurse and was more determined than ever – how I had no idea but would work at it.

Time slid by and the children were in the School Christmas Concert and we did the best we could to assemble and make costumes for them. Their Mother was improving but it was a long, slow process and the children were quite disappointed she wasn't home for the concert or Christmas either. I went up and cooked their Christmas dinner – turkey and lots of trimmings –

and came home early as Mother arranged our dinner later so we could all be together. New Years was the same as I remember.

After the lake and surrounding marsh froze hard enough Dad had made a small make-shift snow plough, pulled by the horses. He opened a trail across this area so I could take a short cut and save nearly a mile by not going on the road. There was a lot of snow and of course our roads were never ploughed anyway so this was a big help indeed. We never even thought about walking alone at night far less to be afraid. We have all quoted the saying 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. The fool part must have been the case with me, with duties attempted performed in that house. My one trump card was that I was home every night and Mother would come to my rescue as to how to do whatever the next day. Sure as anything I would try and usually succeed. Mrs. Howes was going to make some bedroom curtains for a south exposure window and hadn't had time but had the material. The room was too bright with the glare from the snow.

You guessed it, I tackled them and her sewing machine which was different from ours. I finished them, hung same and they shut out the glare, everyone thought they looked great and I felt as if I had accomplished something that would last. Everything I baked or cooked disappeared all too quickly – these curtains seemed a bit more permanent somehow.

Mrs. Howes recovered after six weeks and returned home and the children were overjoyed indeed. She was very weak and I stayed a few days longer to give her a chance to recuperate further. Now can you guess what I earned? \$25.00 for two months work – six and a half day week as I came home before supper on Sunday. I was tired and felt quite rich really and even at that age was sure I had done a good deed and helped neighbours who were in need. Furthermore they all survived and so did I.

Now can you guess what I purchased with part of my earnings? No you never will. I ordered 50 baby chicks from a hatchery in Edmonton to be delivered in late April.

Winter work continued on and Dad and I hauled lots more loads of various types of logs from the bush. Spring was always extra busy as Dad had market gardens so the hot bed had to be made planted and tended carefully. As I stated no time for wondering what to do as the baby animals were arriving daily and now my chicks were coming.

The correspondence courses were just being perfected through the Western Canada Institute. We were very interested in these and Dad stopped at the school inspector's office fairly often to keep up with their progress. Besides Dad and the inspector found they had been about 20 miles apart in Belgium when Armistice Day was declared on November 11, 1918. So I'm not positive their conversation was always pertaining to the possibility of us starting our high school that fall with correspondence courses. I was very keen to carry on somehow and no doubt badgered him quite frequently with "Did you see Inspector Balfour today?".

Summer was busy, gardens and crops very good but prices still dreadful and no demand for farm produce anywhere. The year out of school had slipped by very quickly really. We had hopes indeed as Dad enrolled us for Grade 9 Correspondence in August. We were very excited and much information was required in Edmonton so we grew more eager with every letter. Can you imagine how we felt when the parcel finally arrived in October with our courses. That is another happy story indeed.

OCTOBER 7, 1938

My parents were always great supporters of activities in the area. In the late '30s there was a very progressive group trying to push a road through the mountains called the Monkman Pass after Alex Monkman who had discovered this possible route. Nearly every small community was having fund raising efforts of all sorts for this project. Flying Shot was trying to do its part too.

A dance was scheduled at our community hall on October 7th. Mother belonged to the local ladies group who were sponsoring this dance and had to look after the lunch. Mother and I planned to walk up to the hall with our cake. Barbara had a bad cold and couldn't go. Dad and Charlie were staying home too. It was a rather cold, chilly night with a skiff of snow on the ground, early for October. Mother and I were walking along the trail by the lake admiring the northern lights. They were just brilliant and dancing all over the sky with many colours. All at once Mother was silent and just dropped in her tracks beside me. I spoke to her and got no answer of any sort. I started back to the house to get Dad and suddenly thought I had to move her out of the car track in case someone might be driving around this curve to the dance. I pulled her off onto the grass and raced the half mile home to get Dad. He was just getting ready for bed and hurried out and we drove down to where she was just as I had left her. How Dad and I ever got Mother loaded into the car by ourselves I'll never know as she was a fairly tall lady. We drove to the hospital as fast as the old '32 Chevy would go, a six mile trip.

At the hospital they put her on a stretcher and hurriedly got her inside. Dad went in too and I stayed in the car. Dad and I were hopeful but I'm sure we had a very sinking feeling. The Doctor said she had had a severe heart attack and was probably gone when she fell down. One of the nurses on duty came out to the car to tell me the sad news. She also coaxed me to please be strong for my Dad's sake. Mother would have been 52 on October 9th.

It was a sad trip home for Dad and I and we still had to tell Barbara and Charlie. The latter was asleep and Dad waited until morning to give him the awful news.

LEISURE TIME

What is leisure time? I'm sure many young people in our day asked this same question because we had very little of it. I'm speaking for those who grew up on the farm. By the time all the chores were done, animals looked after, wood box filled, etc., you were ready for bed, believe me!

During the long summer evenings, the young people would gather at our local hall, weather permitting, for a ball game twice a week. My father said the evening chores could be completed in half the time on ball nights. The players were usually male, but if there weren't enough, some of the more expert girl players would be chosen. The rest of the crowd cheered loud and long, yes even at errors.

In the winter months, the ladies club organized a whist drive on Friday night twice a month. Our one room school suddenly became our whist parlour. The desks were piled up on one side of the room to accommodate make shift card tables and chairs or stools. We school children hated Monday morning following a card party. The desks were never put back in their proper places and the worst part of all was that our books, scribblers, pencils, etc. were on the shelf or the bottom of those desks. Horrors! Our personal school supplies were also mixed up from being dumped out during moving of those desks. However, we survived, thanks to our very patient and hard working teacher.

We had July and August off for so called holidays. Hardly anyone ever got away for such a luxury then. Everyone had lots of farm duties, summer fallowing the land, rock or root picking, brushing, gardening and berry picking. Mother was excellent at encouraging my sister Barbara and I to always have at least one craft project on the go in our spare moments.

The School Fairs in September were very popular in Alberta in the 1930s and 1940s and we participated to the fullest. We started in the winter when the new fair book came out listing all the different classes offered. Our teacher used these specifications in our assignments in art, penmanship, composition and posters. She would save the best items in each class until fair time and enter them for us. The teacher would receive garden seeds in bulk in the spring from the fair and we would help her divide them up in individual amounts for each student. These gardens were planted and tended with great care and the wildest expectations of yields emerged from those wee plots.

The school fairs offered quite a variety of sewing, crafts, pressed flowers, weed collections and cooking classes. We would work from year to year almost on sewing and knitting entries. A pair of socks knitted on the fine steel needles used at the time took a ten or eleven year old many hours to complete. The same time allotment was true for an embroidered dresser scarf, doll clothes and so on. Poor Mother would help and encourage us whenever necessary. It would be interesting to know how many dropped stitches she rescued, or times she undid knots in our thread or found our needle or scissors. She had great patience with us, but we had to do things correctly and to show some progress.

More than once she made me sit down beside her and undo something that was untidy or poorly done. "Betty, you can do much better than that, those stitches look like cat's teeth". More than one project was sprinkled with tears of frustration and almost despair. Her standards have stood me in good stead down through the years as I continued on with sewing and crafts.

The pressed flowers and weed collections were quite a challenge as they are so fragile and brittle and required very careful handling. The wild or tame flowers and weeds were gathered at the proper time, e.g., we would have some leaves and stems plus buds, open flowers and seed pods on each plant. These were carefully arranged and pressed between newspapers with a heavy weight on top until dry. Each specimen was then neatly arranged on a large piece of cardboard salvaged from something no doubt. The Rice Krispie Cereal box was the first thing that I remember being wrapped in cellophane. This cellophane was carefully removed and saved, cut in narrow strips and used over the plants in numerous spots to fasten them to the cardboard. We used egg white for glue on these strips – now we know we made the first scotch tape! If only we had known enough or had the money to patent this. There again, I probably wouldn't be writing this if such had been the case.

There were recipes in this fair book that we had to use for our exhibits. My parents and brother were quite often served raisin drop cookies, apple pie, and peanut brittle to name a few as we were practicing. They survived and didn't complain either.

The fair was held early in September with numerous one room schools all around Grande Prairie competing. Such excitement over the final preparation for all our entries, getting the correct tags on each item, packing them carefully as they were transported the six miles by horse drawn wagons. The so called roads left much to be desired, lots of mud and bumps or holes. Somehow the weatherman didn't seem to be on our side on fair day as it nearly always seemed to be a wet day and sometimes for the several days previous. Even the graveled streets in Grande Prairie were bad, no pavement anywhere then. The whole family were up very early to complete chores, load our entries in order and be on our way. I can still see in my minds [sic] eye, parent after parent arriving mostly by horse-drawn vehicles to unload these precious entries. The fair was held in the old Grande Prairie theater on Main Street with a large hitching post area beside the long gray lumber building about where the Park Hotel is today. That area again could be a real mud hole, the calves, chickens in coops, etc. were exhibited outdoors. After the exhibits were carefully placed in the proper categories, we had to vacate the hall for judging. Our shopping was quickly completed during this time and we were back again as soon as possible to see if the hall was open. Of course it wasn't. The suspense was almost unbearable, just waiting to see what prizes we had won. There were cash prizes in nearly all classes as I remember, 40 cents, 30 cents, 20 cents and 10 cents. That was a lot of money in our eyes. Can you imagine today's girls knitting a pair of mitts for competition and a chance to win a prize of 40 cents. Many of the town merchants would donate special prizes, usually \$2.00 for accumulative points in a section. We really concentrated on these even though it meant we had to have an entry in almost every class.

Once the hall was opened, we quickly made the rounds to see how we had placed in all classes. It didn't take us long to calculate our winnings in our heads (no calculators) and this usually amounted to a fair sum. We also admired other students' entries and in turn gained ideas for next year.

When the fair was declared over, we had to pick up all our possessions. Somehow they weren't packed nearly as neatly on the return trip home. We would be tired out by this time but could dream and spend our prize money dozens of times en route home.

OUR CHAIRS

The depression, hard times, dirty thirties or whatever were about at their worst in 1934 as I recall. There was little market or price for farm commodities anywhere. How Mother and Dad kept their spirits up and continued on with daily chores while looking after we three children and hoping for a better day tomorrow I'll never know.

I'll never forget one special event. In our living room we had two old large stuffed chairs commonly referred to as the biggest and smallest chairs. The wonderful world of make believe turned these two big chairs into fantastic adventures for us. We could move them – side by side they were neighbouring houses and moved together with an old blanket or two they became trains, stores, school rooms – you name it.

Mom was an excellent seamstress and had recovered these chairs several times over the years. Dad was very handy with his trusty hammer to do the nailing or tacking and fixing the springs when necessary.

One very cold and miserable January day Mom and Dad decided to see how they could repair these old chairs once more. There was no money for new material this time around so Mother sorted through her dwindling piece bag and found some bits to cover the arms. Dad came up with an alfalfa seed sack to help with the seats. Soon the chairs were upside down on the floor and Dad was retying the springs with some binder twine and hay wire. They truly looked like real wrecks and I wondered how they would ever be usable again.

Mother was busy fitting and stitching and literally making her bits and pieces stretch to cover worn spots, or worse still, real holes in the cushions. This was long before upholstery foam or padding of any sort was available in the stores. A sort of straw like stuff called excelsior was used commercially and it broke up, was stiff and prickly and horrible as I remember. Furthermore we had none of it except what Dad had salvaged from the chair. Soon a substitute was found – horsehair.

We farmed with horses and kept several all the time. They had to be curried and groomed and a special metal coarse curry comb was used to untangle their tails and manes. These loose long wiry strands of hair were kept in a gunny sack hung in the harness stall in the barn. Dad brought this bag in and proceeded to pad the arms, seats, and cushions of our big chairs. By this time Mother had sewn arm pieces and cushion covers so very soon our chairs were right side up once more, complete with their new patches and stuffing. We kids had to try them out of course and decided they were much better and quite comfortable. Mom and Dad were well satisfied with the job and stood back to admire their work.

A few days later a stranger on horseback rode into the yard. He was met by Buster, our dog, and Dad from the coral. Dad came into the house in rather a hurry and left the fellow out in the yard. We thought this most unusual as everyone was always invited into the house. Buster was growling and didn't seem to approve of this stranger being in the yard at all. Dad came indoors

and stated quite emphatically that the stranger was a traveling Jew buying horsehair. These travelers were fairly common and this was how they were known.

Guess what! The chairs were quickly turned upside down again, the horse hair padding ripped out as fast as possible, put in a potato sack and delivered outside to the horse back rider. He paid Dad for the hair and off he went, probably to the next neighbour. I can still see these poor chairs upside down once more, looking such wrecks to this day. No wonder the traveler had not been invited indoors.

Dad came in with the bit of cash in his hand and gave it to Mother. I have no idea what he was paid but cash was so precious and extremely valuable then. Mother and Dad looked at one another and burst out laughing at these poor chair carcasses. Dad was such an optimist and said "never mind, we will find something else to fix them up again right away".

Now it was chore time once more, so out Dad went to the barn, I can remember Mother sweeping up the bits and tidying up the mess while tears were dripping down her cheeks – this I couldn't quite understand and it worried me no end. I have no recollection of how these chairs were repaired again either nor what eventually happened to them.

Once I was a little older I realized that these desperately hard times were almost unbearable for Mother and this chair episode was close to a breaking point for her. She never complained and worked so hard although she didn't have the best of health and very few luxuries. I can never remember Mother saying she had to get away for a break – besides where would she go with no funds. Just like our old chairs which were once again repaired and ready for a new day, Mother truly belonged to the old school of 'smiling, making do, and getting on with it'.