

There
Was
a
Boy



Jacob N. Driedger

Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association





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Jacob N. Driedger

VOLUME FIVE

ESSEX-KENT MENNONITE HISTORICAL SERIES

The Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association

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Back fly leaf: Junior room at Ruthven Public School, spring of 1937

The author is in the second row from the left; fourth from the front

Some Translations

Short Stories

Racist pigs:

Maknovsty – followers of the anarchist, Nestor Makno

Church Services at LUMC:

Ältester – bishop/elder

Point Pelee Picnic:

Platz – fruit-topped pastry

Rollkuchen – fritters

Wenn wir leben und gesund bleiben, kommen wir nächstes Jahr wieder - If we remain healthy and alive, we will return next year.

First Choirs:

Kaos und Erde – chaos and earth

Jauchzet ihr Himmel – Rejoice ye Heavens

Dann fuhr Er hinauf zum lichten Himmelzelt – Then He ascended into the illuminated Heavens.

A Very Important Person:

Stollen – elongated pastry filled with fruit

Es Reut mich Nicht – I am not regretful

First Dick Family Reunion:

Der Herr hat Grosses an uns getan – The Lord has been very good to us

Faspa – light supper

Poems

The Ballad of the Yireeshti Tweeback:

- *Yireeshti Tweeback* – toasted buns

Schultebot – council meeting

Schnetji – tea biscuits

Verenitji – perogies

Erboozi – watermelons

Tum Kukukhan – profane expression

Would she Uphold her kind:

Tweeback – double buns

Japs - cupped handful

They're Never Over:

Grübenschmalz – residue from rendering pork lard and cracklings from pork fat

Hab Acht kleine Hände was ihr tut – Beware small hands what you do

Karten spielen ist Sünde – Playing cards is sin

Hab Acht kleiner Mund was du sprichst – Beware little mouth what you speak

Fluchen – swearing

He Would Not Pave The Cowpath

In czarist times on treeless steppe
A youth superb in math
Laid out a hut of virgin sod
But would not pave the cowpath

He planted crops and orchards too
His fence was made of lath
At last he got himself a wife
Yet would not pave the cowpath

And then one day the weather changed
Machno revealed his wrath
And robber bands made him afraid
To pave the pot-holed cowpath

When all the cows and calves were gone
And stolen all he hath
He praised the Lord, rejoiced, and danced
He had not paved the cowpath

Foreword

Dispatching a farm rooster, buying a mangy horse, dealing with the eccentricities of an odd neighbour...in this collection of stories and poems we discover that J.N. Driedger has the eye and memory for capturing the unusual. In writing about the rustic, simple experiences of an immigrant community, Jake has found humour, pathos and redemption.

Growing up as a child in the home of N.N. Driedger, whose force of will and whose presence most likely moulded the character of the Essex County Mennonite community, Jake was uniquely privileged to witness the comings and goings of that emerging community. There is much to laugh at in this collection. Jake is mischievous and his humour is understated and wry. But it is also the laughter of love, of compassion for the human condition.

The author's choice of title (*There Was A Boy*) hints at Driedger's Romantic leanings. The poet Wordsworth in particular, along with Keats, Shelley, Byron and the other members of the Romantic movement, exulted in finding beauty and truth in the simple, small, often-overlooked things in life. And while the Romantics also revelled in their mountains and waterfalls and in the other exclamation points in nature, they saw all of life, both the grand and the simple, as merely the foreground; they were far more interested in the greater vistas and meanings that lay behind such things. Life's variety of experience was a means with which to snatch glimpses of the Infinite.

I suggest that it is true with these stories as well. God's presence was never far away from the consciousness of these immigrants in a foreign land. Nor is God ever far away from the centre of these stories and poems. Just look a little past the doomed rooster!

That is not to say that these stories are pretentious or pontifical. They are not. Enjoy them for what they are: slices of the past recreated in the fertile mind of Jacob N. Driedger. We owe Jake our thanks for preserving them in this collection of stories and poems.

Victor J. Winter
Leamington
August, 2003

Introduction

On July 17, 1924, at Quebec City, about one thousand Russian Mennonites disembarked from the CPR ocean steamer, "Minnedosa". Some of these immigrants, including my parents and my two oldest siblings, eventually found their way to Essex County, specifically to the Leamington – Ruthven – Kingsville corridor and to a small extent to the western part of Kent County.

The Leamington United Mennonite Church had its birth on January 20, 1929; the name, however, was originally the Essex County United Mennonite Church and that name remained until January 1, 1958. The congregation began constructing its first church building in the summer of 1933 on a site just east of the present imposing building on Oak Street East.

In 1933 my father was ordained as leading minister (*Ältester*), a position he retained until his full retirement in 1964. To supplement his church income he attempted farming, but his heart and soul were with his congregation.

In every respect the Mennonite immigrants endured a difficult and humble beginning here. However, in the decades that followed, Mennonite society and culture were transformed into flourishing communities.

I began writing about the humble beginnings here many years ago, not with the intention of publishing them, but for the sake of chronicling our Mennonite experience so that one day when my children and grandchildren would ask, they would have a ready source for answers. Hopefully my stories will link me to my children and to my children's children and to my community. The preservation of the Mennonite people lies in part in the telling of their stories. What other way is there of explaining our past to one another?

When my writing activity became known among my friends, they prodded me to permit a wider readership to share my work. I slowly and reluctantly consented. Hopefully they will not be sorry for having asked me.

J. N. D.

Preface

The title of my collection originates in a partial line from William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, an autobiographical poem, in which the poet recalls his childhood, school days, etc., and his reaction to those experiences in addition to his development as a person.

In the epistle of Paul, the apostle to the Philippians, Paul suggests that those events behind us should be forgotten, and in the context in which he spoke he was absolutely correct. In the context of family history, however, I believe we should not cast aside the past but learn from it and be agreeably occupied by it.

As we proceed through life we consciously or subconsciously take our memories with us in a huge catalogue of happenings. Memories in part make us who we are now. The memories in the following pages span roughly seven years, from 1934 – 1941, including my first year of high school.

The series of events in my stories reflect what I experienced and/or heard. Others may have seen the same events but with different eyes. Be that as it may. David Rempel in his recent book *A Mennonite family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union 1789 – 1923*, observes that “peddling tales...abounded in Mennonite settlements” (P. 54). I fear that in one or two instances I have joined the company in the Mennonite villages.

In most cases I have used the actual names of characters, but in some instances, for a variety of reasons, I have substituted fictitious ones. My poems to a lesser or greater degree are meant to enhance or reflect the themes of the stories.

I would like to thank my wife, Margaret, and my daughter, Paula, for assisting in proof-reading the manuscript and for suggesting improvements. I also owe gratitude to Astrid Koop for her cheerful competence in preparing and supervising the seemingly endless activities in bringing my work to publication. Finally, I thank the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association for enthusiastically suggesting that my stories and poems be published.

J. N. D.



Tying cauliflower on Ruthven farm, 1934

Rural Life

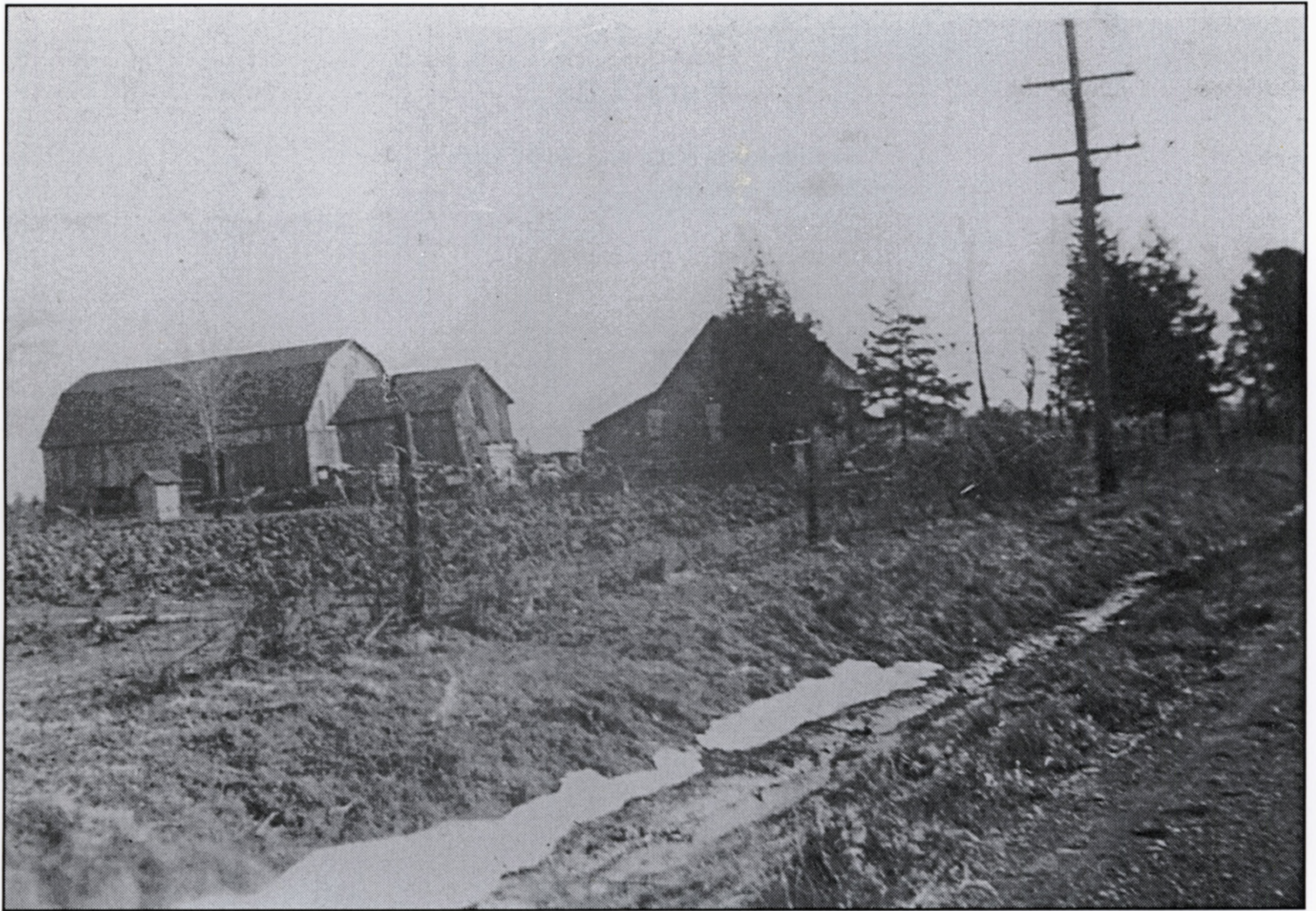
If you want knowledge and not be known
Settle in the country

Know that flowers utter sound
Roses sing
Tulips whisper
Chrysanthemums murmur

Know that gardens are
Living preachers
Gourds glorify
Peppers admonish
Berries gratify

Not known are your griefs and failures
Neglected waterings
Zealous manurings
Misguided prunings

Know that Pan embraced the country
Rested and retired there
Enjoying her ambrosial tea



Panoramic view of Ruthven farm, 1938

Drought, Tomatoes, and Miracles

When farmers talk about a hot, dry summer, there is usually one wag who'll mention the infamous hot, dry summer of '88, where allegedly tractors fell into cracks in the ground, dehydrated birds fell from the sky, and the direct rays of the sun were sufficient to ready the meat on the barbecue. I wasn't farming in '88, and so I had no particular interest in weather extremes, but I distinctly recollect the summer of '35, that almost put us on the dole.

Dad's bread and butter crop was five acres of Heinz tomatoes, and while Dad's name was on the contract, the whole family was involved in producing the crop. We helped with the planting, the hoeing, and the harvesting. You could even say that Mom managed the operation, for my dad had an off-farm job that paid a pittance and demanded everything. As pastor of the Essex County United Mennonite Church, his services were required far and wide and often.

That summer of '35 nature dealt us a dirty blow - strong, dry winds and no moisture. As the tomato plants became smaller and browner, Dad's faith in a loving and caring God was strongly challenged.

One morning at the breakfast table, Mom observed, "It would be easier if we could do something instead of just watching and waiting and praying."

That comment buoyed Dad, for I think he had already been planning something, and he solemnly announced, "There is plenty of water in the barn well. As a last resort, we're going to try irrigating the tomatoes. At least we'll be doing something."

And so the irrigation project began. After breakfast, Dad hitched the horses to the flatrack, on which he hoisted as many wooden barrels as we owned. Next, he drove as close to the farm well as possible, and then with rope and pail he began drawing water. The rest of us took our places, and then pail by pail he filled the barrels. That finished, we proceeded to the tomato field.

There was some question concerning how the water would be applied, but when Mom came with her large soup ladle that question was answered.

Now tomatoes in those days were planted in single rows with plenty of space between the rows and between the plants within the row. Eighteen tons to the acre was considered to be a gold medal crop. The point I am making is that our method of irrigating was not altogether a loopy idea.

Each tomato plant received a baptism of three ladles, and it was amazing to see the rejuvenating power of the water. It took us several days to finish the job, and then too the well was finished.

When the last plant had been satisfied, Dad, not usually given to gaiety and revelry, proposed a celebration to mark our accomplishment, and so without further words he got into our '28 Chev and headed for the Scratch General Store in Ruthven. He returned with a smile on his face and a cherry pop in his hand. Our collective reaction was instantaneous - how could one bottle quench the thirst of so many? Were we to be witnesses to a miracle?

Mom was first to recognize the dilemma. She quickly gathered us around her and gave us a puritan lecture on the evils of drink. "Drink is forbidden in the scriptures. Leviticus specifically instructs not to drink wine or strong drink. Galatians says that drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God." She concluded her homily with a profound suggestion - dilution. How could we possibly say no to that?

I ran home with an empty pail and pumped some water out of the house well. When I returned to the field, Mom performed the miracle. There was even some pop left for Grandmother, who had been left alone in the house. Cherry pop is still the best drink on the pop market.

Our tonnage of tomatoes that fall was far from a gold medal crop, but we had done what we could, and we survived the winter, thanks in part to another miracle just before Christmas. Someone had left a huge box of groceries on the back stoop of our house.

Miracles are not propitious accidents, and to the sensitive eye miracles were also visible in the drought of '88. I am certain of that.

Dad, the Wagon Maker

On this Canada Day, we are reminded that in our nation's history there were certain individuals that were called nation builders, some called railroad builders, or community builders, etc. Dad, of course, was not one of these, not even close, but in one respect, I remember him also as a builder - a wagon builder.

When Dad received a tomato contract from Heinz many years ago, it was obvious that our gravel wagon, a narrow rectangular box on wooden wheels with steel rims, would be sadly inadequate for transporting tomatoes from Ruthven to Leamington, and that therefore a more substantial conveyance would have to be acquired. And so Dad went about looking for an old car that could be converted into a tomato wagon. On one of his journeys to visit a church member, he travelled on the Fraser Road and saw a "For Sale" vehicle, that had potential for a wagon. I don't remember the details of the transaction, but I recall Dad's look of satisfaction when he came home and reported the news.

There was, however, a problem - how to bring the junker home. After considering a number of options, Dad decided to ask Peter A. Epp for assistance. Peter and his brother Henry, had been generous before in helping Dad husk his corn without charging for their work. Again, I can't remember the logistics of the arrangement, but I clearly recollect the two vehicles coming down the farm driveway, Dad in the lead with his '28 Chev pulling an ancient wreck that Peter Epp tried to control. The metal strip on the radiator identified the relic as a Hupmobile, and the large "H" on each hubcap was as clear and permanent as the mark of Cain.

From then on, Dad's work schedule included preaching, visitations, farming, and wagon building, not always in that order. Judging by his whistling and singing, I believe he enjoyed wagon building the most.

The first big job was to disengage the body from the chassis, and for this he used his basic wrecking tools: a cold chisel, hacksaw, hammer, crowbar, and a set of seven sockets with an "L" shaped bar, all tightly packaged in a green metal box. His oil can (not WD40) was always nearby.

At first the work progressed slowly, for every rusty nut that bound the body to the steel frame had to be cut. One problem solved simply opened up the door for another problem, like taking apart Russian dolls-within-dolls. Meanwhile, heads wagged and tongues clucked as his detractors began whispering and tattling:

“N.N. should stick to his preaching, something he knows.”
“That contraption of his will be laughed right off the road.”
“If that wagon ever gets to Heinz, I’ll eat every tomato on it.”

Dad, however, plugged his ears as it were, listened to his gut, and kept forging ahead. Whether the work ever affected his preaching or not, I can’t say with certainty. If anything, his gesturing became more subdued in order to hide his scraped knuckles.

At last the evening came when it was time to assemble the neighbours for one concentrated lift/push on the body to bowl it over. Dad was noticeably pleased that there wasn’t a single impediment that still held the body to the frame.

The next big job was to cut the two 2x8’s with a handsaw so that they would exactly follow the contours of the frame and yet be perfectly level with the ground without the use of a spirit-level. Once that was done, the rest of the rack was fairly simple, except for the fastening of the 2x8’s to the frame. Obviously, nails and wood screws would not do; so Dad went to a local forge and had four U-bolts made to serve his purpose.

When the wagon was eventually finished, we celebrated with a drink of real lemonade, not Watkins freshie, and borrowed my cousin’s camera to take a snapshot. It really was a masterful creation! There were end racks, of course, but also easily removable side racks, so that the wagon could be used for hauling tomato hampers as well as loose cauliflower heads. There was only one fly in the ointment - the steering mechanism was still a car’s, not a genuine wagon’s, and Dad simply didn’t have the wherewithal to make the transformation. As a consequence, when loading tomatoes, we had to take a scenic route into the loading lanes because the wagon would not allow very sharp turns.

The completion of the wagon was never officially announced, but the scuttlebutt on the church parking lot revealed that people knew. The word had spread like creeping charlie on today’s lawns.

“N.N. finally finished his wagon, and as our pastor he will surely lend it out.”

And Dad did lend it out, but always with the proviso, “Don’t turn too sharp. Give yourself plenty of room.”

All went well until the loopy Cornelius Redekop came on the yard to make his request, and as usual Dad emphasized the words of caution. When, however, Cornelius returned the wagon, the tongue was bent, but instead of apologizing he had the cheek to lecture Dad on how Dad might have improved the steering on his wagon. Somehow Dad remained silent, and so did I.

In Robert Frost's poem, *The Road Not Taken*, the speaker encounters a fork in the road and has to make a decision on which road to take. The speaker concludes the poem by saying, "I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference."

I often wonder what difference it would have made had Dad taken the road of the wagon maker, a competitor to the Deryncks, Kilbros, etc. We will never know!

Note: The wagon served Dad and others faithfully for many years.

the arm that swings the lever

the arm that swings the lever sets the seedtime
the ploughman frantically anticipates the season
all calibrations made with logic and with reason
the arm upon the lever motionless

the arm that swings the lever sets the growth span
the niggard sun capricious cools the soil
the torrent rains condemn the plants to spoil
the arm upon the lever motionless

the arm that swings the lever sets the harvest
the ground is lush with asters and with clover
the bins are full and wagons flowing over
the arm upon the lever out of hand

The Disoriented Rooster

When I was growing up on the farm, every farmer had a team of horses, a cow or two, some pigs, and a flock of chickens. The eggs, of course, were used in various ways for food, and when the chickens aged they were slaughtered for their meat. Once in a while, when there was an overabundance of fresh eggs, we would barter them at the Ruthven General Store for chocolate-marshmallow cookies. Usually one egg equalled one cookie. The practice of bartering in our farm community was not uncommon.

What was uncommon was a rooster in our flock. He had no sense of identity with his own kind, no feel for the pecking order, and no appreciation of his place in the fowl universe. Sometimes he would cavort with the cats and kittens in the stable, at times eating out of the same dish. I never heard him attempting to mimic cat sounds, but I never heard him crow either. At times I saw him standing in front of the plow or cultivator as if he wanted to be a horse. On occasion he tried to follow me to school much like Mary's lamb followed Mary. However, when I shouted at him he usually obediently walked back home.

One Easter when we had hidden our coloured eggs, our disoriented rooster took ownership of a blue one as if it was of his own flesh and blood. Only after I got a kitten out of the stable and he recognized the kinship, did he abandon the egg.

In my day, every farm boy had to advance through rites of passage to reach the next level of growing up. In Ruthven, it occurred about the time of the beginning grades in the senior room at school. The rites of passage consisted of milking a cow, harnessing a horse, catching pigeons, and beheading a chicken, respectively.

Milking a cow was fairly easy once a person had mastered the required rhythm and had co-ordinated the pulling and pressing motions. Harnessing a horse was also achievable, especially, as in our case, our old gelding was as helpful as he could be, even tolerating a tomato hamper or two beside him for me to stand on. Catching pigeons was more difficult because it had to be done at night, and that in itself was problematic. Sounds, real or imaginary, in the barn at night were different from daylight sounds. Then, climbing to certain heights at night could be dangerous at best. Even more so for a boy like me afflicted with vertigo to begin with.

For me, the most horrible rite was beheading a chicken. Nothing in the world can prepare a person for this bestial act, quite contrary to every law of human nature. Once Mr.

Siemens handed me his gun to shoot a crow on a fence post. I was all set up, but at the climactic moment my trigger finger numbed and I couldn't proceed. Embarrassed, I handed the gun back.

Another stumbling block for me in the fourth rite of passage was the experience I had had in my Sunday school. My teacher was competent and most always exercised self-control, but when he told the story of Abraham and Isaac he poured out all his theatrical energy into pantomiming the event in front of the class. He pretended to build an altar on which Isaac was to be sacrificed. Then he mimed an armlock on Isaac's head, raised his arm almost to the tiled ceiling, half-clenched his fist and proclaimed, "Isaac, my beloved son, the word of the Lord ordains that I kill you on this altar to prove that I am the Lord's obedient servant." During this production we were beside ourselves with pity for poor Isaac and with anger at Abraham for listening to strange and senseless instructions, but then we relaxed in gratitude when word came that there was an alternative way and that poor Isaac's life would be spared.

The executioner's block was a short section of tree trunk into which two nails were driven about an inch apart. Between these nails the chicken's head was wedged. The wings and legs were held firmly by the executioner's left hand. The weapon of choice was either a kindling axe or a tobacco axe. (In casual conversations one could get into a heated argument as to the merits of each.)

I found the sacrificial bird among the cats, and as soon as he saw me, I believe he sensed that his multiple-personality days were over, for he shifted his weight to one side and stood on one leg, a posture, Mr. Siemens said, chickens adopt when they are thinking. Whatever he was thinking, the intended victim allowed himself to be caught, and I carried him to the site of the execution. Surprisingly, the cats had no interest in what was happening.

Everything was going exactly the way I had thought things out, even the wedging of the head between the nails, when I abruptly decided that the axe needed sharpening, and so I released the rooster and went to the barn to file the edge.

The filing job done, I went back and found the rooster standing on one leg more or less beside the block as if he had concluded that escape was futile and that death was inevitable. Everything went well again except at the most intense moment he opened his eyes, and so I closed mine and let the axe fall hard. When I saw that I had made a clean cut, I didn't experience the thrill of the kill that Mr. Siemens talked about, but felt deeply sad that growing up was not all fresh muffins and jam.

Eventually, farm life returned to normalcy. Occasionally, though, on my way to school I would look back to see if I was being followed.

Racist Pigs

One summer Sunday on our way home from church, Dad remarked, "I was talking to deacon Martens after church, and he informed me that the Konrad brothers have an excess number of hogs this summer; that is, more hogs than they can properly house, and so they are offering the surplus at very, very reasonable prices. I think maybe I should get one."

Usually we acquired two piglets in March, which we then fed through the summer and slaughtered in late fall. This last March, however, money had been scarcer than usual, and so Dad had had to restrict his purchase to one animal. A hog requisition from the Konrads would bring us up to the norm again.

Dad's remark was singular nonetheless. Usually on our way home from church, the topic of conversation was about some church-related matter, such as Mr. Warkentin having been kicked by a horse, or Mrs. Redekop having severe headaches, which meant that her massage therapy practice would temporarily discontinue. Mrs. Redekop had quite a large clientele. Thus, the banal comment about hogs was quite out of Dad's character.

Dad believed earnestly in Jesus' words that "if any man come to me and dislike not his father and mother and wife and children, he cannot be my disciple." Dad's life was the church to which he devoted his physical and mental energies. Instead of, for instance, getting his tomato crop into the ground on time, he would go to visit Mrs. Reimer, laid up with a severe back ailment.

In any case, I was pleased on this occasion that Dad had not entirely shut out the needs of his family. They, like any other family, would have to be fed through the upcoming winter.

We had no telephone to confirm deacon Martens' opinion about the Konrads' hog population, and I'm sure the Konrads didn't have one either, but we decided by faith to make the journey there anyway.

The decision having been made, there was still the matter of bringing the animal home. Here Mr. Siemens was again a help in time of need. He lent us not only his two-wheel trailer but also the hog pen that went with it, for the hog that we were going after was already several months old.

We drove north on the Albuna Townline and into territory I had never seen before. Suddenly the road became narrower, the ditches deeper, and the houses farther apart, and Dad tightened his grip on the wheel. It was as if we had turned the page and were in another part of God's creation. When we finally got to the farmyard, I was impressed with the Konrads' brightly-coloured, free-standing piggery. Fortunately, one of the Konrads (I believe there were five of them) was just walking to the barn, and so after a short conversation between him and Dad all was confirmed as deacon Martens had said.

Once inside the piggery, I stood in wonder at the layout. Each pen had two tiers; that is, a floor-level tier for feeding, but then a second tier for resting. The two were connected by a wooden, sloping pigwalk about two feet wide. I had never seen anything like this before. (Many years later, I learned in my agricultural science class that pigs by nature prefer cleanliness. When outside, however, they dig and wallow in the muck to keep from getting sunburned.)

Dad, for whatever reason, chose a pig as black as a new railway tie. Our portable pen was then carried into the cement aisle, and as soon as Dad's pig had been cornered, two Konrad men, one on each side, grabbed the pig by an ear and guided it into our pen. The door closed and then a chuckling session followed between Dad and the Konrads, the content of which I could not follow because of my poor Low German. I concluded, however, that Dad was getting his animal gratis. (Maybe Dad had recently delivered a Sunday morning sermon that had touched some silver chord.)

We arrived home safely, backed the trailer against the pigsty in the barn, and unloaded our cargo without actually having had to touch it. Our resident white porker was surprised, indeed nonplussed, when he realized that quarters would have to be shared from now on, much like an established resident in a child-care setting reluctantly realizes that a toy once considered one's own must now be shared with a stranger.

We returned our borrowed goods to its owner and then enjoyed the feeling of a job accomplished without a hitch. The climax, however, was still to come.

That night our household was awakened by alarming, horrifying squeals from the barn, more ghastly than the sounds of the thousands of demon-possessed Gadarenian swine that plunged over the cliff and into the sea. At first, we were all paralyzed with terror, especially Mom and Dad, who were still traumatized by their experience with the anarchists and attributed every unusual sound to the coming of the *Makhnovtsy*. Dad, however, soon took courage and taking a lantern led the way to the barn. When Dad lifted the lantern above the pen, we saw two combatants standing nose to nose, ready for the next round but now distracted by the lantern light. Their ears were bleeding and blood was trailing from their open jaws.

We spent quite a while building a makeshift partition of spare wood to keep the racist pigs apart, and the partition remained in place until the white one was led away to be stuck by my uncle's goring blade.

Sadly, they had never reconciled their differences.

The Turkey

The partly deaf girl
In the grade nine art class
Misheard the final exam instructions
And drew a turkey
Not a turtle
And predictably
Harvested a goose egg

“Curriculum is strictly set
each jot and tittle must be met
verbatim is the epithet
no use to whine and weep and fret
a zero is the most you get

“What did you say
eh
eh
obey and knuckle under”

Mr. Siemens

Often in life we interact with people that make a lasting impression on us, people that are sometimes called unforgettable characters. In my case, it was the memorable Mr. Siemens.

A good deal of mystery surrounded him, so that the community began putting two plus two together and coming up with the sum of five. It was said, for instance, that he came to Canada in the 1920's and settled in Saskatchewan. Here he reputedly met a lovely lady, but since she lived in another town, he had to communicate with her by letter. He wrote to her every day, but saved the letters until Fridays, at which time he put them into one envelope and sent them off. Later, because Saskatchewan was especially hard hit by the Great Depression, he decided to move to Ontario, and since he reasoned one ticket was more economical than two, he left the lovely lady in the lurch and came to Ontario himself.

He lived on a farm near ours and immediately impressed us with his unmitigated success as a farmer. His farm received the timely rains, his sows birthed the large litters, his tomatoes were spared the blight. I believe that he genuinely thought that his success was tangible evidence of holy favour. Once when my dad and I were putting straw on our patch of strawberries, he chided Dad with, "Nick, you should be more aggressive in your farming. With your children growing up, your patch should be ten times this size. It's time you started building up equity."

Dad never had much tolerance for "getting on" in the world, and had little truck for worldly accomplishment. He was more of a spiritual person and believed, rightly or wrongly, that godliness was not certified by worldly achievements.

My first one-on-one encounter with Mr. Siemens occurred when one of his sows, in the throes of labour pangs, broke through her enclosure and escaped. For several hours I helped him look for the fugitive by walking along hedge-rows and scrub-filled ditches. We finally found her with a full complement of piglets in a copse covered with wild grape vines. I assisted him in washing the young and then bringing back the whole family to the barn. My little act of helpfulness served to make a big impression on him.

I learned early that perquisites come with certain levels of prosperity. Mr. Siemens had electricity in his house, and that luxury opened the way for entertainment such as radio.

One would have thought that as a fairly recent immigrant he would have preferred nostalgic, European music, etc. Not so! His favourite programme was Ty Tyson's broadcast of the Detroit Tigers baseball game from Navin Field. All games were in the afternoon; so it was not unusual for him to take an afternoon off from work. I know that he went to Detroit at least once to see a game. He would not allow me to come into the house to listen, but he would open the inside front door and allow me to sit on the front steps and listen. Through these broadcasts, I learned the names of Detroit's famous players: Hank Greenberg, Charley Gehringer, Tommy Bridges, Goose Goselin, Mickey Cochrane, etc.

Another luxury that Mr. Siemens possessed was the telephone. In an emergency, he would make a call for us. On one occasion, because of my foolishness, I became stranded in Leamington, and he arranged that Dad would pick me up at the Nickels' gas station.

He could afford to subscribe to *The Border Cities Star* (now *The Windsor Star*) and graciously gave the paper to my family after the news was one day old. News changed very little in those days; so an old paper was still newsworthy.

In reading books now about social life in the Mennonite colonies in southern Russia many years ago, I have been made aware that in wealthy families croquet was a popular sport. Mr. Siemens had a set and used it periodically when he had a partner to play with.

One day when I came to his door to get yesterday's paper, a lovely lady stood beside him. "Jake, this is my wife," he said, and I had no reason whatever to doubt him. I was nonplussed though for a moment, but then put my legs in fast forward to report the news at home. "Mom and Dad, there is a woman in Mr. Siemens' house!", I proclaimed. They didn't faint as I had expected, but perceived my proclamation as if it were old news, as if they knew something I didn't. I suggested that he had met her at a Tigers' game and had married her in Detroit, but my theory deflated when a few days later I heard her speak Low German. And so the whole matter was put to rest.

Later that spring, we left the farm where we were living and moved east of Leamington, but before the last load left I went to the Siemenses to say good-bye. He thanked me for my comradeship, and as a going-away gift he gave me his croquet set.

Then a few weeks later, Dad discovered that indeed he had forgotten something. We went back together, and having a bit of time on my hands, I went to see the Siemenses for the last time. I knocked on the door but received no response. I next went to the barn, and there they were kneeling in the straw - washing some new-born piglets.

When I think about that scene now, I am reminded of a passage in Longfellow's
The Song of Hiawatha:

As unto the bow the chord is
So unto the man is woman
Though she bends him she obeys him
Though she draws him, yet she follows
Useless she without the other.

Heinz Harvest

In the fall of 1936, the N. N. Driedger family, on their small farm near Ruthven, was in full harvest mode, picking tomatoes and delivering them to the Heinz factory in Leamington.

Harvesting a five acre crop, without outside help, was quite a challenge, but even greater was the delivering with horses and wagon and then periodically at night. I had always wanted to accompany Dad on one of his night deliveries, but the mantra was always: too young, too dangerous, too tired for school the next day. However, gradually I began doing grown-up jobs such as picking up the tomato hampers, in addition to my regular job of distributing empty hampers and counting the full ones. Eventually I could not be denied, and a Friday evening was chosen as my delivery debut.

Our wagon, made by Dad himself out of an old Hupmobile, was loaded in the afternoon to its capacity of 64 hampers. Then the horses were stabled and fed, and we went in for our own supper. Immediately after supper I went to bed in order to be rested for our ten o'clock start.

I was awakened at the appropriate time, and Dad and I went outside to make preparations. We hitched up our mismatched team of horses, Dickie and Dollie, and lit the stable lantern and fastened it on the left side of the wagon. Then we took our places on a narrow bench in front of the wagon, several feet behind the horses.

We didn't encounter a single vehicle between our farm and Ruthven. I couldn't always see the road, but the horses never missed a stride. Walking on a hard surface without shod hooves must have been stressful, but they didn't show their discomfort.

When we got to #3 highway, we stuck to the shoulder as much as possible, but even so, I felt very vulnerable. Vehicles drove slowly, but of course their lights didn't have the illuminating intensity that cars have to-day. Our biggest challenge was navigating the Ridge School hill. We were well off the road, but the downhill momentum required that the horses act as a brake on the wagon. Dad had to be careful not to allow the horses to take full flight down the hill. Once down the hill, we were only a short distance from friendly Oak Street.

We reached the staging area at Heinz on time, and were directed to our place in the line-up. We were placed near the head, not far from the grading station. I noticed a few familiar rigs, but what struck me was the occasional watermelon on the wagons. Dad remarked that some farmers found them useful, but his remark was lost on me. (Horses don't eat watermelons.)

We were almost at the station when I recognized Mr. Siemens' rig ahead of us. In the community, Mr. Siemens was reputedly the master of the stacked tomato load. I remember he once began giving Dad a primer on stacking loads: "Don't look guilty as you approach the station. Looking guilty is a certain path to being discovered. Secondly, play your coincidence card. In other words, if the best tomatoes are on the station side, plead coincidence – it just happened that way in the loading, etc."

So far as I know, Dad never attempted to stack a load, and even if he did, he could not have survived the first rule of deception. Dad quite literally believed in the maxim that honesty is the best policy. I wondered at times if there was objective proof of that maxim. The redoubtable Mr. Siemens, for instance, seemed to be prospering with impunity.

The lord of the grading station was a Heinz official, who of course had the interests of the company at heart. His name was Archie, the bane of tomato growers. He must have had a last name, but either no one knew it or pronouncing it only added to the speaker's disgust. I heard farmers say his first name, and then complete their statement in profane Low German, or else simply spat. Archie was arbitrary and ruthless, sometimes wilfully rejecting a load and sending the farmer home on the brink of tears.

When Mr. Siemens pulled abreast of the station, he stopped, humbly hunched his shoulders, and looked ahead at his horses, as if his load was not even worthy of the trash heap. Meanwhile, Archie surveyed the load with his penetrating eyes that knew by name every tomato on the wagon. Then he chose as his representative sample for grading a hamper underneath the driver's raincoat near the front of the wagon. At that moment of choice, I saw Mr. Siemens' right shoulder twitch and I sensed something was up.

Archie dumped the hamper onto the grading table, gently spread out the fruit, and made his decision. Then he tilted the table until the tomatoes rolled back into the hamper. Next, he momentarily left the table and returned with a banner with the Heinz insignia on it and mounted it on the back of the wagon. The banner signified that the load was of exemplary quality and now was destined for whole pack (premium price) instead of for juice. Had Mr. Siemens been vindicated?

We also passed the test but without a banner. (I often heard my parents speak of their relief and gratitude when they trained their way through the Red Gate and out of Russia in 1924. I now experienced those same emotions vicariously.)

We next proceeded to the weigh-in station and then to the unloading rigs, a series of carousel-like machines on which we carefully unloaded our hampers. The carousel moved continually and took our tomatoes into the factory for processing.

Our second last stop was the empty hamper platform, where Dad's friend, Mr. Herman Ginter, supplied us with 64 empty containers. Back in Ukraine, he had worked as a book-keeper, but now the poor man was relegated to counting hampers, but at least he had a job.

After weighing out, we paused to snack on the peppermint cookies that Mom had sent along, and then headed for home. The horses nimbly climbed the Ridge School hill, and at last I could ask Dad the overwhelming question, "Was Mr. Siemens' load stacked or not?"

He paused awhile and replied, "That is really not for us to judge." I was dissatisfied with his indecisive answer.

"Would he tell you if you asked him?"

"Sometimes it is better not to ask questions."

"Well then, how are we going to know?"

"Some questions are never answered," and the darkness continued to envelope us.

Since all of Dad's answers were unsatisfactory, I didn't even bother to ask about his explanation of Mr. Siemens' shoulder twitch.

We reached home, we looked after the horses and then entered the house, where Mother was sitting, fully dressed, beside the coal-oil lamp, waiting for us.

The Siemens' Parental Mansion (Ukraine 1914)

Constructed for appearance not protection
The mansion, light of leisure and of liberty
Forever sabbath continuous sun
Obtained through industry and frugality
And holy favoured in extravagance and style
Dominion over villages and endless steppe

The nether tier underset the massive build
And housed the heartbeat of the giant
A potent boiler forcing joyous heat
To far-flung reaches of anatomy
And making fireplaces needless charms
World orchards rowed the endless shelves
And salted pork, mutton, veal, and beef lay waiting
To be served on gorgeous platters
In claustrophobic winters
To hosts of gracious guests
And rooms of 'brodered linens
Ensured repose to-morrow and to-morrow
Made ready by the docile villainy

The mansion body, oasis of opulent magnificence
A shrine of cabinets, bureaux inlaid ivory
Seats of rich 'holstery in black lacquer
A Kroecker clock to measure idle time
Huge desks with polished gilded handles
And grand piano appassionato
Guiding the songsters
Into the courts of praise
The bedrooms mellow with warm feather rests
And toiletries in lavish porcelain blessed
Serene and relaxed in scented candles

The gardens, smiles of divine approval
Adorned the landscape like some crowning jewels
Chosen by master gardeners
For colour, mass, and continuity
Lining lover routes and bridal paths
And culminating at the leafy arbour den

But then a cruel regime swept through the land
That revelled in the watchword of destroy
Owners turned exiles
And lingering underneath their flowery bowers
Fondly together blinked their last
And bade a sad farewell to pleasures past

Church Services at LUMC in the 1930's

I recently read a German tome about the Russian Mennonites, in which was included an essay by Kornelius Hildebrand (1833-1920) describing a church service on the island of Chortiza in the 1840's. The essay is interesting and informative, despite Hildebrand's preoccupation with the clothes the worshippers were wearing. In any case, it sparked an inspiration to write about church services in Leamington in the 1930's.

The first point to remember is that going to church on Sunday morning was virtually compulsory for every able-bodied member because congregational members took it upon themselves to investigate absenteeism and thereby bring a wandering sheep back into the fold. The resulting publicity could be an embarrassment for the erring one.

Sunday morning church services began at 10:00, and so our family left for church no later than 9:15 because Dad wanted to be the first one there. He felt he needed to be an example both in godly living and less importantly in plain punctuality. Then, too, he required time to cohere his thoughts and engage in silent devotion, both of which were impossible in our crowded farmhouse.

While Dad was in the pastor's room, the rest of us went downstairs, where I waited for my friends to arrive. The official language of the church and Sunday school was German, but teachers permitted us to practise our English before classes began. Sunday school ran concurrently with the worship service upstairs. Children's features in the sanctuary upstairs were unheard of, the rationale being that love and example were the keys to instruction, with "religion" playing a secondary role. Since the main method of instruction downstairs was a dramatic retelling of a biblical account, the transition from school to sanctuary was a smooth one since the latter setting also used the narrative method predominantly. The downside of the preceding procedure was that teachers made an enormous sacrifice, for they seldom participated in worship services. In a sense, they went unchurched.

On special occasions such as Easter, both young and old were in attendance at the worship service, women and girls sitting on the left and men and boys on the right, just as had been the custom in Chortiza. I can't explain the reason for this arrangement, except to suggest it was Mennonite prudery and moral strictness. On the other hand, when I started high school, there was an entrance for the boys and one for the girls.

What always impressed me was the dignity and sanctity of the service. There was no musical prelude. Worshippers whispered a greeting, perhaps engaged in a handshake and then a holy quietness prevailed. Everyone knew that noisy and unruly children in the worship service were unappreciated, and that awareness alone made for creative and noncreative solutions. Coming late for the service was the eighth deadly sin.

When the time was almost 10:00, the *Vorsänger* (song leaders) marched in. Their duty was to lead with their voices, not with hands and arms. They walked in step to a bench to the left of the pulpit, seated themselves with exactly the same timing, and then bowed their heads in unison for a short, silent prayer. (Why the prayer had to be a public one, my mother could not satisfactorily explain to me.) A few short coughs ensued to test whether the voice box was free of clutter.

Next followed the choir in single file and took their places in the choir loft. Tradition forbade make-up and jewelry.

The service was now ready to begin, and the *Vorsänger* were poised. "Number 149," announced a stentorian voice that shook everyone to attention. The number and the hymn were as familiar as Number 606 to-day, but once you hear your resonant voice you want to hear it again. "Number 149," a second time, *Du Sonne der Gerechtigkeit* ("You Sun of Righteousness"). The song has 8 stanzas, and by the end of the 5th you knew by the decreasing volume and failing enthusiasm that a compromise would be required. It was always the same: *Bitte noch den letzten* (The last one, please!). Sometimes a voice in the congregation decided to take a musically scenic route, but then the *Vorsänger* would arbitrarily increase the beats at the end of a line to let everyone know who was in charge. Since there were no musical notes in the hymnary, the *Vorsänger* could take generous liberties in their leading. A second song always followed the first, and sometimes the selections miraculously mirrored the themes of the sermons.

The hymnary was simply called *Gesangbuch* (songbook), printed in Halbstadt in 1914. As I look over the songs now, I am impressed with the profound and substantive truths the lines carry. I presume that many of the songs uplifted the hearts of the worshippers and satisfied their spiritual hunger during the trying time of the 1930's. In our family it was customary at home to sing two songs per day out of the hymnary, so that today I probably know more *Gesangbuch* songs from memory than I know lines from Shakespeare.

Meanwhile, during the singing of *Du Sonne der Gerechtigkeit*, the ministers had single filed into the sanctuary, led by the *Ältester* and followed by the ordained lay ministers. The *Ältester* sat on an upholstered chair directly behind the pulpit, while the lay ministers sat on a bench opposite the *Vorsänger*.

Konstantin Stanislowski (1865-1938), the most influential drama theorist of the 20th century and founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, once observed that an actor mounting the stage should know that he is mounting no ordinary platform. The tradition in our church was somewhat similar. The pulpit and the small space behind it was sacred and hallowed territory. Only ordained ministers were qualified to speak from it, and their bearing and words were expected to be solemn and reverent. Those given to levity were summarily dismissed as ones without credibility and moral authority in ministering.

When the second congregational hymn had ended, the *Ältester* stepped to the pulpit and greeted the congregation with “The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ...” or “I greet you with the words of the psalmist...” A greeting of “Hello” or “Good Morning” was unheard of, probably because it sounded too unsanctified and workaday. The announcements that followed were by today’s standards embarrassingly few because church activities were hardly in demand, with members almost totally immersed in putting bread on the table at home. Then, too, Sunday afternoons and evenings were times of social interaction among relatives and other friends. Of course, announcements of engagements always straightened weary shoulders.

After the announcements, there was always a song by the choir, of which there were at least three, one led by Peter Willms, one by Peter Enns, and one by Henry Krueger, respectively. Periodically John J. Janzen led a male choir. Not singing in a choir was like sneaking through a side door in the rites of passage to Mennonite maturity. Since there was no piano in the church, all singing was a cappella. Gossip ruled that the Willms choir was the most accomplished because it had attempted Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” and ded within its ranks the most brilliant tenor in the community, Rudy J. Dyck. Not having a choir as part of the worship service was like having cake without icing, good but incomplete.

Next, the first preacher went to the pulpit, uttered a prayer (for which the congregation stood) and then proceeded to expound on a text in a plain and unobtrusive manner. The content was not learned but what was spoken was said with sincerity and largely without notes.

Another choral selection followed, and then a second speaker addressed the congregation, concluding with a devout prayer. The choir then rendered its final number, and after another congregational song in which the offering was lifted, the *Ältester* spoke the benediction.

No doubt there will be some to-day who will appraise the worship services of the 1930’s as backward and dinosaurian. However, those good souls, most of them now deceased, who were nurtured under that regimen, founded the UMEI, the Mennonite Home, and other Mennonite institutions that we take for granted. What would those good souls say to the present generation desperate for additional deacons, teachers, singers, etc.?

Dad Portrait (Moscow 1916)

If Dad were alive to-day
He would not be turning in his grave
But preparing next Sunday's sermon
Attempting to keep it separate
From planting his tomato crop

In my portrait of Dad
His pose is singular – arms across body
That will not be repeated
For three quarter century
When he rests in his coffin

Dad is relaxed
As I have never seen him
Here at his Moscow quarters
In officer's headwear
Red Cross emblem
Above the peak
His collar up
Khaki-coloured smock
An epaulet on each shoulder

Soon he will entrain again
As medical orderly
On ambulance car #160
Stretchering the wounded
Where poppies do not blow

Dad made a decision
His dark eyes are at peace
Reflections of his soul

The Christmas Concert

I recently heard on the radio that an Ontario public school had intended to present a Christmas concert, but the board had required the following restrictions: "I wish you a merry Christmas" had to be changed to "I wish you a merry holiday"; "O Christmas Tree" to "O Winter Tree"; Jesus or the New Testament was not to be mentioned.

Time was when there was shock at seeing "Xmas" instead of "Christmas" on greeting cards. To-day traditional Christmas concerts are only a nostalgic memory.

As a youngster attending Ruthven Public School in the 1930's, the school with the large 1884 high up on the gable end facing the highway, I too was involved in a controversy surrounding the Christmas concert, nothing though as fundamental as exists in public schools to-day.

The controversy was about the casting for Santa Claus. My only qualification for the part was that I could hold a tune. On the other hand, Hughie, my competitor was tone deaf, but had the required Santa Claus belly, his father was a trustee, and his parents were not immigrants. The teacher chose Hughie, a decision that cut to the quick, but I still had the faint hope that when I got home and told my story, my mother, in her quiet way would side with me, but she intoned, "If your teacher made the decision, then it must be the right one." And that was the end of it.

Rehearsing for the concert was a monumental job. My classroom teacher could not sing, at least I never heard him, and so the burden fell on the music teacher, Miss McSween, who came every Thursday afternoon for music education and singing. Of course, as the concert drew closer, she contributed much extra time. Miss Moody, a community resident, was the pianist.

On the day of the concert, we marched in double file to the Ruthven United Church, on the west side of the village. Here a stage was already in place, and we went through the entire programme again, just the way it would be done in the evening. A concert in the school would have been considered a sacrilege.

Our concert included Santa Claus and the elves, but the message of Christmas was never in doubt as in such songs as, "It came upon a midnight clear", "Away in a manger",

“Good King Wenceslas”, and others. Most of the presentations were well laced with Christmas morality.

The provincial ruling in the 1980’s that put an end to Bible readings, the Lord’s prayer, and inter-Christian clubs also put a lid on the traditional Christmas concert. The buzzwords such as cultural diversity, pluralistic society, multi-culturalism, and neutral moral education now became important.

Near the end of our concert, Hughie, with the brown bag over his shoulder, got up and monotoned:

Now all my friendly girls and boys
It’s time to go
For you must make your journey
For home, you know
The time comes once in every year
When Santa must on earth appear
But now the moment’s drawing near
It’s time to go.

I too was singing, but my lips didn’t move.

Then everyone in the church sang “Silent Night” and we solemnly went our way home, the better off for having heard some peace and good will, and I too no longer bore any ill-will toward Hughie.

Tim Hortons Worshippers

on the seventh day of creation
they ponder in their pews
in the amen corner
of the drive-in service
the caffeine cathedral

they seek no muss or fuss
no protocol invidious
they just desire to discuss
in caffeine fix salubrious
creative sabbath issues

Of Toilets and Things

The local newspaper recently lamented citizens' lack of interest in running for the school board, and so the incumbent was acclaimed. It occurred to me that the attitude was exactly the same when I went to public school. Anyone attending a ratepayers' meeting was certain to be acclaimed as a trustee; thus my father, among other reasons, never attended. So far as I could tell, the trustees then had four specific duties: ensuring that there was a teacher in the classroom, dipping out the septic tank, keeping the door on the three-holer, and fixing the school bell.

As I think about the problem now, the septic system was inadequate to begin with to properly service the number of pupils using it, and thus it had to be dipped out several times a year. Dipping was done by hand, using large pails, which were emptied into wooden drums set on a stone-boat, pulled by a single horse. On dipping days, we could stay inside at recess and noon to breathe the stale air, or we could go outside and breathe the stool air. Those who stayed inside watched the dippers, all smokers, all solemn faced, all dressed as scare crows, and all wishing they hadn't attended the ratepayers' meeting. All had a wad of what looked to be vaporub smeared under their respective noses.

On dipping days, we had to use the three-holer out beyond left field on the school grounds. The three-holer looked like an Indian longhouse, high and narrow. It was actually a six-holer (though I never saw the other end) with a block wall dividing the third and fourth hole. The walls too were built from cement blocks, and there lay the problem. On Hallowe'en, it was a tradition in schools to knock over all one-holers, two-holers, etc., but in our case that was impossible, and so the grade eights, as an act of vengeance, kept tearing off the doors. Even though it was a three-holer, we were under the strictest of orders that only one person at a time would use the facility. When the door was on, the three-holer was dark and dank and frightening. When the door was off, there was no privacy, and so in effect the three-holer was a white elephant – of no use.

Our school had a bell tower, the insides of which could easily be seen as one walked up the sidewalk to the school. There was an iron, sprocketed pulley with a groove around the circumference. In this groove lay the rope. The top end of the rope was tied to a sprocket, and the bottom end somehow found its way into the lobby of the school. Fastened to the pulley was a head stock from which hung the enormous bell. So long as the rope in the lobby was gently pulled, everything was fine. If the rope was pulled too hard, the bell mechanism in the tower flipped backward and the bell became useless.

The rope in the lobby hung just beside the classroom door, and very few students could resist giving it a good yank as they nonchalantly passed by. Then the great inquisition began, and since no one stepped forward, the entire class was punished. It took a courageous trustee to climb the extension ladder and put the bell apparatus into its proper position again.

One spring a terrible coincidence occurred wherein the doors of the three-holer were off at the same time as the sewer system shut off. A crisis was unfolding, but somehow the board got wind of the situation (The school had no telephone) and brought over their dipping equipment. We were told that one trustee had gone across the road to inquire of the Taylors whether the school could use their two-holer for several hours. The Taylors had graciously consented to the request. There was only one problem, however - crossing the highway to get there.

The highway really wasn't that busy. Both Billy and Doris McDonald used it to roller-skate to school. Stanley Vinal was not so lucky. He was riding his bike to school and carelessly made a turn into the school yard and was hit in the leg by an old pick-up truck. As Stanley lay squirming and screaming on the ground, the teacher came out, and we gently loaded him on the back of the truck, and the driver sped off to the hospital in Leamington. I can't remember whether Stanley returned to school or not.

The teacher quickly solved the highway problem by appointing several crossing guards, including me, to help ensure the safety of younger children. I relished the job, and for a while I saw a policeman in my future. All went well until Joey Couture (also in my grade four class) started out too late for the two-holer. Several feet from his destination he had an accident on the sidewalk, and at that point the Taylors called off their gracious gesture of hospitality.

Nowadays, all trustees have to worry about is educational matters.

The Little Red Schoolhouse

I recently studied the new English curriculum for elementary schools, and in doing so unintentionally began making comparisons with my days as an elementary student in the little red schoolhouse. It is not the purpose of this essay to point out the virtues and faults of each system. That will be up to the reader. The purpose is to give a specific insight into the kind of education I received as a youngster.

Pervading the entire school day was the atmosphere of patriotism and morality. Patriotism was taught with an enthusiasm bordering on zealotry. Each morning students were required to stand and salute the Union Jack and recite the pledge: "I pledge allegiance to the flag, to the king, and to the empire." Then a national song or two would follow, such as "The Maple Leaf Forever":

In days of yore from Britain's shore
Wolfe, the dauntless hero, came and planted firm
Britannia's flag on Canada's fair domain
Here may it wave, our boast and pride
And join in love together
The thistle, shamrock, rose entwined
The maple leaf forever.

Pious bent or not, the teacher was required by law to read a selection from the Bible. The reading came from King James, presumably for patriotic reasons.

Mottoes and maxims were written across the top of the blackboard, intended to instill virtues in the one who committed them to memory. Sayings included Kindness is nobler than revenge, Let love and truth always reign, Shun evil companions.

Drill and memory work characterized all studies. Blackboards gleamed with arithmetic tables, history dates, the names of countries and their capitals, definitions of parts of speech and labelled diagrams of all sorts. The students were expected to know them by heart. They also memorized poems and parts of prose. It was common practice to bring classes to the front of the room for recitation. Oral reading received more than its share of class time. A youngster struggling painfully through a literature selection was further demoralized by sighs and groans from the better readers.

Competition was a great motivator, especially among those who were capable of competing. Those who couldn't compete were resigned to repeating the grade next year, and then became the seed for a booming bully culture. Group work was synonymous with pilfering ideas from your neighbour, and everyone understood that pilfering was evil and had to be punished. It was also considered to be a cop-out for lazy students, unwilling to work on their own initiative. Creativity was discouraged because it smacked of insubordination and subversion, giving the impression that the teacher didn't know everything after all.

Teaching in the little red schoolhouse was very challenging. There were many organizational and teaching problems to overcome. My school had over forty students from grade one to grade eight, all in the same room. The beginning grades could not be expected to work by themselves for any length of time, and so the teacher scheduled her time to meet with them at frequent intervals. There was no duplicating equipment and so nearly all the assignments were laboriously copied on the blackboard by the teacher. Every piece of blackboard chalk was used to the very last mite, no matter how badly the teacher's fingernails suffered in the ordeal. The upper grades ordinarily worked quickly in order to be free to listen to what the next grade was being taught. The "listening-in-habit" accelerated these children and very often they were advanced. The buzz of classes in session never appeared to distract the seatworkers any more than music distracts today's children doing their homework at home. Needless to say, there was no teacher time for yard supervision; consequently the laws of the jungle ruled the school yard. As for athletics, our school bought a ball and bat from the Christmas concert proceeds, and beyond that we made up our own rules for the game. (The lions were always at bat, and the jackals were always fielding.) Children of immigrants, including "Minkermits", often played the jackal role, and in our school, were generally regarded as second-class Canadians.

Because the teacher was always preoccupied with various aspects of teaching, she developed an ingenious system of student signals to which she could respond by nodding (approval) or shaking (denial) of her head. For instance, a one finger signal signified a request to go the washroom for a pee; a two finger signal was a request to go to the washroom for a more involved procedure. The difference was important because a one finger signal implied a quick return to class so that others could take their turn. Only one person at a time, no matter the gender, could go to the washroom. (After the war in 1945, I was never comfortable flashing the victory sign for fear of being misunderstood). A three finger signal signified a request to use the pencil sharpener; four finger signal to get a drink but only if the throat was bone dry. (An honour system overlapped the finger system here.) A four finger plus thumb signal was a request to ask a legitimate question.

The last signal was almost never approved for obvious reasons. During a class, if the student raised his/her hand to answer a question, all the fingers of the hand had to hang limp, again for obvious reasons. Snapping fingers was an automatic loss of recess time, no appeals allowed.

Education beyond the three basics was the duty of the parents; hence there were no field trips, no guest speakers, no inter-school events, etc.

To graduate from grade eight required a strong recommendation from the teacher to the district inspector. Without that, a student had to pass a departmental examination administered at the local high school. In my research, I came across a question asked on the English examination: "Define tense and voice. Name the tenses and voices of each verb in the following: I am praising; I am praised; I praised; I had been praised; I shall have praised; I shall be praised."

Having a mature and dedicated teacher in the little red schoolhouse was like having a pearl of great price. I was lucky. Years later, when the news of her death was announced on the local radio station, I immediately resolved to go to the funeral parlour to pay my respects. Having arrived there, I was prepared for the white hair waterfalling in the cheeks' hollows, but I was unprepared for the position of her hands. The left one lay by her side, but the right hand, fingers and thumb spread apart, lay flat on her body. What question was she asking, I wondered. No doubt it was a legitimate one. More importantly, if I knew the question, would I have been able to answer it?

On Eaton's Filing for Bankruptcy Protection (March 15, 1997)

The ides of March
A retail Caesar
Gashed and bleeding red ink
Because the emperor
Refused to change his clothes

But remembering is the garden
From which we cannot be expelled

Remember Eaton's and the catalogue
More marvelled at than holy miracles
More memorized than David's psalms
Lone book in family libraries
First expositor in gender education
Corsets, chemises, drawers, longjohns
And bust forms on page 33

The year turned on the catalogue
Two seasons with their own edition
And specials for the mini-terms

Remember Eaton's and the one-holer
First failure in recycling craze
(Too glossy and too leathery)
Bosom friends on lonely winter eves
And when the fears and shivers overwhelmed
Leaf blindly to the dog-eared Winchesters

"Satisfaction guaranteed"
Could not be sustained
For distracted retail shepherds
Lost interest in their sheep

A wounded Caesar destitute and dies
But from his dust a new regime will rise

On the Snout of a Dilemma

In the 1930's, many farm families survived the winter by obtaining piglets in the early spring, then feeding and fattening them through the summer, and finally slaughtering the animals in late fall when the flies were gone.

It was quite remarkable what was extracted from these animals. There was, of course, ham, sausage, and other well-known products, but there were exotic ones as well, such as the brownish, greasy substance that was put into our blackbread sandwiches for school lunch, which we ate by ourselves in the school basement behind the furnace. The pig's bladder we used as a football, but it too had two downsides: too light to throw a spiral, and when friends came over to play football, and asked where we got ours, and we told them, they lost interest in playing.

It is terrible being poor. There is nothing redemptive about it, despite what moralists proclaim, and so being poor should be avoided at all costs. (But I digress.)

And so one Saturday in March, Dad announced that it was time to fetch the piglets that he had reserved from a certain Cornelius Enns near Cottam, and moreover, that I would be going along to keep him company on the journey.

After breakfast, then, we converted our old Chev into a pick-up by taking out the back seat and putting in some boards for a bed liner. Dad also tossed in two jute bags and some twine, while Mom sent along some peppermint cookies for a snack.

When we arrived at the Enns' farm about mid-morning, Dad stopped at the house to see if Mr. Enns was home. He was, of course, because there was nowhere to go but home. Besides, Dad was continuing a long tradition - social interaction first, and then business. It would have been rude and indeed boorish for Dad to have said, "Hello, Cornelius, I came to fetch the" No, that simply was not done. At some point in the conversation, though, I presume that Dad said, "Well, Cornelius, since I'm here anyway, I might just as well take along the piglets that I ordered some time ago."

Meanwhile, I was waiting in the car/pickup psyching up for the pig hunt. I visualized a kind of African safari whereby we would walk out into the pig pasture with sticks and cudgels and bring back two pigs as trophies of the hunt.

However, events didn't happen that way. When Mr. Enns and Dad came out of the house, we drove to the pig barn. We followed him inside and in no time Mr. Enns had climbed into the pen and clutched two runts by their hind legs. He lifted the animals, squirming and squealing, and put them into our jute bags, one in each. Poor Dad could only afford runts, never the pick o' the litter. In any case, the safari was over. No money changed hands at this time, but I heard Dad say, "Cornelius, I'll pay you when the tomatoes are off in the fall!"

We left the yard, two people at the front and two pigs at the back. We hadn't gone far when I turned around and noticed that the pigs were beginning to worm their way out of the bags. I decided to proceed cautiously and reported to Dad, "Dad, the pigs are misbehaving."

"Well, what are they doing?"

"They are not happy in the dark and are trying to get out."

"Well, we can't stop now!"

But by the time we got home and parked beside our barn, the piglets were frolicking about the way they must have frolicked on the day of creation at the earth's first turning. We both noticed that we were on the snout of a dilemma - how to get the pigs into the pig pen, which was inside the barn. Had Mr. Enns been with us still, there would have been no problem, but one must remember that Dad had spent his youth working in a bank, not a barn. He could manage pig-headed customers, but now he was dealing with the real animal and he didn't like it. Dad disliked touching animals, from cows to cats, and recruiting me was out of the question.

To solve our problem, we took the most circuitous route possible by opening the barn door and driving inside. Then we closed the barn door behind us and opened the doors of the car/pickup and poked the animals out, trying not to be vindictive.

Then it took us a long time to shoo the animals into the pen. Stupid pigs!

Mr. Hillman

Mr. Hillman was the teacher in the senior room of our school. He had a handsome build, a Clark Gable moustache, and dark, wavy hair. Schoolyard gossip, rumours, and lies revealed that he had come from Pelee Island, but since he had refused to attend Sunday worship he had been dismissed. The same sources revealed that he had fought on the Western Front in WWI, had in fact been part of the company that inhaled poison gas and was one of the few who survived. On returning home, he found himself unemployable except for teaching jobs.

I found that one of the memorable things about him was his constant scowl, except on three occasions. One occurred during my last year in the junior room. Mr. Hillman walked into the room without knocking, and without saying a word, smiled at Miss Wigle. Then he walked backwards out of the room. The happening was again grist for the rumour mill; namely, that Mr. Hillman had met a lovely girl in France, but could not bring her home after the war because her father refused to allow it. Perhaps Miss Wigle reminded him of the lovely French girl.

The second instance of his smiling occurred when he was pulling the rope for ringing the school bell. This smile was more difficult to explain. Perhaps he was thinking that if he ever left his teaching job he could be employed as a bell ringer in a grand cathedral. Or perhaps he wanted to let the Islanders know that even though he didn't attend church he had nothing against the beautiful sound of bells.

The third instance was quite bizarre. I should explain first that the one thing I noticed when I graduated to the senior room (in senior fifth) was the cannon on Mr. Hillman's desk. It was made of polished brass, about a foot in length and about eight inches tall. This allegedly was the souvenir that Mr. Hillman had brought back from the war. I had already heard from other seniors that whenever a student achieved something special, that student was allowed to fire the cannon.

At our classroom musical festival, Chester Gillanders, the school bully, volunteered to sing a solo. He was very uncomfortable leaning on the blackboard, but he got through his sentimental cowboy song called "Jack", the story of a man who had lost his love. When the song was over, Mr. Hillman thundered, "Chester, you will fire the cannon tomorrow." Some said his eyes were glazed when he said it, but that I cannot confirm.

After school the next day, we ceremoniously followed Mr. Hillman, who carried the cannon behind the school and set it on the ground. Then he threaded a string through the touch hole in the cannon until the string reached the bore. Next he pushed gun powder down the bore until it was packed against the string, and then he invited us to put in the ammunition such as chalk, pebbles, etc. Howie put in a nail with the sharp end facing the powder. Finally the order came to cover our ears and crouch down while Chester crawled forward and lit the string. Slowly the fire reached the powder, and then there was an enormous explosion.

“Put on your masks and move forward,” Mr. Hillman bellowed, but we just stood there, momentarily stunned and awed, having no idea what his instructions meant. “Take that, you Fritzie,” Mr. Hillman smiled.

When the assault had ended, we went to inspect the damage and found that the nail, head first, was imbedded in a maple tree.

In June of the same year, Mr. Hillman left and we heard on good authority that he had entered a sanatorium at Windsor Western Hospital. He did not return in September, and we began fearing the worst. Some senior boys got together and sent him a letter, the gist of which was as follows:

Dear Mr. Hillman,

We are sorry that you are sick. We will remember you, but most of all we will remember the cannon. Hope you get better soon. We hope you win your battle.

My small signature appeared in one corner.

In spring, a short statement announced that Mr. Hillman had died. The news appeared in Mr. Siemens' *The Border Cities Star*.

The announcement left a two-fold impression on me. First, this was my second encounter with death, and I wondered when some day death would lay its icy hand on me. Secondly, I wondered about the boundary between gossip and truth; namely, how many true friends would be left if all people knew what each was saying about the other?

The Skunk in the Animal Trap

Never deceive a tax collector
A policeman or poet
They will avenge
But will a skunk

Lure it with cheddar cheese
And while it feeds
See the mechanism trip
Barring escape routes
And choking the appetite

Back humped
Spitting needles
It glowers scorpions
Into the mind of guilt

I hope it has forgiven me
That is the nature of skunks

Point Pelee Picnic

When I was growing up on the farm near Ruthven in the 1930's, the most pleasant event of the year was not my birthday, not even Christmas, but the annual Sunday school picnic at the Point.

I should explain that knowledgeable people called the park, Pelee Point National Park, whereas the people who actually lived there referred to it as Point Pelee National Park. Anyone looking for an instant argument could ignite one simply by broaching the subject of the park's name. Wayside signs were useless because there were none.

The time of the picnic was usually June, about two weeks after British Empire Day (Victoria Day), the day that public school children would go to Lakeside Park in Kingsville and wave Union Jacks.

On picnic day, we went to church in Leamington as usual on Sunday morning, but since this was an all-day celebration we took along food for the entire day: cooked eggs, fresh bread and home-made butter, *Platz*, and several jars full of real lemonade, etc. With gasoline at 10 cents a gallon, it was unthinkable to return home after church, have lunch, and then proceed to the park, even though not going home meant that Dad had to sacrifice his after-lunch nap.

And so after Sunday school, we all gathered in the big room of the church basement to hear the annual important announcement by Mr. Siemens, the superintendent. It was an announcement we didn't want to hear, and in any case we knew it from memory: "There will be no swimming at the picnic today because we teachers can't take responsibility for supervision, but at a certain time in the afternoon we will all join hands and walk to the lake together, where we will enjoy watching the water lapping against the beach." (Many years later, I appreciated the wisdom of the superintendent's words.)

We left the church parking lot as soon as Dad had determined who was ill in the congregation, who needed a pastoral visit, and generally what administration work needed to be done. We took Erie Street South, then turned left on the road that leads to the park. When we passed Erie Shores Golf Club, Mother always smilingly observed, "I can't understand why grown-up men play such a childish game. And right out in public at that! Our young men in Schönfeld would have been ashamed of themselves."

When we reached the park gates, as everyone else, we were expected to pay the entrance fee of 25 cents, but this fee could be waived provided the driver declared that he and the car occupants were paying a social visit to friends residing within the park. In our case, the Friesen family would have qualified, but Dad, as usual, chose the high road and paid the 25 cents, a sum I thought could have served as a downpayment on a sack of flour at Ruthven General Store; however, I remained silent. Then as Dad gave the money to the attendant in the booth, we heard her amused remark to her companion, "The Friesens must be having a party this afternoon."

We took the winding dirt road to the picnic grounds near the elementary school and more or less across the road from the Tilden farm. Interestingly, when we passed the Friesen house, the yard was deserted, the party having been moved to a site near the elementary school.

All picnickers looked for a level plot of ground on which to park their cars with enough extra space to spread out a sheet on which to set out their meal. (Picnic tables had not yet been invented.)

Once everyone had settled in, the visiting began, and even though everyone belonged to the same congregation, the Essex County United Mennonite Church, and everyone was friendly toward one another, Old World preferences were visible, though certainly not enforced. The Chortitza group seemed most comfortable among their own, while the Molotschna group seemed to gravitate to their own. My parents were most at home among the Schönfelder (Molotschna) because that was where their memories and sentiments resided. Most certainly at some point they reminisced about the respected and peerless village schoolmaster. At next Sunday's service, however, everyone would worship as one body, whether Chortitza or Molotschna.

Meanwhile, we children gathered around our teacher, Miss Rogalski, for Bible quizzes and games. One of the games that she had created was based on the theme of the hymn, "Safe in the Arms of Jesus". It involved our teacher and her assistant standing about 20 feet apart. Then one at a time each child was blindfolded and instructed to walk in a straight line from the assistant to the teacher. Coaching from onlookers was strictly forbidden, and when a child strayed from the straight path twice, he/she was out of the game. Conversely, those that reached the teacher were warmly embraced, cheered by all, and praised for staying on the straight line.

I was the first to be disqualified, but Gerda Reimer made it to safety twice without wavering or faltering. Her success resulted in my first experience with religious doubt; namely, how could Gerda Reimer be safe in the arms of the Lord when she was the one who was secretly passing naughty notes among our class in Ruthven? There was something amiss here! Divine justice was not functioning as it ought to!

After several other games, the superintendent let it be known that it was time to walk to the lake. When we got there, the water was like a glorious mirror, dark blue and extending out until it touched the sky. We took off our shoes and walked to the edge, enjoying the water as it laved our feet. That was our swim and it felt refreshing. Then we spent some time gathering unusual shells along the beach.

When we returned to the picnic area, Mom was already spreading out the sheet for our afternoon meal of *Platz* and lemonade. (It was not unusual on a Sunday to have a meal consisting mainly of dessert.) The Reimers agreed to our invitation to join us, and with their *Rollkuchen* and jam we had a delicious meal. Gerda, usually vibrant, was noticeably silent, perhaps feeling uncomfortable that her victory earlier had been somewhat tainted.

On our way home from the picnic, Mom made that circumspect remark common in Mennonite gatherings: "*Wenn wir leben und gesund bleiben, kommen wir nächstes Jahr wieder.*"

We drove with cherished memories of food, of nature in its original splendour, and of our wonderful church community. Memory is a garden from which we cannot be expelled.

Our Trip to Waterloo

In the spring of 1935, Dad received an invitation to speak at the Waterloo United Mennonite Church, and when he accepted via surface mail our preparations for the trip began.

A trip to Waterloo was an enormous act of faith. Besides preparing a sermon, there was the daunting task of preparing the car. A flat tire on our '28 Chev was always a possibility and so equipment in this regard included tire irons, a jack, and a full complement of tube patch material. (Mr. Wiens once told Dad that on a journey from Leamington to Ruthven he, Mr. Wiens, had experienced three flat tires. That meant a change to the spare plus two beside-the-road patching sessions.) Then the battery had to be charged, the two-wheel brakes checked, etc.

The four of us started before dawn on Saturday morning. (The oldest three children stayed at home to safeguard our humble home.) For snacks, we took peppermint cookies that we ate dry. Pop and thermos bottles may have been invented, but that didn't matter - we couldn't afford them anyway.

We took Highway #3 to Talbotville, then north to Lambeth and east to London. Then we turned north again to Arva, Birr (Mom had a hearty chuckle at the name) and then to Elginfield. Here we turned east and passed through places like St. Marys, Stratford, Shakespeare, etc., finally arriving in darkness at the Ennses in Waterloo. (Mrs. Enns was my mother's sister.)

The Ennses lived in simple luxury. They needed no match to light a light bulb; their outhouse was inside the house and used soft, white, rolled-up paper, not the Eaton's catalogue.

My Uncle Herman's bicycle had all the spokes intact and had inflatable tubes, not strips of hay rope inside the tires. Riding on the sidewalk (although the law forbade it) was much easier than riding on gravel.

I don't remember the Sunday morning sermon, but I do recall the resounding pipe organ that the Waterloo congregation was famous for.

Our Leamington church had no musical instrument at all, the rationale being that instruments stifled congregational singing. (In 1943, a council motion passed that Aggie Dick and Anna Hildebrand be allowed to play the piano before the service "in an unostentatious manner".) The other memorable Sunday event was the torrential rain, and Dad was pleased that we were not travelling because occasionally the wipers gave out and then the driver had to use one hand, usually the right one, to manipulate the wiper from the inside of the car.

We left for home early on Monday morning, the rain had stopped but the day was dreary. When we got to St. Marys, the main street was flooded, and with the water up to the running-boards we nonetheless managed to wade through. I remember reporting to Dad that there was a line of water on the floor at the back but he ignored me because his nerves were already visibly taut. Besides, what could he have done?

On the other side of St. Marys the car stopped, but luckily we were near a service garage. Dad went to check it out and returned with a man, who opened the hood, took his cloth and dried some wires (I think). Then we were on our way again.

At London, the Thames River was even higher, so that cars on Richmond Street were in water up over the wheels. We were stopped, of course, and wondered what the car ahead of us was going to do. Slowly it inched forward into the water, but when the water found its way into the exhaust, the car gurgled momentarily and died.

Dad was poised to move forward and then a miracle occurred. (No, the waters did not divide to give us safe passage on dry pavement.) An angel dressed as a man came up to Dad and told him to turn around and drive through the university campus and cross the Thames at the university bridge. The unknown man volunteered to lead the way. Dad was quite relieved to follow and without further mishaps we reached home at dusk.

When Dad drove on the yard, he made a left turn and parked beside the hand water pump, instead of parking in the barn. He often did this after some significant event such as a difficult church meeting, a stressful counselling session, etc. Somehow the pump was a symbol of revitalization for him.

The next morning the car had a dead battery. Dad had forgotten to turn the lights out.

Note: When the Fanshaw Dam was constructed in the 1950's, flooding on the Thames was largely corrected.

The Ballad of the *Yireeshti Tweeback*

In days of yore above in time
An ancient village stood
The villagers agreed they lacked
A champion in food

A *Schultebot* was thus arranged
All came with serious mien
The nominations stung a bit
The arguments were keen

“What’s wrong with *Schnetji*?” if you please
“They’re known from to and fro”
“Well, nothing taste-wise, I should say
But look like domino.”

“But *Verenetji* are awfully nice
And really good to see”
“And so they are,” a quick retort
“But far too slippery”

A wizened man of eighty-four
But none could be more fitter
Suggested the *Erboozi* ripe
“The seeds are far too bitter”

The czar was e-mailed to come down
And asked to wear his crown
The sides had gotten in a rut
And no one would back down

Twas winter time and bitter cold
The wind blew with its might
The train arrived but woebegone
The czar was frozen tight

With regal care they set him down
The stoves all burning high
The body warmed and then it spoke
A curse and then a cry

“Tum Kukukhan”, the curses flew
“My back is getting toasted
If you persist on more of this
My buns they shall be roasted”

“Hurra – hurra”, they all rejoined
Hail to the czar of suns
Who says we need a champion
When we have roasted buns?”

First Choirs

Singing in the choir is like ploughing with a team of horses. All efforts must be synchronized for successful results. If one horse pulls too hard, the furrow is crooked; if the operator leads by the seat of his pants, the plough will likely dig too deep or else move to the surface; if the operator and team are at loggerheads, the effect will show in unpleasant temperaments. So far as I know, my first choir participation showed none of the above; in fact, there was listener praise, but in subsequent years I experienced a director that lost his glasses by waving too enthusiastically and thus indeed had to complete the song directing by the seat of his pants. (I digress.)

My first encounter with a church choir began at an early age. I began as a boy alto in Anna Hildebrand's choir in 1941. Anna had studied music for a year at Bluffton College, Ohio, under the guidance of the venerable Pearl Mann. She returned to Leamington with a zeal to sing something musically challenging, and thus she chose the cantata *Kaos und Erde*, a work that generally traces the salvation narrative. In assembling her choir, however, she found that she was desperate for altos, and so she seconded Abe A. Driedger and me to fill the breach.

Since the church did not have a piano, we practised in the Hildebrand home on Wigle Street. (In 1943, the church council did approve a piano for the church provided it was played without ostentation and only before the church service began. Anna Hildebrand and Aggie Dick were the first pianists.) I walked to the practice from my home on concession two and became a part of LUMC's first intergenerational choir. We ranged in age from about twelve to thirty. Five Hildebrand siblings, including Anna, all unmarried then, formed an integral part of the choir. The Hildebrands were represented in all parts except the alto. On one occasion, Jake and Peter came home late from work, and so the rehearsal had to be postponed until they had had a repast. The Hildebrands were a high-spirited family, making rehearsals lively and relaxed. Dick's fiancée, Mary Janzen, was our soloist.

We performed in the white clapboard church, where the pulpit and stage faced directly north. (The addition to the west came later.) Abe and I needed strong encouragement from Anna before we consented to lead the choir down the aisle and up into the choir loft.

I distinctly remember three details about the performance. The first was that we sang the entire cantata without piano accompaniment. (The expressions "going sharp" or "going flat" had not been created yet in our church.) Secondly, Mary's descant in the anthem

Jauchzet ihr Himmel was spine warming. Thirdly, Abe and I had predetermined that in the last line of the cantata, *Dann fuhr Er hinauf zum lichten Himmelszelt*, we would desert the altos and show our manliness by joining the tenors. Anna noticed, and did not look pleased. We learned later that improvising is taboo in choir singing.

In his commentary later, Rev. Abram Rempel commended the choir for its valiant effort. With that kind of encouragement, we repeated the cantata some weeks later.

Several years later, quite unintentionally, I sang my first solo, albeit a one word effort. Our choir was singing "In the Garden." The second stanza begins: "He speaks and the sound of his voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing." We were under strict orders to make a long pause, for whatever reason, after "speaks," but my voice was so revved up that I continued singing. My solo consisted of the word "and." Unfortunately, we cannot rewrite our history.

In 1943, I left Leamington to continue my education and did not return until 1950, except for the summers. On my return, the Sunday school superintendent was waiting for me, and so I lost another eighteen years of participation in choir singing. But all the while I missed it.

There used to be an attitude in the community that everyone, tone deaf or monotonic, should participate in the church choir, especially in the teen years. There is some merit to that point of view. Participating in a choir encourages group solidarity, provides insightful thoughts by the words that are on the page, and presents a wholesome setting for all. On the other hand, anyone knows whether he/she is really contributing or not, and I submit that non-contributors feel frustrated and hypocritical by just adding to the numbers in the choir.

The most difficult assignment in the church is the choir director's, more difficult in fact than the pulpit's because he/she has to be disciplinarian, psychologist, organizer, thespian, diplomat, mediator, motivator, photogenicist, punctualist, role model, etc. A lesser or greater knowledge of music is also helpful. I was fortunate in that all my directors could lay claim to all of these attributes. Because of them I was made aware of music I did not know existed. I am also still enjoying some of the memorable remarks of my directors:

"You sound like folks trudging through a muddy field. Keep it light!"

"You can't sing with your chin on your chest."

"If you don't know what you're singing, mouth the words and save the choir from being embarrassed."

"Singing softly is most difficult for Mennonites."

Despite the trend to choruses flashed onto a church wall or screen by means of overhead projector (and choruses have their place, mind you), I believe the choir will always be part of the church service. In fact, I noticed recently in *Canadian Mennonite* that a Niagara church is reviving the traditional church choir besides other musical groups. There are just too many profound and meaningful memories associated with it to let it drift into oblivion.

An Old Church Choir Picture (1940)

With voices closed
Piano unattended
No sight of hymnaries
Faces in shadows
Like prisoners condemned
Awaiting sentence
As if heaven and earth had passed away
And also the word

Yet music was there
In hopeful to-morrows
Garnered memories
Accepted fates
Harmonious ties

And even though no sound was there
In every vein the music stirred
For it resided in the soul

My Grandmother

(Agatha Loewen Dick, 1856-1935)

In 1924, my dad and mother, my two sisters, and my grandmother arrived in Canada from Russia and lived first very briefly in Waterloo, then Manitoba, and finally settled in various parts of Essex County. Grandmother was part of our family, for in Russia, Mennonite tradition dictated that an elderly, single parent live with the youngest child. In this instance, the youngest was my mother.

My first memories of Grandmother go back to a small Ruthven farm. Our family, including Grandmother, had now grown to eight, and we lived in a four-room house with a small lean-to. Two members had their own bedroom – my older brother slept in the kitchen and my grandmother in the living room.

My grandmother was a strong woman, both physically and emotionally. My mother told of instances in Schönfeld (Ukraine), wherein my grandmother was the one, not my grandfather, to get down from the buggy and push it out of a rut in the road. She lost her mate in 1922, two years before she emigrated, but I never heard her wax sentimental about her loss.

I knew her mostly as a warm, caring woman. For instance, my mother was deeply afraid of fires (She had witnessed a number of conflagrations in Schönfeld) and so she would turn off the gas heater before going to bed. As a result, the house felt like the inside of an igloo the next morning. It was then that Grandmother welcomed me into her bed, where I stayed until the heater was on again and the house fit for human beings. She also had a huge, cozy lap, where I took refuge when I was hunted down for deserved punishment. Here I felt secure while she pleaded my case before my mother: “Give him one more chance, he is not completely hopeless. Maybe he’ll grow out of his waywardness.” Her record for gaining acquittals was almost perfect.

Nonetheless, she was not a saint, far from it. In fact, I have heard various cousins refer to her as mean spirited. Nothing could be further from the truth. Admittedly, she loved to tease, a trait she passed on to some of her descendants. She loved to use her cane for purposes a cane was not intended, and she loved to win at checkers and made certain that her victories annoyed the grandchildren.

However, I believe now that her annoying behavior at times was her method of coping with adversity, and in that way she was not unique. We all have our own ways of dealing with despair and disappointment. We must remember that about two years before her coming to Canada, she had lost her spouse and her eldest son, the latter through a bomb blast. In her village of Schönfeld, she had been the wife of the leading minister, an estate owner, and had at her elbows servants awaiting her wishes. Here in Canada, everything was different. She was now penniless, her social status had been reduced, and there was no hope of life ever getting better in her time that remained here on earth.

Her favourite spot in the house was on her chair next to the stove, the one place that offered some solace from the pain of her arthritis. Aspirins were available in the market but not in our house. There was always something more urgent on my parents' list of necessities. That we were not able to supply my grandmother with basic medication for alleviating pain saddens me to this day.

Grandmother was a student of the Bible, a fundamentalist if ever there was one. From her I learned about the last judgement and the awful torment of hell-fire. While she preached to me, I cowered under the kitchen couch, hoping again that somehow Grandmother would save me from whatever disasters might befall.

Grandmother died in our house on a cold night in winter. During the last weeks of her life my uncles and aunts had kept vigil by her side. Early one morning Uncle Abe came to my bed and announced her passing. I remember feeling nothing but disbelief, for she had taught me that Christians live forever, that whosoever believed in God would not die but live unendingly. And now this incredibly disappointing news! Another battle with religious doubt!

I was not allowed to see her body, my parents believing that the emotional shock would be too great, but I was familiar with the rhythm of life and death on the farm, and so the concern really had no basis. At any rate, my day in school was wasted, and to add to my injury, I was chided for daydreaming.

Grandmother lies buried in the cemetery at the north-west corner of highway #3 and the Albuna townline.

She left behind her purse containing fifty cents, which Mother put in the offering plate on Thanksgiving Sunday. She also left a dossier of good memories.

Memories

Oft in the quiet night
When slumber's chain unbinds me
Warm memories spring to light
Of times both sad and cheery

A Very Important Person

One of the perquisites of children in a pastor's family is meeting the many important individuals that come and go in and out of a pastor's house.

When I was growing up, our family of seven lived in a four-room farmhouse near the hamlet of Ruthven. Our house had no running water, no inside plumbing, and no electricity. Our dishwasher had to be carried out because the outlet pipe on the kitchen sink had nowhere to go. And yet the studio couch in our living room was always available for itinerant church leaders. The one I remember most was *Ältester* David Toews of Saskatchewan.

Ältester Toews was known in our home as the most important Mennonite of the 20th century. He was the one who had somehow overcome the slings and arrows that threatened to keep my parents and two sisters in Russia. He had signed the contract with the CPR, enabling the Mennonite immigrants to come to Canada. When news came that he would be staying at our home, we instinctively knew that a king of sorts was on his way.

Ältester Toews was specifically coming to our community to address the *Reiseschuld* problem, that transportation debt that was owed to the CPR for having financed the transportation of Mennonites to Canada in the 1920's. The problem was not only the lack of cash, but more importantly, the lack of willingness on the part of some to pay up. I can only surmise the reasons for the latter. Perhaps some immigrants felt that now that they were in Canada, the chances of deportation were minimal. Others may have felt that with all the CPR's financial resources, there was no need to give the company even more. Historians I'm sure know the exact reasons, and the issue is not important here.

When *Ältester* Toews got out of Dad's car and came into our house, I was disappointed in his lack of magnificence. His hair was thinning, his lower eyelids were beginning to droop, and lines were showing on his face. Also unkingly was his lack of condescension; for a man of his eminence to enter our humble dwelling was praiseworthy, I thought. He conducted himself as if he had expected nothing better in his accommodations; indeed, he said that he had experienced worse. That made Mom feel better.

For supper that day, we had an extra person at an already crowded table, and so I sat at one corner, but this place worked to my advantage, for it improved my view of our guest. For supper, Mom had prepared her best fried potatoes and cooked eggs, and I was eager to see how *Ältester* Toews would manage the latter. I had always been instructed to show some restraint in thumping the egg on the table to break the shell. Now I was to see how an important person would go about it. In fact, he went about it the same way I did. Only his thumping, I felt, was a bit excessive. Once I had the shell broken, I peeled it off a little at a time and ate the egg much like an apple is eaten. *Ältester* Toews, on the other hand, peeled the entire egg and cut it into slices much like Mom sliced cheese. I don't remember what we had for dessert, but I'm sure we had some. Probably *Stollen*, for they were Mom's favourite and ours too.

Later that evening we went to church, where *Ältester* Toews delivered the message for which he had come. His tone was gentle, but he left no doubt about his stance on the transportation debt. He pointed out its moral dimension, that it was a holy obligation because Mennonite honour and virtue were at risk. Moreover, in the interests of togetherness and solidarity, all Mennonite immigrants should feel an obligation to resolve the problem. (Very likely, although I don't know, those that should have heard the message were absent. I make this judgement because it took another decade before the collective debt was finally retired, but to reach that goal some paid more than their share just to put an end to the controversy.) In his presentations, *Ältester* Toews always found room for the poem *Es reut mich nicht*. It also became my dad's favourite.

When we came home later, but before we went into the house, Dad again pointed out the whereabouts of the outhouse, and then we entered our house. The grownups enjoyed some tea while I went to bed. My brother, who slept in the kitchen, had to wait awhile before he retired.

The next morning found *Ältester* Toews and me engaged in conversation.

"What is your name?"

"Jacob."

"What grade are you in?"

"Four."

"What do you like most about school?"

"Reading." (No one had ever asked me that question before. It was so totally thoughtful.)

"Some day I want you to come to our school in Rosthern." (The name meant nothing to me and sounded like a very faraway place.)

After breakfast, Dad and *Ältester* Toews left for further duties.

When I think of the event now, I have a number of questions, including whether his wife and children approved of his long absences from home. Were they even consulted? My guess is that Mrs. Toews accepted her role submissively, in quiet self-sacrifice and endurance, as was expected of a minister's wife. That is the way my mother accepted her role.

Oh, by the way, I never attended Rosthern Academy, but I did attend school with *Ältester* Toews' grandson. He is an excellent musician and thespian, who lives in California, not Saskatchewan.

A Letter to Jacob Johann Thiessen

Lieber Ältester Thiessen

You're called

Aristocrat

Manipulator

Vaccinator

Politician

Facilitator

Mediator

Compromiser

Dreamer

Egotist

All I know

You shook my hand

When I was a child

And called me by my name

Is there a word

for that

First Dick Family Reunion

Grandparents, Agatha and Jacob Dick, had eight children, all of whom except Jacob immigrated to Canada with their families in 1924. Jacob was killed by an exploding bomb in 1920 and Grandfather died a natural death in 1922. Both lie buried in the Neukirch cemetery in Ukraine. Grandmother and Jacob's widow and children accompanied the relatives to Canada.

In 1935, Grandmother died in our house in Ruthven, and the following year the Dick clan decided to have their first family reunion. Except for the Ennses, all lived in the Leamington-Kingsville area; so logistics was not a factor in the planning. Since Agatha (Dick) Wiens was the oldest of the children, the Wienses were put in charge of the first reunion. They lived on a farm on concession 4, just east of highway 77. The old brick house has long been demolished and the lone and level sand leaves no trace of the great 1936 celebration. All came to the event as menial labourers and/or share-croppers, their horny hands visible evidence of their hard days of toil. The clan statistician, Sarah Wiens, reported that all were present, denoting a group of 74 people, including 17 great grandchildren.

As a gesture of respect and devotion, all of my grandparents' children named one of the male offspring after my grandfather, and so when it came to one of the main events of the gathering, mainly picture-taking, a snapshot of all the Jakes was a unanimous choice. Fortunately, my cousin Jake Enns, Waterloo, had brought his new "accordion" camera and was willing to snap virtually anyone/anything. When I look at the pictures of all the Jakes now, I cannot escape several observations. First, even though reunions are generally rather casual events, all of the senior Jakes wear suits, ties, and white shirts; the junior ones, wear shirts and "good" pants. The conclusion is obvious - there were no "in-between" clothes, either you wore Sunday's finest or weekdays' worst. Second, there is a 34-year age gap between the youngest and oldest. Any stranger to the clan would never believe that the eight people in the picture are all first cousins. Thirdly, the cheerless and grim expressions are telling. There are several explanations: the Mennonite tradition of not showing the teeth when a picture is taken, or the resignation to the harsh facts of daily living here in Canada. Sadly, only two of the Jakes are living today.

Then a picture of all the Agathas followed, Agatha being the name of my grandmother. This group was more camera aware and thus on the photo look quite photogenic. Hair styles are quite conservative - combed straight back with a slight suggestion of curls. Four Agathas remain today.

When the picture-taking was over, all gathered in the shade where Dad delivered a homily on being grateful and the makeshift choir sang *Der Herr hat Grosses an uns getan*. Anyone familiar with the song knows that the men are particularly challenged in the chorus. They are required to take a scenic, musical route while the ladies remain on the trodden path. The confused men never found their way back home, but everyone agreed that the choir had been excellent.

In between the service and *Faspa*, there was a period of social interaction, the women moving to one end of the lawn and the men to the other. The seniors' demeanour mentioned before during the picture-taking now changed significantly, at least on the men's end of the lawn. Margaret Atwood, our renowned Canadian poet, once wrote "The Progressive Insanities of the Pioneer." She certainly was not referring to the people at the Dick reunion. These Dick pioneers suddenly regarded their condition with black and gallows humour. For example, Dad volunteered that he had built a wooden float (Nowadays farmers use steel packers) pulled by horses to break up the clods in the field. Dad said that he stood on the float to weigh it down, and any clod stubborn enough to resist crumbling as the float passed over it, was clobbered with the axe Dad had at his side. My uncle continued with the story of his horse that tried mistakenly to run over a hidden and abandoned well. It broke through the rotten cover and sank into the depths, and when rescue efforts failed had to be shot dead. There were debates over whether Plymouth Rocks were better layers than Rhode Island Reds, and which breed of cow gave the most milk. What might surprise us now is that there was no reference to politics. At least I remember none. Maybe there were more urgent issues to discuss; perhaps they were satisfied with the King government that had won the election the previous year on the promise to end the Depression; maybe they still bore emotional scars from the political upheavals in the land of their birth, and thus avoided political matters altogether now.

For *Faspa* the main course was raisin bread, each mother setting out her own distinctive loaves. The distance between raisins spoke a silent language of rank and status.

Sarah Wiens in her last report noted that, because of disinterest, the last Dick reunion took place in 1984. By then the clan had increased to 558, scattered throughout Canada and beyond. Not nearly all attended the last gathering.

The memories of the first reunion are still clearly locked in my thoughts.



Oak Street house, winter of 1938

Our New Home and the New Neighbour

I have moved eight times during my lifetime. I can't say that each time it was a step upward. At one place I had to club a rat, before we could settle in comfortably.

We were not compelled to leave the Ruthven farm, but influential church members thought that Dad should move closer to Leamington, where a new church building had been erected in 1933. These same people assisted Dad in finding a small farm on the second concessions of Mersea township, just east of Sturgeon Creek. The distance to the church would now be about a mile, but the ugly fly in the ointment was that this deal was straight cash rent per annum instead of the share-cropping we had been used to. The rent was set at \$345.00, a sum Dad had little chance of paying, and so church council decided to raise Dad's salary to \$460.00.

We moved on March 15, 1938, in a caravan of three vehicles. My parents had enlisted their nephew and his Model A flat-bed truck. Since he was already busy on his farm, he requested that he be in the lead so that he could quickly unload and continue with his own work. Dad had no grounds for disagreement, and so he drew a map on his nephew's hand and sent him with all our household furniture, including our showpiece item, a glass cabinet with two glass panels missing. (Dad, however, had nicely boarded up one side, and Mom had sewn a very attractive curtain to replace the glass in the door.) Mr. Redekop, who had helped with the loading, did not endear himself to Mom by his snide remarks about our rickety furniture.

The second vehicle in the caravan was our old Chevie containing most of our family. My entire wardrobe I held on my lap.

The third vehicle was the farm wagon with our team of horses, containing all of our farm implements. My incomparable uncle was once again seconded to drive the team. He was one uncle Dad could always rely on in time of need and needs never diminished for us. To keep my uncle company on the journey, my older brother went along.

We had just passed the Sturgeon Creek bridge, a narrow, wooden, rickety structure when I noticed my mother making the traditional Mennonite gesture of despair, a raised elbow and a slow slap of the forearm and hand. Casting my eyes ahead and to the left, I noticed that the Model A had ruttled its way over the front lawn and up against the front steps of our new home.

Our new home was a big improvement over what we had had. We were still cramped for space, however, and so the living room served as Dad's office/counselling room, a visiting room, and a bedroom for the boys. When visitors stayed late, we went to sleep in my parents' room and later sleep-walked to our new quarters.

But now we had electricity, and after a good deal of deliberation, Dad bought a used radio from a family in Windsor which was selling everything and moving to Germany. Electricity added a further strain on our budget, but soon we were old enough to contribute some money by working for others: picking beans, raspberries, etc.

Our farming also took a new turn. Dad had been used to growing Heinz tomatoes and cauliflower, corn, and tobacco, crops that did not require instant response time. Our new crops were early potatoes, early tomatoes, early cabbage, and celery. Now we were in competition with other farmers to get the crop to the market as quickly as possible and earn the premium prices. To do that required knowledge, management skills, and proper equipment, none of which Dad possessed.

Our rescuer was our neighbour, Mr. Hamm, every bit as neighbourly as Mr. Siemens had been. To-day farmers turn to the agronomist for help, if necessary; we turned to Mr. Hamm. Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) complained in his diary entry of April 1, 1667 that some people borrow everything from their neighbours. He could have been speaking of the N. N. Driedgers.

From Mr. Hamm, we borrowed the potato planter, the potato digger, and the steel needles to close the potato bags and make them ready for shipping. And he was always pleasant about our requests, at least when I was there. At one time we even used his horse a short time after our *Kunta* died.

When Dad went off to conferences, etc., Mr. Hamm was our farm advisor. From him, I learned the art "scratch" hoeing. My method had been "chop" hoeing, based on the premise that if dirt is not flying behind the hoe, the whole art of hoeing is useless. Mr. Hamm pointed out that the mature tomato plants have shallow roots and sustained injury using my method. Earlier he had explained that early tomatoes still in boxes should be watered with the hose running between the plants. "Over the top" watering would damage the tomato blossoms.

Two incidents remain firmly etched in my memory. Shortly after the death of *Kunta*, our family had decided to bury the horse ourselves, on the north-west corner of the barn. We needed an extra shovel, and so I was sent on another borrowing expedition.

"And why would you need a shovel this time of year?" asked Mr. Hamm rather casually.

"We want to bury a horse," I replied matter-of-factly.

He interpreted my reply as that of a smart aleck and promptly refused my request. He relented, however, after my full explanation.

The other incident showed Mr. Hamm's genuine concern for us. Every summer when the heat and humidity struck, Dad lost his appetite. Not even his favourite food could tempt him to eat. When Mom in informal conversation mentioned this problem to Mr. Hamm, he smiled mischievously as though he knew the remedy.

Several days later, I was sitting on the side steps when I noticed Mr. Hamm coming up the driveway. He stopped in front of me, got out of the car, opened the back door and slid out a full carton of Cincinnati Cream beer. By now, Mom was outside (Dad had gone to town) and when she read the telling four-letter label on the carton, she gasped, "But we cannot accept this!"

"This is the certain cure for a poor appetite," he grinned.

"But what will the people say?"

"Let me just carry it into the basement."

"And there it will!"

The rest of the story cannot be told here. Suffice it to say that in our family the episode became known as the case of the Cincinnati Cream.

The Hamms and the Driedgers forged a firm and lasting relationship. Each week they exchanged visits and always had something to talk about. In the war years, they followed events closely, always finding parallels in biblical prophecy. They agreed on almost everything, except for the site of the climactic battle, the battle of Armageddon.

I hold the memory of the Hamms in high esteem.

Geraniums

Flowers are the most genial
Of all creation species

Daffodils may be
Jocund company

Roses may be
Nature's phenomenon

But geraniums are most endearing

Unlike roses
Geraniums require little care
But demand full appreciation

Unlike birds
Their only toil is pleasure

It is late November
My geraniums are in summer style
A riot of blooms blowing in the wind

A profusion of buds
Proves their confidence
Of deathlessness
In the face of winter

Andy

Many years ago, when I was still living at home on the farm, I became acquainted with Andy. He was about my age, we both wore glasses, both hated school, but loved the Leamington Fair, mostly because it meant a half-day off from classes. (In my day, the fair came to Leamington in the fall and was a more agricultural event than it is today.)

Unlike me, Andy was a macho person, as far as I know the first person in the community to take the Charles Atlas course in body-building, long before pumping iron became a religion. Andy happened to love animals, while I barely tolerated them, a trait inherited from my father. His machismo and friendliness with animals made Andy a natural candidate for a peculiar habit. Whenever a calf was born, he got into the pen and lifted it up, thinking that if he lifted it every day he should be able to lift it when the calf became a full-grown cow. I tried to understand his reasoning, but was never convinced of his logic.

I thought at times of bringing up the matter in science class, but my teacher was not interested in real problems, only make-believe ones that always began with, "Suppose that" or "If". And so I thought if I brought up a real problem, I would only be ridiculed and laughed down. I once received a bonus mark from him for taking home a picture of a Percheron horse and wrapping the picture in cellophane to keep it clean. Hardly a good way to learn about horses.

When the fair came to Leamington in September, the school closed on Tuesday afternoon, and we students flocked from the high school to the fairgrounds.

Andy and I first walked around the midway, then passed the side-shows, including "The Birth of a Baby", "The Two-Headed Calf", and "The Five-Hundred Pound Lady". However, I soon noticed that Andy looked to the barns with that urgent expression on his face.

"Andy," I said, "the sandboxes in the barns are off limits; so if you have to go, we'll have to find some around here, or else you'll need to put yourself on hold 'til we get home. Now let's start having some fun."

"No, that's not it at all. I was just wondering if there might be some calves in the cattle barns."

We left the carnival grounds and went to the cattle barns, where just inside the door a farmer was grooming his calf in preparation for the judging.

"Hey, mister, would you mind if I lifted up your calf?" asked Andy. "I'll give you a nickel."

"This is not sideshow country, kiddo," the farmer said, "but for a clean-cut school kid like you, I'll let you try. She's a tame bugger anyway, but remember I take no responsibility."

By now other farmers had gathered around anticipating some spectacle and Andy obliged. He lifted the calf off the ground, held it for a few seconds like an Olympic weightlifter, then gently set it down. Farmers, usually a composed lot of people, applauded and returned to their chores. One, however, remarked, "What kinda larin do kids do in school anyhow? Seems a waste of our taxes." Andy's nickel, by the way, was not called into play.

When the fair was over, there was nothing left but the monotony of school, but not continuous monotony. Fortunately, Canada was at war and our principal was superpatriotic, allowing classes to be cancelled in favour of route marches and performing physical exercises used by military trainees. The physical activity fit right into Andy's regimen.

One Saturday I went to his place and was not surprised to see him engaged in his favourite pastime - lifting a calf. The calf, though, was giving him trouble this time. He wrapped his arm around the calf's hind legs but found his left arm too short to wrap around the front legs. Reversing the process worked no better. Then he tried to wrap his arms around the middle of the calf's belly, but then both ends of the calf had to be balanced, not an easy task. Besides, the calf was not enjoying all the attention and wouldn't co-operate. When he tried again, he got three legs off the ground, but then the calf swished its tail and knocked off Andy's glasses. He put down the calf, which promptly took off, leaving him bleary-eyed but still in delirious fury, determined to lift whatever he touched. (He could have dislodged the pillars of the temple had they been nearby). This time though, it was not the calf but the mother cow, "Andy," I cried, "stop it! You're trying to lift a full-grown cow," but Andy was so intensely agitated that he ignored my cries, and I was in no mood to climb into the pen and pull him away. After several more desperate attempts Andy collapsed in the straw, and I ran for help.

When I went to Hopewell Hospital on Russell Street, kitty-corner from Reid's Funeral Home, I met his mother in the hall, who said that Dr. Frunze had diagnosed a severely overburdened heart. "Andy is very ill," she said. "Only his family is allowed to see him."

I pleaded for an exception and reluctantly she relented. I stood by his bed and slowly he opened his eyes. When he recognized me, he falteringly whispered, "Jake, I don't understand it. I lifted that sap a few days before." After a long pause, he continued, "I once read in the encyclopaedia that a grown elephant weighs six tons. I'll bet a new-born elephant doesn't weigh all that much." At this point, his mother motioned me to leave.

Later that evening she called me and said that Andy would be okay, but would need a long rest. "In the meantime," she asked, "would you mind looking after Andy's calf? It requires a young person to do that."

So I squeezed my eyes shut, pinched my nose, and said, "Of course I'll do it."

That next year I left Leamington to continue my education elsewhere, and so lost track of Andy. Years later, I heard from others that he had gone to South Africa to work at Kruger National Park, the largest elephant sanctuary in the world.

Kunta

Many people will probably have different opinions about the suitability of *Kunta* as the name for a horse. Actually, we were never asked about an opinion when the horse was named. He came to us with the *Kunta* name and we decided not to change it, just like the owners of a dog, newly adopted from the humane society kennel, usually keep the dog's original name.

I would have preferred a name like White Beauty, Prince, or Silver, but on second thought these names were inappropriate because *Kunta* was not an attractive horse. His hide may have been white in his salad days, but I don't think he ever could have passed as a white charger on whose back rode a handsome knight with both horse and rider glowing in a pale white light. *Kunta* just didn't have the pedigree to attract attention. In any case, his hide was now a dirty gray, and his drooping neck showed his best years were behind him.

I don't remember the name of the previous owner, but I know it was he who gave the horse his name. I believe the name *Kunta* is a variation of the German *konnte*, meaning "one who is able to", but I stand to be corrected on that matter. In truth, *Kunta* was able to do some things well, but in other things he was deficient and annoying.

I probably should explain how *Kunta* came to be ours in the first place. A certain Mr. Pankratz on the 9th concession was having financial difficulties, and thus put up his horse for sale. Coincidentally, Dad was looking for a horse himself since Dolly had recently died. Dad was always concerned about the welfare of the people in his congregation, whether the concern was spiritual or material, and so Dad felt a moral obligation toward Mr. Pankratz.

We drove to the Pankratz farm to look at the horse, and it soon became clear that Mr. Pankratz was a much better horse trader than Dad. Dad had many gifts, but horse trading was not one of them. We were told that the horse was young, tractable, and durable, but it was obvious that the horse had a bad case of the mange, a condition that Mr. Pankratz clearly played down. (Mange is an unsightly skin disease in hairy animals, caused by parasites. The disease makes the animal quite irritable.) The price he was asking was one hundred dollars, a sum Dad could not really afford. Dad should have paid his thanks and quietly walked away, but he didn't. Instead he paid Mr. Pankratz the money (Dad never haggled), and I rode the horse home. I was secretly hoping that Mr. Pankratz would volunteer to do it, but the offer never came.

It was not a pleasant ride because sitting on the horse's back made the itch more provoking and the horse responded accordingly, but we eventually reached home. Soon after, we discovered that it was almost impossible to put a harness on its back. When we tried to apply salve to the mangiest parts, the horse became uncontrollable. So there we were with a new horse that we were unable to use, and going back on a deal was unthinkable.

The answer to our problem was a trade, and that is how we got *Kunta*. Sadly, Dad was outplayed again because he traded a younger horse for an old horse and still had to pay five dollars to clinch the deal.

Kunta was a worthy horse. He could have been worthier except for two incorrigible faults. One was his tendency to daydream. On a two-horse cultivator, that habit was tolerable because then his partner guided him along and no one was hurt by his reveries. However, when pulling a one-horse cultivator the result was quite different. Now *Kunta* had to take responsibility. During one of his fantasies, he could be walking right on the tomato row instead of between the rows. I often wondered what he was dreaming. Perhaps he imagined himself as part of an ideal society of animals where horses could negotiate their working hours, their working conditions, and their time of retirement with a guaranteed life-long supply of feed. Sometimes, it seemed to me, he would try to wax poetical:

Ah, happy hills! ah, pleasant shade
Ah, happy fields where I have lain
Where once my careless colthood strayed
A stranger yet unknown to pain

His second fault was his refusal to be toilet trained. Maybe age was simply against him, but I think not. Other horses that we had had through the years would simply stop in the field when they had to "go", but *Kunta* would "go" only in his stall in the barn. That was his line in the sand - in the stall or not at all.

Anyone familiar with horses knows that a horse's stall has to be cleaned and bedded down with straw from time to time. In *Kunta*'s case, it was a daily procedure because the straw would be soiled right up to the manger.

A common saying reports: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." Our experience with *Kunta* was, "You can lead a horse to drink, but you can't make it water."

Kunta died in the active service of his masters. Once when I was single-cultivating the tomatoes, I gave him a rest on the headland. Suddenly he dropped his head, buckled his legs, and keeled over as if struck by an asteroid. When I went over to him, his eyes were closed, but his mouth was slightly open. I think he was smiling because he had reached his field of dreams.

The Burial of the Mare

Decades ago on road of Oak
A horse lived in a stall
It was a lovely roan mare
A workhorse for us all

One noon I walked up to the stall
To curry-comb the hide
It was a useless exercise
It seemed the mare had died

The family gathered all around
To see what should be done
They all were in a grieving mode
Consensus there was none

Then Dad suggested we should call
The Darling company
Who'd truck away the lifeless horse
And do it all for free

But Mother through with pity filled
Had something else in mind
"A faithful horse who's done its job
Deserves a fate more kind"

She should be buried on this farm
So boys get out your spade
And dig for it a pretty pit
In which she shall be laid"

And so we dug a mammoth hole
To suit our humble mare
The only problem still to solve
Was how to get her there

We tied a rope onto her tail
One end onto the car
We hoped the rope was strong enough
For we were going far

Just when the rope was getting taut
Our mare raised up her head
And in a sleepy tone of voice
These are the words she said

“I know I’m just a horse’s rump
But you have caused me flap
You know that even lowly ones
Can use a little nap”

And so we cut the rope in two
And let her rest her soul
The toughest thing was still to come
To shovel in the hole

A Bully I Knew

In November, 2000, Dawn Wesley of Abbotsford, British Columbia, killed herself because she couldn't put up any more with the bullying she received at school from a former girlfriend. The latter was eventually convicted of criminal harassment, but at the time of this writing has not been sentenced.

The report of Dawn Wesley's misery is not an isolated event, though almost never does it conclude in death by one's own hand. In my many years in education, I observed bullying and sometimes had success in stamping it out. The purpose of this essay is to focus on one bully that I encountered while I attended public school.

In the 1930's, the public school environment was fertile ground for nurturing bullies. Rural school boards were usually conservative, intent on keeping taxes down in the municipality, and when they required a teacher, they opted for the least expensive one, often one just out of normal school and not much older than the children he/she would be teaching, making intimidation by unruly children a real possibility. A person who could intimidate the teacher could also cow other children into submission. Of course, any ineffectual teacher, regardless of age and experience, could suffer the same fate.

Even a very good teacher, like I had in one school, was fully preoccupied in managing a one-teacher school, including lesson preparation, classroom management, Christmas concerts, etc. There was no time for supervision of school grounds, where all grades shared the same territory and Darwin's law was always in play: the biggest and meanest prevail.

A third factor that contributed to bully development was that Ontario educational policy required that each child legitimately pass the grade eight exams. In fact, the grade eights, unless exempt because of exemplary year's work, had to write an Ontario high school entrance exam. In these circumstances, a mentally challenged child could repeat grade eight several times, or barring that, be confined in grade eight until age alone allowed an escape from school.

Lem, a strange Anglo-Saxon name, probably an abbreviated Lemmon, was the most notorious bully I ever encountered, easily meeting all three descriptions just outlined. He lived in a machine shed converted into a house behind some barns on one of the back concessions. His clothing featured a blue, all-seasons cardigan sweater, his lips were always puckered as if to whistle or curse, and his hair was always in the just-out-of-bed style.

Every school day began with the national anthem, readings from the King James Bible, and the Lord's prayer. One particular fall day, the teacher chose to read a portion of Acts 9: "and as he journeyed, Saul came near Damascus and suddenly there shone round him a light from heaven. And as he fell to the earth, he heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' And he said, 'who art thou Lord?' and the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' "

The teacher was about to close King James when Lem uncorked a guffaw that rocked the school and temporarily stunned the teacher. On recovering, she blasted him with, "Come up here, Lem, and read what I read!" A critical mistake, for Lem couldn't read, but he shuffled forward, took King James and looked down at it and waited.

"Lem, you're making a fool of yourself." (Uncomfortable silence.)

"No more than you are." (Deathly silence and then a verbal explosion.)

"Lem, get out of here and don't come back without your father."

"I ain't got one."

"Your mother."

"She's pickin' tumaduz."

"Just get out and don't come back."

Lem dropped King James on the floor and tramped out of the room. The Lord's prayer, inappropriate at these moments, was dispensed with.

The next day he was back, somewhat subdued but not contrite.

Lem's tyranny could be directed at anyone, but immigrant children were especially targeted. An immigrant is generally slow to assimilate successfully to rules and social cues of peer interaction. Mennonite immigrants have an additional handicap. They grow up with the sense that they are a minority, always outsiders, conspicuous targets for oppressors. Of course in hostile environments the weak are always vulnerable. I avoided Lem by staying in the school at noon and recess, spending time reading and playing board games. After school I headed home across the field immediately.

A few years prior to WWII, several Italian families settled in the Leamington area, forerunners of those who would eventually have a tremendous impact on the greenhouse-farming industry. Sandico was a son of one of these families and enrolled in the school I attended. Although his English was broken, Sandico was not the typical immigrant, for he was self-assured, resolute and appeared strong beyond his years and thus a worthy challenge for Lem. And Lem knew it.

Just after I had had my lunch one day, I saw Lem rush and attack the unsurprised Sandico. They clutched, locked arms and legs around each other, fell to the floor and rolled along the cement. Since their limbs were tied, like vicious animals they used their

teeth as weapons. The struggle was brutal and thus ended quickly. Lem sustained a partially severed ear injury and repulsive-looking teeth cuts on his neck, while Sandico's cheek was raw and mutilated. Lem promptly ran upstairs and told the teacher while Sandico slunk to his parents' tenant house across the road from the school. He never returned. I felt guilty on two counts: perhaps I should have attempted to intervene and been true to my upbringing, but I had been cowardly and timid; secondly, perhaps I should have gone to the teacher and submitted my own interpretation of the fight and so might have vindicated Sandico and allowed him to continue school. As it was, I didn't do that either because I lacked moral courage. The day ended with Lem licking his wounds but continuing to reign as king of the commonwealth.

When I entered high school the next September, Lem was not there, nor should he have been for his own good and that of others. In fact, I lost track of him until I saw him years later at a Saturday farm auction sale. I had gone there for a change of pace from my teaching job. Our eyes met, but I'm sure he didn't recognize me. I knew him by the shape of his mouth. My first impulse was to go up to him and taunt, "Okay, Lem, let's lay this matter to rest forever. I'll meet you behind the barn." But when I got closer to him, I noticed how much he had shrunken through the years because of some illness I didn't know the name of, like an ailing August corn stalk you know will not make it to harvest. It occurred to me also that retaliation was not the best way to settle differences.

When his death was announced in *The Leamington Post* sometime later, it never even occurred to me to go to the funeral home. I really had no reason to go anyway.

Then late last fall when I went to Haven of Rest Cemetery to place a remembrance wreath on a friend's grave, I took some time when the ritual was over to wander about the cemetery and casually look at various grave markers. In doing so, I happened upon Lem's grave. As I studied the inscription a small voice whispered:

"Here lies a brute
Here let him lie
At last at rest
And so am I."

I have it on good authority that Sandico became a successful Detroit businessman.

Alfie

Before combines and other large farm machinery were widely in use, farmers depended on their neighbours for assistance in threshing grain and other intensive farming activities. Since our farm was small and my siblings were at home, I was able to devote considerable time helping Alfie, a neighbour some distance down the concession.

Alfie was single; so there was work to do for him both indoors and outdoors. He walked with a noticeable limp and his arms were underdeveloped, a handicap some of the neighbourhood gossip attributed to syphilis, contracted during WWI where Alfie fought in the infamous Battle of the Somme. I didn't know anything about that, and so I simply accepted him for who he was now. In retrospect, given the symptoms, it may have been the beginning of MS, but again I'm only guessing. At any rate, he could perform all farm chores but at a pace slower than average.

Although there was a canyon between our ages, we had many things in common. We both rooted for the Tigers, especially their great pitchers, Schoolboy Rowe and Tommy Bridges. In fact, when Ty Tyson called the games on the radio, we felt we knew the entire team personally. Alfie insisted he could even smell the hotdogs.

We also agreed on our musical tastes - western style. Our favourite singer was Wilf Carter, and when he sang "The Strawberry Roan", our skin tingled with excitement, wondering whether the bucking bronc would throw our hero this time.

From Alfie I learned the pleasures of smoking. "Jake," he advised, "the roll-your-owns are tastier than the tailor-mades. Draw slowly to enjoy to the fullest, and don't cough. Coughing gives you away as an amateur immediately." (I think I smoked a total of three cigarettes, and then the pleasure stopped.)

With some things I was no help at all to Alfie. When he wanted his aged dog shot, my fingers numbed at the climactic moment, and I couldn't pull the trigger. Eventually the dog died of old age, a better solution anyway. He also wanted me to write a letter for him to a girl in Manitoba, whom he had read about in the "Women seeking Men" section of "*The Family Herald*", a farm paper. When I began with "Dear Miss Unknown", he was displeased and said he would ask someone else.

Farming life continued on its course with more peaks than valleys until one haying season. I was up on the flatrack, building the load into four gigantic piles, one at a time, that looked like enormous birds' nests so that when we got back to the barn, the heavy two-pronged hay fork could be plunged into each pile, and then the horses could pull up each pile into the haymow.

When we had backed the wagon into the barn, I climbed up into the mow. In hindsight, I should have stayed on the wagon because Alfie hardly had the strength to drive the fork into the hay. Besides, the hay gave him no steady footing. As it was, Alfie stayed on the wagon.

The first dump went fine, but then somehow Alfie lost his balance, tottered, then fell forward on his knees. I thought for a moment he would stay in that position, and so I didn't clamber down to help him. But then he fell to his right, and in paralyzed horror I watched him slide headfirst down the side. Apparently his arms were too weak to cushion his fall, and so he landed with his head taking the full brunt of the fall.

He hit the concrete with a thud that still haunts me today. It was a distinctive sound, solid and direct, something like the sound of a pile driver at work or a ripe watermelon hitting the ground. Then there was a deathly silence followed by a long ghastly groan and then again deathly silence.

When I got down to him, he was lying beside one of the horse's back feet. I pulled Alfie farther away and ran for help. When the doctor finally came, he simply confirmed what I had dreaded.

Alfie's funeral was in his home, as was the custom in those days. I had a hard time persuading my parents to let me go, but in the end Dad decided to go along with me.

It was an odd funeral. The casket, situated in the living room, was open, but no one stood around it. In fact, the few people that were there, were seated in the dining room, if you could call it that.

The air was stuffy and didn't have a clean draw to it. Perhaps if the house had had the feminine touch, breathing would have been easier.

The Canadian Legion did not participate, and no one was dressed in Legion attire. From this I gathered that all the conversation about Alfie's having fought at the Somme was just ugly rumour. I suppose I should have asked him directly long before he died.

There was no singing, and no reading of the obituary. To some extent one could say that this funeral was no different from the burial of a farm animal.

However, there was a speaker, whose name I don't remember, but I clearly remember his text: "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

I had heard it once before at an evangelistic gathering, where the speaker tried to frighten the sinners into becoming saints. I wondered about its suitability for funerals. Who was being segregated and condemned? If Alfie, he could not speak on his own behalf, and I was too timid to do it for him. When I asked Dad about it, he cautiously replied, "Sometimes speakers choose a text and decide, when it is too late, that they could have chosen more wisely."

After the funeral I resolved not to become a farmer. It is a dangerous and risky business, but I did acquire the hay fork as a memento, which I still own.

Harvest

Harvest what you sow
Nature is no fool
Except this year

Mr. Stone sowed soybeans
And grew a harvest of cockleburs

Like planting boutonnières
And reaping hectares of button holes

To save face
Mr. Stone had his harvest
Custom combined

Track and Field

When I recently noticed the advertisement “Edmonton 2001: World Champions in Athletics,” I was reminded of my initiation into the world of track and field the first year I was at Leamington High School.

I graduated from public school without fame or fanfare: no ceremonies, no trip to Niagara Falls, and no diploma in my hand. Well, actually those that had been exempted from writing the province-wide high school entrance examinations received a lifeless handshake from the teacher.

Most country kids ended their formal education at the end of grade eight, one reason being that there was plenty of work to be done in country kitchens and in rural fields. Then, too, there was still the debate about whether high school was really necessary. Most importantly, there was the issue of distance, so that anyone living beyond the walking or biking limit was almost surely denied a further education. A few parents, bent on sending their children to high school, roomed and boarded them in Leamington. Country folk accepted this status quo. They didn't blame Mike Harris, but realized that for some life was not fair.

There was never any question about my not going to high school. I was a flawed link in the Mennonite chain. I didn't speak Low German, having given up the language after my grandmother's death. Further, I could not keep down potato salad, the ultimate Mennonite staple, and I showed no apparent interest in farming. My parents therefore sent me to high school in hope that perhaps I eventually might be of some good to some cause in the world.

I make this elaborate digression in an attempt to excuse the generally poor showing of country kids at the high school track and field meets. When I arrived in high school, I soon discovered “THE MEET,” as it was referred to, was the big event of the fall athletic season and everyone participated in it willy-nilly. Track and field was new to me. In my public school, the main out-of-school event had been marble games with “closest to the wall” the most popular. Nonetheless, I practised hard at home with running and leaping exercises.

For running events, I practised with an alarm in my hand to compare sprint times. For pole vaulting, I used a dead but sturdy branch from a maple tree. For high jumping, a stack of tomato hampers was the best I could improvise. Heights could be adjusted by adding to or subtracting hampers.

At school, I noticed town kids were wearing spiked shoes, athletic shorts, and wrist bands. Poles for pole vaulting and height bars were made of bamboo. Most of all, the town athletes wore the look of self-esteem and self-assurance. After all, many were the offspring of Heinz executives, town business owners, and other important adults.

The field events were held on the grounds of the old high school in that area between the school and the railway track. Pits filled with lake sand looked like new graves without the floral arrangements. The track events were conducted in the afternoon at the fairgrounds horse-racing track. The four-legged runners were temporarily stabled to make way for the two-legged ones. The grandstand was situated where the old arena once stood and the oval track was just to the east of the stands.

On the morning of the meet, I walked to school instead of biking, thinking that I needed time to psych up for the humiliation that I thought was inevitable. It didn't take long to happen. At the pole vaulting event, I felt uncomfortable with a bamboo pole in my hands. Then the take-off pit was triangular in shape and lined with metal, while mine at home was simply a hole in the ground. I was also distracted by the spectators. As a result I couldn't get my body off the ground. So far as I can remember, no country students performed well in the forenoon.

I fared no better in the afternoon track events. Some of us farm boys decided to run bare-footed and gain some advantage that way, but the spiked feet (Don't get too close to them) left us far behind. We were like dachshunds chasing greyhounds. I was very proud, though, of George Kenna from the first concession, who won all three of his races by a wide margin and thus saved part of the afternoon for the rustics. In fairness, though, the bare-footed Bruce Riley won the first heat in the one hundred yard dash.

The county meet, occurring right after the local event, was set for Essex that year, but only the achievers at the local meet could participate. That left me out, but our principal, an avid competitor himself, ruled that on the day of the county meet the school would be closed so that everyone could come out and cheer on the certain victors. Moreover, he said that he had rented two open semi-trailers from Brown's Cartage, and therefore no one would have an excuse not to go. The ride would be free.

On the morning of the meet, we boarded the semi-trailers by means of a ramp and headed for Essex. Just west of Olinda, the second driver, consumed by the competitive fever of the day, attempted to pass the first, who, of course, refused to yield. (In a race, never willingly allow another runner to run by you!) Our load pulled up even with the other, and for a while we were perfectly parallel, during which time arms of greeting reached across the abyss. Several idiots (I believe from town) hankered to crawl over the sides

and into the other trailer but then wisely changed their minds. Just before we reached the curve, the lead driver relented and let our ditsy driver pass. It was my first experience with guardian angels.

At the meet itself, the overconfidence of our team was its undoing, and the trophy went elsewhere. George Kenna, however, and Jack Neilson (from town) won all their events.

The next day at the student assembly the principal sardonically announced, "It was a near disaster. Perhaps we should have all stayed home!" Those were exactly my thoughts.

Last week-end, our grandsons were in Leamington, and one of them reported that he had placed third in the high jump in his division at the North York regional track and field competition. He got to the meet in style and did not compete bare-footed. His report put a big smile on my face.

Molly

There once was a dog named Molly
A sleek, cuddly lab, not a collie
She kicked up her heels
And got under the wheels
Realizing too late the sheer folly

Onkel Heinrich Moves to the City

When I was a youngster, it seemed to me that all my relatives with the exception of one family were living in the country. In this regard, they were following their Old World tradition of living with the land. Technically my *Onkel* Heinrich had not been a farmer in Schönfeld, but living in the village he was aware and part of the warp and woof of farm life. So far as I know, none of my relatives ever lived in such places as Kiev, Kharkov, etc.

I sensed that my parents and relatives believed that the land was a place where God dwells. Indeed, biblical images are charged with what is rural: sower and reaper, drought and flood, harvest and pestilence. The garden of Eden was a kind of large farm, where every plant pleasant to the sight flourished, and every fruit tasted ambrosial.

On the other hand, the city was a place of evil. Sodom and Gomorrah were evil cities, and Abraham did not live in them, presumably to be nearer to God in the fields and among the hills. Ironically, the New Jerusalem is a city we all aspire to, but that is a place neither of the here or now.

When I began public school in Ruthven, we used *The Ontario Reader First Book* in my beginners' class, and as I look at the index now I note that almost all of the sixty-four selections have rural over and undertones. One selection in particular left a lasting impression on me: *The Field Mouse and the Town Mouse*. The story is about a field mouse who, on a visit to a town mouse, is impressed with the amenities of town life until both mice are attacked by a cat and then a large dog. There the field mouse concludes:

Eat all you want and have your fill
of good things, but you must be in
fear of your life every day. I will
go back to the country where I have
simple food, but where at least I
can eat in peace.

My teacher, who lived on a farm in Gosfield South, left no doubt in our young minds where the advantages lay.

As a beginner in high school, I was made aware of the dangers of the city. It was a den of iniquity, a lair where worldliness prospered in such activities as dancing, movie-going, and smoking. I was instructed that on my way from school I should go straight south to Oak Street and then follow the street as it dissolved into concession two, my home road. If I walked home via Talbot Street I would have to pass the pool hall at the intersection of Talbot and Queen. Even walking by the site one could contract the pool virus.

In my opinion, *Onkel* Heinrich was quite a successful farmer on concession four. I distinctly remember the huge, lush raspberry patch on the east side of his house and his impressive flock of chickens, a much larger flock than ours back home. He drove an exotic Whippet, not a lazy Chevrolet like Dad's.

In the light of all that I have said about country and cities, one can appreciate the shock and dismay in the clan when *Onkel* Heinrich announced that he had bought a house and was moving his family into the *Stadt* of Leamington. (The German word applies to both town and city.) Clan gossip became as ugly and acrid as smog on a hot, humid day:

"He'll become as lazy as the rest of 'em up there."

"He won't be able to communicate with his neighbours because of language barriers."

"He'll have to learn to shoot pool," quipped a cousin impertinently.

Onkel surprised everyone again when on moving day he moved his cow onto his new premises and housed her in a shed behind his new house. I doubt whether he had consulted the city fathers about the by-laws governing the keeping of a cow within municipal boundaries. More likely he had rationalized that Lakeside Dairy kept horses for milk deliveries, and Vic of Vic's Buy-rite Store kept a horse in his garage for peddling his sweets on every street. Why then shouldn't cows qualify? No need even to ask! As it turned out, though, the cow's periodic persistent mooing disturbed the neighbours, and poor Bessie was condemned to Brookers Meat Market.

Not discouraged, however, and clearly not succumbing to laziness, *Onkel* Heinrich embarked upon a more ambitious project - converting the cowshed into a small apartment for a bit of rental income. Dad, always concerned about others, sent me over to assist in the dismantling, but I was of little help because I suffer from vertigo, and I lacked the physical strength to pry off the large boards. I learned, however, a very important lesson: never throw away material that might be reusable, and so we straightened all crooked nails provided they were not too rusty. As I remember, the apartment was a very successful undertaking and many individuals were happy to receive accommodation here. *Onkel* Heinrich had proved others wrong again.

Onkel Heinrich died in his *Stadt* house at the age of ninety-two, a solid pillar of the church right to the end, and having shown not a spot or blemish that his detractors had been worried about earlier.

Today the line between urban and rural is virtually nonexistent, and it is commonplace to see farmers living in the town and driving out to their country spread for a day's work.

Both groups fraternize freely at Tim Hortons. Speakable and unspeakable wrongs I'm sure are committed in both venues as was most likely always the case. I have even heard of luxurious poolrooms in some country homes. So far no one has stepped forward to admit as much.

Would She Uphold Her Kind

In under time in Dnieperland
A maid of noble mind
Set out to prove her pedigree
Would she uphold her kind

The challenge was to make a treat
Not difficult to find
It was the lovely *tweeback* bun
Would she uphold her kind

The time was set; the dough had ris'n
The maid was in a bind
For if she failed to squeeze it right
She would disgrace her kind

She touched the dough and took a *japs*
Her fingers all aligned
She strained and pinched; the dough was stuck
She had disgraced her kind

With gnashing teeth and venting spleen
Her anguish made her blind
When unannounced the dough popped forth
She had upheld her kind

They're Never Over

The nineteen thirties are over
but I still taste *grübenschmalz* sandwiches
still feel chapped hands
still darkly see coal-oil light
still smell self-flushing john
still touch my naked innocence
and imagine an abode
with walls four thousand metres thick

Hab Acht kleine Hände was ihr tut
Karten spielen ist Sünde
The bar's higher for p.k.'s
I don't want to be one
Hab Acht kleiner Mund was du sprichst
Fluchen in Low German is o.k.

Nowadays
I see a card deck
and imagine eternal conflagration
I smell the mushroom farm
and taste a scorching cadaver
I hear heightened language
and sense a poem being born



*N. N. Driedger family in front of their Ruthven house, summer of 1932
L to R: Kaethe, Mom, Ernie, Dad, Jake, Aggie, Henry*





John Board
1. Tom - 137
2. Bill - 50-2
3. Bill - 30-9
4. Bill
5. Ed - 14-4
6. Ed - 21-6

John Board
1. Bob - 53-5
2. Bob - 65-5
3. Margaret - 10
4. Bob - 67
5. Bob - 31-3
6. Bob - 24-5
7. Bob - 36-5
8. Bob - 54
9. Bob - 31
10. George

John Board
1. Bob - 22-8
2. Bob - 30-2
3. Bob - 27-3
4. Billy - 44-1
5. Mike - 50-3
6. Bob - 51-0

John Board
1. Bob - 22-8
2. Bob - 30-2
3. Bob - 27-3
4. Billy - 44-1
5. Mike - 50-3
6. Bob - 51-0
7. Bob - 46-7
8. Bob - 41-8

