

**The
CLEM & MURIEL COLLINS**

MILLENIUUM CONTEST

A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION OF LIFE IN THE
GRANDE PRAIRIE AREA,
1939 TO 2000

Submitted by: Elizabeth Welter

#217, 9700 92 Ave.,

Grande Prairie, Alberta, T8V 6Z7

780 532 3011

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INTRODUCTION

I have lived in the Grande Prairie area steadily since 1928. My family and I were privileged to contribute to the development and share in the growth of this vibrant part of Alberta during the period 1939 to 2000. We are representative of the many hardworking pioneers who shaped the community and participated in its growth both individually and collectively.

A biographical sketch of my family during the first decade of this period shows the determination and resourcefulness typical of the early citizens of the Peace River area as we homesteaded, raised and educated our families, saw many of our family and friends leave for the Second World War and continued to support the development of Grande Prairie.

In the fifty years that followed our community grew rapidly, asserting its own identity and establishing its importance in the Province. I have chosen to highlight the areas of education, community organizations, sports, and transportation. The collective involvement of the citizens of Grande Prairie as the community met the challenges of growth in these fields gave us the firm foundation upon which we ended this century and entered the new millennium with a strong, diversified economy; an educated, skilled population; and the brightest of prospects for the future.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In 1939, our family lived on a homestead six miles south west of Grande Prairie. I was keeping house, my sister taking High School by correspondence at home and my brother attending the Flying Shot one room school. Mother had died very suddenly late in 1938 thus ending my high school correspondence schooling. The economy was improving across Canada but war clouds were getting worse in Europe. The population in Grande Prairie was 1,550 and steadily growing. Our household was gradually getting re-organized without Mother, and my how we missed her. Dad and I were busy during the winter months hauling free logs for fence posts, rails, firewood, and building logs from the 'bush' which was crown land on the north side of the Wapiti River. Few lived south of the township line then, but there were some homesteaders across the Wapiti River.

Our household got busier with the arrival of spring. Dad had market gardens so started bedding plants early in a small greenhouse and hotbeds. Several baby calves arrived, some litters of pigs but no colts that year. The chickens were always my department and I had several broody hens with their families plus one hundred chicks from a hatchery in Edmonton. These came up by passenger train in the express car. We didn't have a real brooder house, just a make shift big box in the house to start with plus large pottery jugs full of hot water for heat. As they grew we had a coop and run covered with chicken wire that could be moved across the lawn – they ate a lot of grass. They were fed often with mashed hard boiled eggs and chick starter and later grain.

Summer quickly sped by and war clouds darkened by the day. We had a huge raspberry patch and sold crates and crates of these plus vegetables of all varieties. We were picking something continually it seemed, the days were never long enough and the grain harvest was approaching in the fall. I was also planning to attend the Vermilion School of Agriculture that fall 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.

The seven month school year was very busy with courses in both Agriculture and Home Economics. I found a part time job tidying the library every day which provided a few dollars towards my board. Money was scarce – postage was three cents for a letter – we could buy one stamp at the office and more than once I couldn't even do that – my letter home waited to be mailed. We could go to the theatre down town on Friday night for twenty five cents, coffee and three cookies afterwards was fifteen cents. We walked down and had to be back in residence by 11 p.m., and lights out by 11:30 p.m. – weekdays it was 10 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. The girls' wing had one telephone which was hardly ever used as many parents didn't have telephones at home. There was one radio in the sitting room and we could bring our handwork down on Monday evening and listen to *Lux Radio Theatre* from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. while doing our projects. We kept up with the news through a few daily papers in the library as we were all quite concerned about the war in Europe.

Most of us returned to our farms for the summer months. Some of the boys enlisted immediately in the services and did not return for the second year. As fall approached for our second year of school, many of us had to worry about finances once more. My Uncle Charles sent me another \$50.00 as I had done so well in my first year. I also had a chance to help friends cook for their threshing crew. I earned \$5.00 per day cooking for a twelve day run and that helped my bank account enormously.

I was fortunate to become a student waitress part time during my second year. The extra money was most welcome to help pay my board. A friend had the job of cleaning seven bathtubs on the three floors of our residence before 7 a.m. every day. Cleaning was done with Old Dutch and

coal oil as the Vermilion water had a lot of iron in it and removing the brown stains was very difficult. She got bogged down with projects and turned the was job over to me. Yes I did the job for two months for \$10.00 and could smell that coal oil on my hands for days after it seemed.

Our last sewing project was our graduation dress to be modeled at the ceremony. I chose a white printed wabasso cotton in a floor length princess style. The cost was under \$3.00. This was certainly all I could afford and I 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.

I returned home by bus and train as before, only now the train was crowded with soldiers returning or going on leave. Dad met me with the team and sleigh. I was glad to be home and Charles, my brother, had grown tremendously over the year. Spring was in full swing with baby animals arriving, green house and hot bed nicely started. There was certainly lots of work ahead of me plus an excellent opportunity to put into practice all the knowledge gained with my course.

In early May I received a letter from our Grande Prairie Hospital offering me the cook's job and stating that they knew I had just graduated in a Home Economics Course. After some discussion with Dad, he said "well why don't you look into this, after all Betty I don't expect you to stay home forever". My room was in the Nurses' Home next door to the hospital. I was to

work a six day week with split shift starting at 6:30 a.m., hopefully off from 2-4 p.m. and working over the supper hour until about 7:30 p.m. The salary was \$60.00 per month and I had to cook for staff and patients, plan menus and do a lot of the dietetic work for about 60 people per day. I was to work with the current cook for a week to get acquainted and learn what I had to do. At just 20 years of age this seemed a gigantic challenge, especially since the cook left after my first day!

The hospital kitchen was very unhandy, and situated in the basement with a huge cast iron coal and wood cookstove. The walk-in fridge was down the hall so one made miles back and forth. It was a hot May, the kitchen was uncomfortable and I lost fifteen pounds in weight right away. The matron was very helpful as were the kitchen staff and I soon adjusted. Food rationing was on by now so the goods in short supply had to be considered when planning menus.

In 1941 the Grande Prairie Hospital had 40 much needed beds. I can remember patients and accident victims being transported by both passenger and freight trains. No ambulance service existed at that time. Staff at the hospital would assemble a stretcher and equipment and rush out to the crossing as the train stopped to transfer the patient. As the train approached from either direction it uttered dozens of short, weird blasts with its whistle to warn of its arrival. That stretcher posed quite a problem as it was pushed through the snow covered street. I also recall a few patients were brought in on the repair crew's open air speeder that also stopped at the hospital train crossing.

My wages were soon raised to \$75.00 a month and I quite enjoyed the job cooking at the hospital. I stayed on all summer until September. Although the matron begged me to stay and offered higher wages and more benefits, I had made a promise to my family to return to the farm for the winter so my sister could come into town and finish her Grade Twelve.

I kept house for my Dad and brother, helped the neighbors, and did some custom sewing until the following August of 1943. Again I received a letter from the hospital asking me to return as cook. Harvest was early that year and my sister was already working in town. Charlie was thirteen and Dad said they could manage batching. I started again in late August and I think my salary was now \$80.00 a month, with the same hours and work schedule. My day off was usually Tuesday and on Monday night I would walk home seven miles after work at 7:30 p.m. We had quite an open mild winter in 1943 and 1944 and I only missed a few days of not getting home. While at home I washed clothes for my father and brother, made bread, churned butter and prepared some food for the following week. Sometimes I had a ride back to the nurses [sic] home on Tuesday evening. Dad still didn't have a telephone so my comings and goings were more or less governed by the weather. We had a truck but roads were not snowplowed during the winter months for vehicles, just for horses and sleigh.

I stayed at the hospital until mid May, then resigned and came home to help Dad once more with spring work. Jack and I were planning to be married in August. I certainly missed the staff and I love to cook. I had learned a great deal about quantity cooking, menus and organization of help and serving – all of which came in handy at a later date.

My fiancé Jack and I bought an empty lot on 103 Ave. and 101 St. – 33 feet wide and 110 feet long for \$95.00 in May, 1944, from the town of Grande Prairie. We built a small, two room house, getting materials wherever possible as everything was in very short supply. Our house had four windows, all different sizes as they were 'rejects' from the lumber yard. Insulation was shavings from a local sawmill by the Wapiti River, free for the hauling and shoveling. Nails, hinges, shingles, locks, tar paper, paint, floor coverings were purchased here and there where available. We hunted for months for a cook stove and eventually heard of a small shipment

arriving at Bunyan's Hardware in Wembley. We were in luck and for \$95.00 purchased one of the three small wood camp stoves that arrived that day. It had a water reservoir, a small oven and warming shelf. We ordered a new Chevrolet truck from Thompson Motors in 1945. There were none in stock and the delivery date was unknown. It did arrive in the spring of 1946, price \$995.00 cash.

We were married in August 1944 at Rev. Carson's house. I made my dress, a two piece turquoise print, also my corsage which was a lovely peach spray of gladioli from Dad's garden. We had our photo taken at the only photographer in Grande Prairie then and back to the farm for dinner. Our honeymoon was a camping holiday by the Wapiti River on the flats below where the Weyerhaeuser Mill is presently situated. Gas coupons were scarce, rationing was strict and tires almost non-existent because of the war. With a borrowed tent, meat preserved in lard in an earthenware crock, lots of fresh fish caught in the Wapiti River, and our food kept cool in a hole on the shady side of a tree, we had a very enjoyable and inexpensive ten day camping trip.

Just before we were married I noticed an advertisement in the paper looking for a cook for the proposed school dormitory. I applied, was interviewed and accepted the job shortly after our holiday.

The Army Training Camp in Grande Prairie was closed in 1944 and the barracks were all empty with only one caretaker present. The School District under Inspector Johnson's insistence was trying to get a dormitory established for county students to come to Grande Prairie to attend high school. This first dormitory was established at these barracks, one H hut to house the girls and a second H hut for the dining room, kitchen and the boys' residence plus a small living space for us. There was one small refrigerator in the kitchen plus a large, badly damaged cast iron coal and wood cook stove with a small, very uneven oven, a few shelves and two tub sinks,

also a tiny bathroom and small pantry. The place was walking with mice as it had been empty for several weeks. My new husband and I cleaned the place, started a 'mouse trap line', and ordered supplies.

Thank goodness school was late starting in 1944 because of the polio scare so we had a few extra days. Food rationing was stricter than ever now and we needed lots of supplies. Dishes had been ordered weeks before from Medalta potteries in Medicine Hat and arrived, filthy dirty, packed in crates of hay and excelsior. Cooking necessities were absolutely impossible to buy. The school district gave me a letter which stated "To whom it may concern – Please give Mrs. X any utensils she can find anywhere and charge it to us". I still have the letter. I did eventually procure four seven quart canners for my sauce pans, a few cake pans, one frying pan, two or three large spoons. Food containers for flour, sugar etc. were not to be had and with our mouse problem this was quite a worry. We had 56 students to feed which also meant I had to look after the same number of ration books. Students' board and room charge was \$15.00 per month so I had to budget for that. My wages were \$130.00 a month for 30 days, plus our room and board. The coal stove had to be started very early to get the heat up to make toast, porridge and coffee for breakfast so it was easier and more productive for my husband and I to move in to the residence.

The students were all farm children from grades nine to twelve and could they eat! Walking to high school and returning for lunch created healthy appetites. Grande Prairie merchants were so good to us and worked hard to send items our way when these weren't available in the stores at times. Mr. Johnson, the School Inspector, was worried about costs and over Christmas holidays I had to take stock of all groceries on hand for a price check. Surprisingly we had spent just under \$15.00 per student per month for the fall term so everyone was happy indeed. We really had to watch sugar, preserves and meat coupons. By scrimping a wee bit on sugar in

most recipes I could gain enough to make the students an occasional batch of fudge when they had a 'sock hop' in the dining room. Candy and chocolate were very scarce.

School ran into July that year to make up for days lost in September. VE day came in May and everyone was so excited and glad the war was over in Europe and rationing ended. I took stock of all groceries left and got dishes packed away for the summer. I received a nice letter from the school district thanking me for my efforts, stating the initial year was a success and my contract was ended. They also stated that the job would be open again in September but at a much reduced salary and I was welcome to apply. Needless to say I did not apply – so ended the first year of the High School Dormitory.

In 1939 Grande Prairie's population was 1,550. 'Main Street' was about three blocks long. We still had two livery barns nearby and hitching posts as many country residents still traveled with horses. Main Street was graveled with angle parking. We had a few blocks of wooden sidewalks plus a half dozen street lamps. Agriculture was the main source of income and we had several grain elevators. We had two passenger trains a week and freight trains as needed to bring goods and take grain and livestock to the city. Main Street had running water and sewer services for a few blocks. The water was from a drilled well close to the United Church. A 40 bed hospital in the same spot as today had two general practitioner doctors and served the town and a very large surrounding rural area. There was one movie theatre with two shows a night on Thursday, Friday and Saturday only. We also had a large hall called the Capitol Theatre where dances, plays, school fairs, and band concerts were held. Heating everywhere was mostly with wood, some stores and homes had coal furnaces in the basement. Many farmers hauled loads of firewood into town at \$5.00 or less to buy groceries, especially in the winter months. My mother had made and sold excellent dairy butter at 20 cents a pound, fresh eggs at 20 cents a

dozen to the store – this was her grocery money for essentials every week and I continued to do this.

During the '40s as the war progressed in Europe, more and more of our local men joined the forces and left town. Soon an army training camp was started here on what is now 96 Ave. and 101 St. – then it was out in the bush. A huge drill hall was constructed on 90 Ave, and a parade square behind it. H huts were built all down 101 St., with the officers' mess on the south and the guard house at the north end. These quarters housed 1,000 men for preliminary training before being posted elsewhere. The economy was certainly picking up and the population was reaching 2,000 (without the men in uniform). We soon had both Canadian and American Signalmen, Air Force and Army stationed here in addition to the personnel of the Saskatoon Radar Base. We were a hive of activity and there was a dance somewhere every night. Jitney Dances were very popular in the Capital Theatre building on Main Street. Different live orchestras supplied the music and dance tickets were eleven for \$1.00. Army pay was \$21.00 a month plus a uniform and board and room. Food ration books of stamps were now in use all over Canada – sugar and meat were the ones in shortest supply here it seemed. Different local organizations took turns making and serving lunch at these Jitney Dances. Larger special dances were held in the Army Drill Hall on July 1st, New Year's Eve etc. Many articles became scarcer and scarcer in the stores and the classic answer was "curtailed for war use". Aluminum was scarce and many store counters had a large bowl in which we were asked to drop our used empty tooth paste and shaving cream tubes to be salvaged. These were rather unsightly and one wonders what today's health officials would think and say. At war's end our population was 2,500, the town had grown in every direction.

The story of my family, our quest for education and the challenges that we accepted and met were typical of most of the pioneers in the Grande Prairie area during the first decade of this

period. World War II and the reconstruction in the years immediately following affected all of us. The skills we acquired and the lessons we learned were to contribute to the growth of the area and set the stage for the half century of progress that followed.

EDUCATION

In 1939 we had dozens of small one room country schools all over the area offering grades 1 to 8. Enrollment was usually 25 to 30 students. The odd school was allowed to teach Grade 9 but only if enrollment was under 30 students and the teacher was qualified to teach this additional grade. Schools were ideally seven miles apart so a student would only be three and a half miles from a school. Most students walked to school but some had a horse or mule to ride or to pull a small cutter or cart. Schools were heated with a big old barrel wood stove in the middle of the room; the boys were responsible for carrying in the cord wood stacked in the corner of their cloak room. Schools had no telephones or electricity, two outdoor privies, no gymnasium of any sort, and ball diamonds and basket ball courts on the grass in the summertime. They had blackboards on two walls, a small bookcase with a very limited number of a variety of books and some schools had a pump organ or piano. Most school yards were fenced and had a fairly large barn usually of logs to stable the horses during school hours. Quite a number also had a very small two room teacherage to house the teacher. If the teacher was fortunate to have a teacherage they were alone from 4 p.m. until 9 a.m. five days a week plus all week-end, probably often feeling quite isolated and lonely. Their nearest neighbour was probably a mile or more away. They may have had the luxury of a battery radio as we had a local broadcasting station in Grande Prairie from 1937. Some teachers had board and room with a district family, often times having to share a bedroom with numerous children and ride horseback or walk to school. The teachers of that era were certainly a hardy breed, many were very young single girls. Despite all these obstacles they were wonderful people and were truly 'pioneers'. They

were a 'jack of all trades' for in addition to teaching the eight grades they umpired our ball games during noon hour, attended to medical emergencies and may have had to help repair a saddle, or harness a cutter or buggy. There was a lot of good learning took place in those one room schools and we owe a huge debt to those dear teachers. We as students honored, loved and respected them whether male or female. Even these very limited and poorly equipped schools were quite often the hub of the community. They had an elected school board who were responsible for collecting the taxes, hiring the teacher, paying his or her salary, plus making repairs to the school and barn.

As a child I can still remember how that little one room school was turned into a very magical place for the Christmas Concert. We practiced for weeks before hand, students made and brought decorations for a real tree, spare sheets, blankets and tablecloths from home to be used as curtains on the make do stage and dressing rooms. Yes, Santa Clause did arrive (he never had a red suit then) and had candy bags for every child in the district. the mothers had usually raised money before hand through a card party or dance of some sort and purchased these goodies and made up the bags. We always had at least one Christmas orange in our bag, an apple sometimes plus nuts and candy. The wooden boxes of oranges were about 95 cents, peanuts 5 cents a pound I recall.

Obtaining a high school education was a problem and many young people had no opportunity to attend. The School Act then stated that you had to stay in school until age sixteen or had passed Grade Eight. Some young people had sufficient finances to go to a town that had a high school and 'batch' or board in a private home. Often girls worked for their board in a home helping with several children and being responsible for household chores. These girls often worked very hard and seldom had a week-end off. St. Joseph's School had started an Academy

for out of town students providing board and room at \$15.00 per month. As you can well imagine that was quite a fortune in the late 1930s.

Mr. Balfour was the school inspector here then and was very active in getting correspondence courses started for Grades 9 to 12 through the Western Canada Institute in Edmonton. Students had to apply for courses required for the grades needed, complete their lessons and mail them to Edmonton to be corrected. We had two passenger trains a week into our area so mail days were eagerly anticipated. It was a bit of a problem that each lesson was away about two weeks and students had to carry on with the following assignment before the previous one was returned corrected. However we managed at home and some students completed most of their high school, only having to attend a town or city school for Grade Twelve to access science labs, larger libraries and resource material. There were about 15 graduates in 1942 from Grande Prairie High School – my sister being one of them. In 1999 there were over 500 high school graduates in Grande Prairie.

In 1966 a Junior College opened in a former two story school building. The college occupied several class rooms wherever available around town as the enrollment grew. In 1974 our present College was built plus an addition in 1990 to accommodate the ever increasing enrollment. In 1999 well over 2000 part time and full time students were in attendance and enrollment is still growing.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Grande Prairie has always been noted for its volunteering for almost any cause. The hours given by dozens of organizations for fund raising, work bees, and numerous projects is certainly commendable. The Women's Institute (a branch of the Alberta Women's Institute and affiliated

with Associated Countrywomen of the World) has functioned here continuously since 1924 and done untold community 'good works'. They started the public library with less than 500 books, mostly second hand, in a small bookcase situated in the old town hall (then south of the present Bank of Montreal). This library was open two nights a week manned by volunteers. As the need grew more books were added and library hours increased. This tiny library was eventually taken over by the town and it continued to grow and was moved several times. In June 1999 all of our current Women's Institute members were present to help celebrate the 60th anniversary of this library which now houses over 90,000 books and records in a large split level building.

The Women's Institute also started and manned a small residence in the early 1930s where expectant mothers could live and wait to go to the hospital to deliver their baby. Over 300 women used its facilities during a ten year period. Remember there were no bridges across the Smokey or Wapiti Rivers at that time and as the ice was coming in or going out transportation was cancelled. A small cage could be pulled across the ferry cable in extreme emergencies to cross the river. This could be a frightening experience for a woman in labour and the residence in Grande Prairie proved very popular especially in the spring and fall.

The Women's Institute also started the first well baby clinic here manned by volunteer registered nurses. These early clinics provided a much needed service during those years as the only other means Mothers had of checking their infant's weight was in their friendly grocery store using the scoop scale on the counter through the kindness of the store owner.

The Kinsmen and later Kinettes also provided many years of service to our area. The Kinsmen Radio auction was started before the war, proceeds then provided milk for needy children in Britain. Merchants donated items to be auctioned off over our very new CFGP radio station. Our then Mayor Tooley was challenged to sing a song to be matched by any other businessman on

mainstreet plus bids and donations of course. My Mother wrote a poem titled "Our Mayor Takes the Air" about this challenge which was printed in our local paper and created a great deal of interest and fun in our small community. The Kinsmen were also responsible for spearheading the building of the Memorial Arena, later installing the first artificial ice plant, the curling rink, and the first outdoor swimming pool to name a few early projects. Incidentally the Radio Auction is still an annual event and very popular with proceeds designated to various causes.

The Elks and Royal Purple, also the Legion and Ladies Auxiliary are all great volunteer organizations who have earned and donated thousands of dollars to our community for dozens of different projects. Another very busy and productive ladies [sic] group were the IODE. They made and raffled dozens of beautiful hand quilted quilts and used the proceeds for different projects. Many church groups provided untold assistance to our area right from 1939 to the present time – apart from their traditional clerical role. They provided facilities for many different community activities such as music festivals, school concerts, music recitals, lectures, travelogues by their members, Scout and Guide groups to name but a few.

The Red Cross is another very active and valuable group in our area. Currently they house a large loan cupboard, in our local office, to meet patient needs – wheel chairs, crutches, beds, commode chairs, walkers and so on. Many volunteers help here as well on many projects. Disaster assistance has always been one of their main activities wherever the need may be. The first ever mobile two day blood donor clinic in our area was held in 1945 with numerous volunteer organizations assisting with registration, traffic flow, rest beds, lunch and wherever needed. These clinics continued two or three times a year until about 1978 when the blood processing was changed in Edmonton and blood was needed more quickly in the lab. Our distance from Edmonton was the problem here. There were no mobile clinics for several years – now we have about four a year since the early 1990s. An interesting and rather unique example

of corporate community support in the early years was the use of smaller planes courtesy of Proctor and Gamble and Canfor to help transport crates of blood to the lab in Edmonton.

The Musical Festival has functioned here since the early 1930s with the exception of a few war years. I participated in an elocution class for 10 and under in about 1934 – my poem was “Little Brook”. In the intervening years this festival has grown to presently run over two weeks with at least eight adjudicators being hired for dozens of different categories.

A number of interested citizens met for several years trying to get the United Way started here. Many of us were regular canvassers for numerous fund raising groups. There were appeals almost monthly, for example February was Heart Month, April Cancer, May Red Shield. Because of our persistence and perseverance, a branch of the United Way was started here twenty years ago and seventeen different groups were assisted in 1999 I believe. This still requires a lot of volunteer labor but also saves hours of house to house canvassing.

I have only talked about a few of the many organizations whom could not have existed in this time period without the active and committed participation of many volunteers. Each of these organizations has contributed in their own unique way to the growth of our area and the quality of life of our population.

SPORTS

In 1939 Grande Prairie had one natural ice skating rink and curling rink side by side. We attended numerous hockey games, skating performances and carnivals in that drafty cold, crack filled old building. Weather always seemed to turn warm whenever a hockey tournament or bonspiel was scheduled. I can remember some games being played on pretty wet sloppy ice. In

the winter of 1947/48 the roof fell in on this old building after a very heavy snowfall so we had no covered rink at all. Max Henning and Bill Bessent told me they had a temporary natural ice rink at the airport in an unused hanger and played all their hockey games there in 1949 and 1950.

The Kinsmen Club spearheaded a new Memorial Arena being built on 99 Ave, and started in 1949. This arena was still using natural ice, and was mostly built by volunteer labor and many donations of time, building materials and money. Max Henning tells me they poured huge six feet square pilings of cement for supports. This cement was mixed outside and wheeled in by volunteers with wheel barrows via a gang plank over a thirty hour continuous pouring event. Many men in the community volunteered during this cement pouring marathon including my late husband, Jack. There were no augers to transport cement to wherever needed – it was truly man power. The main surface was poured a few days later by the same method. This covered rink was a great improvement and used for many activities. The 'rink rats' scraped the ice with wide wooden boards between periods, this was quite a coveted position and never short of volunteer boys. The artificial ice was installed some ten years later and now the chinooks didn't affect hockey playoffs or bonspiel finals. This also saw the early version of a zamboni to scrape and spray the ice, the rink rats were now unemployed. This arena served the area for years and was eventually knocked down and a curling rink took over the space.

The Johnny Macdonald Arena was built in the late 1970s in the north west corner of the city followed shortly after by the Dave Barre Arena on the south side and the Crystal Gardens on 99 Ave in 1997.

There were always outdoor rinks on any available empty lot where needed around town. The youngsters certainly enjoyed these free sports and many a budding hockey player was born there. Two regular sized outdoor rinks were built in the Bear Creek Flats and the Minor Hockey

Association was formed in 1959. In 1960 it consisted of 221 players on 17 teams, membership was \$1.00 and equipment rather poor to say the least. Temperature is usually 10 degrees colder on a creek or river and these children from mites to bantoms played in many degrees below zero F weather. Ice space was still short for many junior teams so a natural ice rink was started in the huge barn at the old fair grounds in the 1970s – now Crystal Park School area. Dozens of boys spent many happy hours there in organized games from pee wees to juniors.

In 1999 Grande Prairie's population was now 34,000 and the G.P.M.H.A. had 750 children registered in 47 teams – again how we have grown. Registration fees vary with different groups starting at about \$100.00 a player.

Ball diamonds, tennis courts, basket ball courts sprang up all over town when and wherever needed. A lawn bowling green was installed in Muskoseepie [sic] park a few years ago. In 1939 we had one golf course and club house situated on Richmond Hill. In 1999 the golfers have access to nine courses in our area.

In the 1940s a ski-jump was built where the log pile is now situated on the west side of the city. Years later a larger ski hill with a lovely club house was built on the south bank of the Wapiti River. They have a lift, snow making machines, lunch room and give lessons.

A few years ago part of the old 'nuisance grounds' in south Grande Prairie were reclaimed and now contain several ball diamonds, campground, concession booth and children's play area. In 1998 an indoor soccer facility was established and is booked solidly all winter long and is a very welcome sports addition to our city.

In the early 1950s an outdoor swimming pool was built, again spearheaded by the Kinsmen, where the Telus Building now stands. This certainly was a popular and well used facility all summer long. Red Cross swimming lessons were established for all ages.

A larger, better equipped outdoor pool was later built in the Muskoseepi Park Area and is still used from May to September each year. In the mid 1970s a full sized heated covered pool was built complete with diving boards, dressing rooms and wading pool beside it in the Recreation Center. Lessons and aerobics are available here for all ages year long.

Fairs and rodeos were very popular during the summer months. Fairs were revived again after World War Two with the first Agricultural Fair being held in the old fairgrounds – about where Crystal Park school now stands. Several of the H huts from the now vacant Army Barracks were moved up there and were used as exhibit halls. Some animal stalls, pens, poultry and rabbit hutches, race tracks were built as well. The number of exhibits, exhibitors and interest in general increased steadily and we soon reached a Class B status fair. More space was needed and larger and better grounds were found south east of Grande Prairie in the jack pines and sand hills. Our County Fair moved lock, stock and barrel to our new grounds called Evergreen Park in 1982. Later on rodeo pens, racing starting gates, logging sports competitions and farmers market every Saturday morning and Wednesday evening in produce season were added. The Fair Board, all volunteers, worked very hard to bring our fair up to a Class A – there were not many in Alberta. Rodeo and racing events seemed to be gaining in popularity while fair interest was declining. A huge grandstand was added along the way, and several large covered arenas used for animal shows, rodeos, 4-H judging competitions, seed fairs and trade fairs were built. In 1995 the Agricultural Society voted to discontinue the fair, however the Farmer's Market continues to grow with every stall taken during the fresh produce season. Many entertainment shows, such as the RCMP Musical Ride are booked as well in this facility.

TRANSPORTATION

In 1939 the train came from Edmonton to Dawson Creek around by Slave Lake. The twice weekly passenger train took over 22 hours to Grande Prairie. It did have several day coaches, as well as a dining car and a sleeper, both of which were quite expensive and few regular passengers could afford these added luxuries. A rather poor gravel road also wandered around this lake shore and was not widely used so train travel was more popular for the north. Freight service was always in demand, grain and livestock were moving out of the area long before 1939. Once the lumbering, pulp and oil business was established in this area, the freight train use was greatly increased and remains very active today. Passenger and express service was discontinued years ago in our area.

A bridge over the Smokey [sic] River had been talked about for years promised by different governments. Thousands of truck loads of goods for the Alaska Highway came up via Valleyview only to be stalled, sometimes for days in early spring and fall waiting for the ice to come in to travel on or go out so the ferry could move once more, Mrs. G. Charters was a very tiny, dynamic lady reporter, at times with the newspaper and radio and got on the band wagon to promote the building of the bridge. She did much research into financing possibilities and approvals through various government departments. We were successful and the bridge was started. Many residents vowed we owed that bridge to our beloved Mrs. Charters. It was opened in 1949 with a huge celebration on both sides of the river. Our family took a picnic lunch down, we had two small children plus our four boarders. Mr. J. Holtom was Master of Ceremonies, Dr. L.J. O'Brien and Mr. J.E. Thompson spoke as well as several of Grande Prairie's dignitaries and the Mayor. It was a lovely day and we were all so grateful to have a bridge to cross the river,

except the ferryman who would be out of a job. The bridge was a great advantage to the growth of Grande Prairie and the transportation of goods being trucked up the Alaska Highway.

Lots of road work and improvements were done on the route to Edmonton over the years to meet increasing traffic demands. This work continues to the present with the twinning of the highway between Grande Prairie and Edmonton to be completed in the near future. Soon after the Smokey [sic] River Bridge opened Greyhound established a regular route from Edmonton to Grande Prairie, Dawson Creek and eventually on to the Yukon. There are currently four trips daily both ways to Edmonton, and routes across the Peace to Peace River and from Grimshaw to Yellowknife, now all on paved roads.

Trucking is a huge means of transportation in our area today and is steadily increasing. Crude oil, lumber, pulp and newsprint, grain and seed, livestock are trucked out to the south daily while machinery, cars, furniture, appliances, and food stuffs are trucked in. Transportation into our area has been especially facilitated by continuous improvements in our highways.

SUMMARY

Grande Prairie in the year 2000 is a vibrant, exciting community, very much part of the Alberta scene and a major North American City. My memories and recollections of the years 1939 to 2000 are of a community experiencing growth in so many ways. I have highlighted some of the activities of the people of our community as they guided the growth and set the firm foundation for the new millennium. It has been a challenge, yet a pleasure and a great deal of fun to live during these times and to work and raise my family in the Grande Prairie area.

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