GUS ROMANIUK

TAKING ROOT IN CANADA

L. Romaniuk
107 Irwin Drive
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3K 0R2
phone (204) 889-3119

TAKING ROOT IN CANADA

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By

GUS ROMANIUK

Illustrations by GORDON DALE,
(Minneapolis, U.S.A.)

The Author, Today.

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CONTENTS

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY

OF THE

COURAGEOUS PIONEER SETTLERS

OF

LEDWYN, RIVERTON AND OTHER

DISTRICTS OF NORTHERN MANITOBA

Emily and Gus attending Hotel Association's Convention at Winnipeg in 1953.

PREFACE

I have known Gus Romaniuk, whose autobiography this is, for a number of years. Known him as a neighbor, a barber, a storekeeper, a fur trader, a hotel man. I have watched him at work and at play, fishing, hunting, bowling, curling, dancing. I have welcomed his logic, his reasoning and his intelligence in the common sense solutions he has often presented to problems which beset our town council.

His has been a full life, and a satisfying one. His achievements have been many. But I never anticipated that he would come to me one day, hold out a voluminous manuscript and say: "Mr. Sigurdson, would you like to take a look at the story of my life?"

Where, I wondered, had this man found the time and the energy for such an undertaking? Where had he found words to express the full and adventurous life that was his? Was there no end to the goals he would set for himself?

I read his story. The story of his life and of life at Riverton and at Ledwyn in the difficult, formative years from 1912 to 1954. I relived with him several of the memorable incidents which I had shared; and I relived in his graphic recounting, nearly a half century of human struggle in the history of our province.

May his life and his achievements be an inspiration to others, as they have inspired so many of us, close to him here at Riverton.

S. V. SIGURDSON, *Mayor,*
Riverton, Manitoba, Canada.

FOREWORD

This is the story of a man and a country. A story of the pioneering of a new land, of the hardship, the miserable poverty, the sacrifice, the tragedy and the indomitable courage that lifted men above misfortune to hack and carve and grub from an unrelenting wilderness the precious heritage of freedom and unlimited opportunity.

It is a true tale, penned by a Ukrainian immigrant of negligible formal education and only limited command of the language of his adopted country. But as he wrote it, in the words of his native land, it is a beautiful, heart-warming, inspiring story; a lesson from life, in the life of one who had no other teacher.

Gus Romaniuk, a sickly child, a strong young man, a courageous adult was successively and successfully logger, harvest hand, driller, fireman, fisherman, barber, merchant, cattleman, fur trader, innkeeper and councilman.

Woven inextricably in his life story is the history of northern Manitoba and the record of human progress that opened a frozen, forbidding land to the sun.

This is his life. It is a gratifying experience to live it with him in the pages of this book.

BOB BUSHNELL, Editor,
Sports and Recreation Magazine,
Minneapolis, U.S.A.

CHAPTER I

A Strange New Land

The mystery, adventure and romance of a strange new land loomed before us as our ship pulled into the wharf at Halifax in March, 1912.

This was Canada!

Baggage in hand, our little family and hundreds like us waited nervously on the deck looking down at a crowded dock; crowded with people also waiting, waiting to meet friends or relatives, or waiting just to stare curiously at a new batch of immigrants.

We were immigrants.

And we became more nervous and uncomfortable when people began to point at us and laugh! I suppose we did look bizarre in our Old Country clothes; men and women in long, clumsy sheepskin coats — the men in white, homespun trousers — the women with kerchiefs pulled tightly around their heads.

But the staring wasn't all one-sided. We, too, were amused by the sight of people with bright metal gleaming in their teeth, flashing in the sunlight as their jaws worked in a constant chewing motion. And we laughed in turn when one of our group, a big, burly, gesticulating man, pointed and boomed:

"Look at that! Look at that man! Why, he's chewing

his cud! There's another . . . and another. Oh, a woman, too! Just like a bunch of sheep!"

Then, in mock supplication, he intoned loudly: "O, Lord. Protect us! Lest we, too, become 'cud-chewers' in this strange land!"

Even the "tobacco-chewing" Canadians laughed good naturedly at this. The tension of the moment was relieved, and it was with almost boisterous good humor that we walked down the gangplank.

No one was there to greet us. We were to see father for the first time in over a year, further west at a place called Winnipeg. We were hurried through a medical examination and questioning at the immigration office, then directed to our train.

We were not alone. So many others were rushing eagerly to board it that there was near panic on the station platform. Mothers struggled to herd their children aboard. I heard frantic cries: "Hey, Johnny! Mary! Hold fast to my skirt! Now, don't you dare let go!" My mother tenaciously enfolded us, pushing Volodymyr (Walter) 4, Ivan (John) 8, and me (I was 11) ahead of her. Big sister, Helen (she was 13), clung close to her skirts.

At last we were safely aboard and the train got underway. What a difference there was between this comfortable Canadian coach, and the overcrowded, stuffy little railway car that had taken us from our tiny village of Myshkiv in the western Ukraine to the German border, on the first leg of our long journey. That one had been

dark and gloomy, and the bench along its four walls seated only half the passengers. The rest sat, or fidgeted, uncomfortably atop their belongings (huge bags of anything and everything from bed sheets to kitchen utensils). The second train to the port of Antwerp in Belgium where we boarded our ship had been little better.

But this was wonderful! How marvelous it will be to live in Canada, I thought. But in mother's eyes were tears as we rode across the Canadian countryside, through a wilderness of seemingly never ending lakes, rocks and fire-blackened trees. Several days later we arrived in Winnipeg, where we were put up for the night in a large immigration home near the C.P.R. station.

Father came for us the next morning. It was a tearful reunion. But the tears were of happiness at being with him again. And between the tears we stumbled through moments of awkward silence as we groped for words to express our joy. Then father opened a big paper bag of goodies for us; candies and all kinds of fancy cakes and cookies. We eagerly munched the sweets, while mother and father rushed to make up for lost time; in a torrent of words that leaped to spell out, for him, everything that happened since he first left home for Canada; and, for her, all there was of the future in our new home in a new land. Father bubbled with energy and enthusiasm. But we were worn out after almost a month of sea and land travel. To us, tomorrow and the future seemed hardly worth reaching for.

At five o'clock that afternoon we boarded another train that took us straight north about eighty miles, to the town of Arborg. Here father found lodgings for the night. We were still thirteen miles from our new home; thousands of miles from the old.

The next morning greeted us in a manner that may have been prophetic of the stormy, harrowing, often tragic adventures that lay ahead. A blizzard raged outside! In this blinding storm we were bundled into the hay of a large, horse-drawn sleigh. Mr. Stadnyk of Arborg was to drive us to our homestead farm, in the marshy wilderness a few miles north of a primitive little pioneer settlement later called Ledwyn.

It was not the kind of merry sleigh ride pictured on Christmas cards. The cold north wind drove into our faces, stinging our cheeks to redness with hundreds of tiny needles of icy snow. It had been a beautiful, mild, thawing February when we left the Ukraine. We were unprepared, both physically and mentally, for a Canadian winter.

The sleigh moved swiftly, yet hesitatingly, down the narrow snow covered road, between walls of sky high trees through which sifted only an occasional glimpse of the blue above. At times the sleigh skidded off the hard center track, almost throwing us out when it met the loose snow on either side. The thirteen miles seemed like forty. Then father cried:

"Here we are. Home at last!"

I stared in disbelief. This was home? But what an odd looking house. So small! And it seemed to be made from logs of wood and hay and moss! The houses in Myshkiv had been neat, whitewashed buildings roofed with tiles, or strips of sheet iron or thatched with straw. This was a strange sort of house.

Mother burst out weeping when we entered the door. We children joined her. Inside, it was like outside; bare log moss-chinked walls, a ceiling of hay, and the floor? There was no floor. We were standing on bare, packed earth!

I remembered how long we had waited for this. How happy and thrilled we had been when father sent our passage money. How we hated to leave our comfortable home, our friends in Myshkiv. How eagerly we had looked forward to the glorious life in the new land of freedom and opportunity. Then, horrified and numb with grief I turned to father and blurted:

"Father, I want to go back. I want to go home. I will stay there with grandma . . . "

As I look back, what a shock it must have been to him; after working and planning and dreaming and waiting so long to bring his family here. He stood bewildered, dejected, unbelieving. But he quietly replied:

"All right, Augustine. I will send you back home to the Old Country in the summer."

I stopped crying. The others stopped, too. It was as

though his words were a reprieve, releasing us all to return to the Ukraine.

Mother looked around. She removed her coat, rolled up her sleeves and started setting things in order, as if she had never known another home. She pushed one of the homemade stools this way, another that. She dusted a bench, then rummaged around the iron stove and prepared supper. In a jiffy, she warmed some of the food we brought from Winnipeg. Helen set the table, and we had our first meal in our new home. After supper, mother prepared a place for us to sleep. She and father had the smaller of the two rooms for their bedroom.

The night passed. The next morning we awakened to find the snow over knee-deep outside. What kind of country was this? It had been thawing when we left Myshkiv. Farmers were ploughing their land when we passed through Germany. While we waited for our ship in Antwerp, it had been almost like summer. Father seemed to sense the doubt and misgivings we felt. But he said nothing. Taking his shotgun from its nail, he loaded it and went out. We heard the gun bark several times back in the woods. Then the door opened. Father returned—carrying a couple of wild rabbits and chickens!

He looked proud and happy. But worry creased mother's brow, and she asked in a hushed tone:

"What have you done? What will the local squire say when he learns of this poaching?"

Father grinned and looked relieved to explain: "Now,

dear, there are no big landlords or squires here. Canada is a free country. Here, we may do what we like. We may own as much land or other property as we like, so long as we behave well and obey the laws of the Canadian government. We may also help choose the men who make the laws. We may vote for the candidate whom we choose to represent us.

"Canada is a very big country. It has enough land, and food for millions of people. The government does not mind if we kill wildlife for food. We may also kill fur-bearing animals for the skins; and we may sell these at a good price.

"There is nothing to fear from squires or big landowners; for we are landowners ourselves. We have 160 acres of Canadian land to use and develop as we choose."

Father never made claim to being a diplomat or a politician, but his timing for this lesson could not have been more appropriate; particularly as it coincided with fresh meat for our table. It was effective, too. Mother, Helen and I looked more favorably on our present state. Johnny and Walter were obviously content, as they stroked the soft white rabbit fur. (They probably would have been happier had the rabbits been alive.)

White rabbits were new to us, and father gladly explained how nature protects Canadian rabbits by changing their grey coats to white to blend with the snow in winter.

Winter ended. The snow disappeared about the

middle of May. But we were left on a little island surrounded by spring waters that flooded the marshland around us.

Tears glistened in mother's eyes as she asked father: "Where are we to grow our vegetables? Where are we to grow our wheat? Our land is under water!"

And father patiently explained: "Now, don't worry. A little more sunshine and a warm south wind and the water will evaporate. Then I will clear the trees and bushes from a piece of land, spade it well and plant our garden. The trees we cut can be sawed into cordwood. We can sell it to buy what we need. We'll keep a few cows, too, since we have plenty of meadowland and hay grass. They will give us milk, cheese and butter. It will be a good life. You'll see."

We children, even mother, lacked his indomitable faith in the future and in the new country. But he continually stressed the great opportunities of Canada. His faith was a source of inspiration to each of us. It was our only hope in those bleak days.

"Canada has given us land," he would repeat. "We need have only strong hands and the will to work. Mine are both strong and willing. So, we need not worry. In time, there will be plenty of everything: tilled land, food, and money.

"Yes, we were comfortable in Myshkiv," he would concede. "But we could go no further. The children could never rise above the lot of a peasant. Where could

they learn? Where could they acquire their own land? Where was land or opportunity for any but the wealthy class? Where was there hope for freedom?

"It is for Augustine and Helen and John and Walter that we have come to Canada. That is why so many of our countrymen have come to this new land."

It seemed at times, that father's hopes would bear fruit. The water disappeared. He and mother cleared a piece of land and it was spaded and planted with vegetables. This we could understand. In our minds, we could almost hold the fruits of this first garden in our hands. We took heart, and our hearts beat faster with joy.

Our farm life became more pleasant, too, when we became acquainted with the Abramskys, our nearest neighbors. Their home was just a few hundred paces from ours, on the opposite side of the road. Frequently, Mr. Abramsky visited us in the evenings. On Sundays, he and his wife would drop in, or my parents would visit them. My sister and brothers also played with the Abramsky children.

As for me, I was bed-ridden; had been for two months.

CHAPTER II

Tragedy and a Little Red Hat

I became seriously ill the third week in our Canadian home. A cold that developed from the sleigh trip from Arborg became worse. I grew weaker; too weak to get out of bed. I coughed incessantly. I lost weight. My right leg grew limp as if paralyzed.

I thought back to some of the childish devilment we had enjoyed on shipboard during our three-week crossing; of the time I jumped from the first to the second deck and landed awkwardly, not on my toes but on my heels! I wondered if this had contributed to my present state.

After a few months of lying in bed I grew thin and emaciated; just skin and bones. My digestive system refused to function. I could eat but little. It seemed there was not much life left in me. I should have been hospitalized, or had medical treatment at home. But we were poor pioneer settlers, knowing little of the availability of such treatment in Canada. We didn't know of a doctor or a hospital. Besides, up to the middle of May, we were isolated from Arborg and Icelandic River (later renamed Riverton) by miles of almost impassable marshland.

Then, on a bright day in early June, I got an uncontrollable desire for chicken meat, — but domestic

chicken, mind you. I couldn't stand the thought of wild chicken. The fact that there were no domestic chickens in the entire neighborhood complicated matters. As a substitute, father shot a sparrow. Mother cooked the little bird and also made some sparrow soup, which she placed by my bedside.

Unselfishly, I insisted that the bird be divided into four equal portions; one for each of us children. It made something like a small tidbit of meat apiece. But it was more than enough for my weak stomach. I sipped the soup, too, but could not finish it. And my child's mind imagined that my stomach had grown together during the long illness.

My main meal for the next few days was boiled sparrow and sparrow soup. Then father started shooting blackbirds. These were larger and meatier. The soup, too, was more nourishing. And on this strange diet, I gained some strength, although I was still invalided in bed.

The June days were bright and warm in contrast to the cold, uninviting snow we had known unfamiliarly for so long. I longed to play outdoors with the other children. I grew restless from my long confinement. Sometimes I found myself listening intently for the familiar song of a nightingale or a cuckoo, the birds that made music for us back in the Ukraine. But to my ears, instead, floated a sad, yet gentle and pleasant bird whistle that seemed to repeat: "Poor Immigrant, Immigrant,

Immigrant"—over and over. And I thought: even the birds pity me!

I learned later that the bird was a Canadian white-throated sparrow whose song has been interpreted by a poet as: "Poor Humanity—manity—manity." And there was a loud, cheerful, though persistent singing of a strange bird that seemed to command: "Doris, my Doris, come here, come here." This was the song, I learned, of robin redbreast.

I would lie there, close my eyes and picture the pretty, white-petalled anemones of the flatland atop Obich (O-beech), the "two-sided" mountain that overlooked our Myshkiv valley back home. What fun we boys (Petro Bodnar, myself and others) had playing in the warm spring sunlight on the mountain top. What adventure there had been in the large mountain caves and underground passages, where villagers long ago had sought refuge from the raiding Tartars from the east. And I remembered the sad call of the cuckoo-bird, the song of the nightingale heard so often on the mountain, and the lilting melody of a shepherd's flute, wafting upwards from the mountain slope where Andrey Wowk tended his sheep.

But these were memories, now interrupted by a tiny unfamiliar, never-ending yet always annoying buzz: "n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n"—soft, yet piercing when amplified by a thousand such voices. These were mosquitoes! Armies of them; and always with adequate reinforcements.

Father made smudges of old grass, leaves, tree stumps to discourage their visits. Yet hundreds of them stole into our home each night, stinging us at will; welting our exposed hands and faces with hundreds of smarting, itching bites.

Each spring day, also, we heard the incessant clamorous chorus of frogs in the marshlands. In the Old Country, an occasional frog could be heard by the river where my father and mother's brothers had their flour mill. But here, millions of frogs created a din that was new to our ears.

One day father returned from Riverton, leading a cow! To us it was like seeing a dear friend after a long separation. Father had bought the cow from Finni Sigurdson. It was nice to have milk to drink again. It made us feel prosperous. But it wasn't long before we ran short of other food supplies. There was no choice but for father and mother to hike to Riverton to buy food. One person could not carry enough.

As they left, mother reassured us: "Now, don't worry children. We shall likely be back before dark. If not, we will be home tomorrow, for sure. Be good, and don't be afraid."

After awhile, Helen, Johnny and Walter went outside to set a smudge against the mosquitoes. It was then tragedy struck. A sudden strong gust of wind blew sparks from the smudge, igniting the dry thatch roof of our home. In minutes, the place was ablaze—and screaming

in terror, Helen, John and Walter fled from the licking, devouring flames.

They fled, but I could not leave my bed! In the horror of the moment, they had forgotten me.

As I look back, I feel certain a Divine Providence was with me that day. I had been too weak to move. Yet, terrified at the sight of flames leaping across the ceiling above, I somehow wrested the pillow from beneath my head and pushed it onto the floor. Then rocking painfully back and forth—forth and back, I rolled to the edge of the bed.

This feat alone seemed to take all of ten minutes, and it left me near exhaustion. Yet somewhere, somehow, I found strength to roll once more, to the pillow on the floor. It seemed there could not be an ounce of strength left in me. But deep down inside the desire to live survived. Slowly, painfully, I rocked, struggled and rolled toward the open door. Crackling flames licked hungrily at the log walls, eating their relentless way through. I had to roll completely over only three times to reach the threshold. Yet it seemed that the effort took all of fifteen minutes. The fact remains that I, a helpless invalid, found the strength to accomplish this feat. I reached the door. Then blackness descended!

When I regained consciousness I was lying on my pillow on the ground outside staring up at the blue sky, only vaguely aware that the still smoldering heap of

ashes some yards away was all that remained of our home and all our possessions.

Then I learned that a frightened Helen had remembered me, rushed to the doorway and dragged me across the threshold to safety—just a few seconds before the blazing roof caved in! So close I was to death!

Mr. Abramsky had hurried to our rescue. But there was nothing he, nor anyone else, could do. When he arrived the blaze was a raging inferno. None of our belongings could be saved. The clothes on our backs—and my pillow—were all we had left in the world. We huddled on the ground; four youngsters sobbing pitifully —helpless and defeated.

Thus we waited. The sun lowered in the west. Dusk descended. Then, at a distance, father and mother came into sight.

They walked bent almost double under the weight of their loads. Father was carrying half a sack of flour and another bag of food. Mother carried the other half sack of flour. They advanced slowly, waving bush branches ahead of them, cleaving a path through angry swarms of mosquitoes. So preoccupied were they with the very task of moving their tired bodies and heavy loads, that they were almost upon us before realization of the tragedy hit them. They stood, stupefied; rooted to the spot, staring unbelieving at the dark pile of ashes—grim evidence of a home that had been.

Mother let the pack slide from her back. She dropped

to her knees. I have never heard her cry so. Her tears, too, released the flood gates we children had struggled to close. We cried, wailed, rent the still night with our lamentations. Pitiful, heart breaking, spasmodic sobs followed as our grief muted somewhat in the oppressive cloud of utter despair.

Then, shocked into awareness, mother frantically, yet fearfully shifted her eyes in our direction. She stared at each of us as though daring not to count to four. And when she realized that we were safe, she began to pray. She thanked God for saving us from harm. It was only with difficulty that she comprehended the miracle that had aided my escape.

Father again displayed the courage that helped keep us going. He was poking the grim heap of smoldering ashes with a stick, searching for something. And, at last, he found it. He dug out a frying pan! That blackened piece of cast iron acted like magic on mother. She took it, filled it with salt pork and bacon and set it on the smoking ashes. When the meat was warmed, she cut slices of bread and there, in the rubble of our shattered dreams, she served supper.

After supper, father and mother plucked handfuls of dry grass and weeds and spread it in a thick pile on the ground. Then they covered these improvised mattresses with blankets which the Abramskys had generously spared from their own limited belongings. This was our bed. It wasn't bad. The night was warm and we

slept well. All but father. He stood guard over the smudges to see that no sparks fell near our grass pallets.

Thus we slept under the stars for the next few nights, while father was building a temporary shack to house us. I imagine I slept more comfortably than the others. I still had my pillow.

We lived in the small shack through the summer. Meanwhile, father was building another house. It was finished before autumn, and we were very proud of it. It was a very nice house; larger and more comfortable than the one we lost.

Our prospects seemed much brighter that autumn of 1913. Even though I was still confined to my bed, I seemed to be recovering slowly but steadily. After father had finished and furnished our new home, he again went to Riverton where he bought a team of oxen from Finni Sigurdson. He already had food for the team for the winter. During the summer he waded through the water of the marshland, mowing with his scythe and carrying bundles of hay grass until he had a large stack piled up.

Yes, we seemed to be doing fine: a new home, a cow, a team of oxen and a large haystack. But there was a dimmer side. Our garden was destroyed by an early frost in August. We had no vegetables. The five hundred dollars we had brought from Europe was gone, too. Again it was father's cheerful, hopeful, courageously optimistic attitude that buoyed up us. He always looked at the "brighter side of the coin".

"Don't worry about losing our garden crop," he said. "Soon it will be winter. The marshland will freeze. Then I will go into the woods, cut tamarack trees and saw them into cordwood. With our oxen and sleigh I can haul the wood to town and sell it—or exchange it for the food and clothes we need.

"And, mother, in a year or two our children will be old enough to help us clear more land, mow more hay and cut more wood," said he looking fondly at us—and still more hopefully at the future.

By late autumn I was well enough to lift myself and sit up in bed. During the long illness all my hair had fallen out. It was growing in again, however, and a little soft down, like peach fuzz, covered my head.

On his next trip to Riverton father bought more than just food supplies. In his cumbersome pack he had gifts for each of us. For Johnny and me he had pretty red hats. Not very practical with winter so near, but I imagine they were the nicest things he saw in the store and he couldn't resist the temptation to buy them for us.

Johnny was so proud of his hat. He put it on and strutted around like a peacock. I was in no physical condition to strut, but I was so happy tears welled in my eyes. I thought I had never seen anything quite so beautiful as that little red hat. And I was saddened at the thought that I might soon have to part with it.

"You shouldn't have bought me such a nice hat,

daddy," I half sobbed, "because I am going to die before long . . . "

I don't know what planted such a morbid thought in my head. I had never brooded about dying. I don't think it ever occurred to me before the moment I put on that lovely hat.

My words had a startling effect on the others. Helen and mother broke into sobs. Even father's eyes grew misty. A dark cloud descended on our home. The happiness the gifts had brought was gone.

Seated there in my bed, I pressed the little hat close to my heart, overcome with sadness at the thought of leaving it behind. Then I began to think that I must live, at all costs—live for my little red hat!

The desire grew. And it speeded my recovery. From my diet of blackbird meat and soup, I gained more and more energy. Within a few weeks I was well again!

CHAPTER III

Our Lot Improves

When winter came father began his work in the woods. By the first of the year (1914) I was strong enough to help him. Our Ledwyn district was still too primitive to have a school, so I had to learn my lessons from life.

We made railroad ties that winter. Father cut down the trees. I trimmed off the branches and he hewed ties from the trunks. Three times each week he hauled loads nine miles to Riverton (Icelandic River) by ox team. We worked steadily at this task all winter. There wasn't much money in it. Still it brought enough for food and clothing and some supplies for the spring season. Whatever additional food we needed in the summer would be bought on credit at Svein Thorvaldson's general store in Riverton.

When spring came we cleared more trees and brush from the land until we had space for a large garden. The ground was thoroughly spaded and seeded with vegetables. We looked forward to a good yield.

That summer we got acquainted with more of our neighbors, and these social contacts made life in the new country more enjoyable. Ours was essentially a settlement of transplanted Ukrainians. We were "all in the same

boat" so to speak; experiencing similar difficulties at "taking root in Canada".

Sundays became visiting days in our settlement. We went to visit neighbors, or they visited us. Sometimes we visited on weekday evenings, too. There would be much talk of friends and experiences in the Old Country. We would sing familiar folk songs. But, aside from these get-togethers, we spoke and thought less frequently of the Ukraine: of our family flour mill by the River Seret, of our neat white house, of our large garden and two-acre field. To me, my boyhood days in Myshkiv already were becoming indistinguishable from dreams.

Of course, the Abramskys were our nearest neighbors. Half a mile south were the families of Holyk, Storoshchuk, Dziadykewych, Radkowsky, Boundy, Brigg, Palkewych, Ratynsky, Mospanchuk and—a little further away —the Stefan Lahodowskys.

On a farm three miles south lived Dmytro Zinkowsky. His home was the cultural center of our district. He was an educated man, had attended public school at Sarto and could speak and write English. The Ledwyn district post office was in his home. He was our postmaster.

Most of our settlers had no opportunity to learn English, so Mr. Zinkowsky was interpreter, writer, adviser and confidant in all matters, business and personal, which were conducted in the new language. Often he was so busy reading and answering letters and documents for us that he had little time for his own farm work. Yet,

with him, neighbors and their problems came first; a philosophy he follows today even though an old man in his seventies.

During harvest time the pioneers of our district hired out to big farms in Saskatchewan where they harvested and threshed crops. The money thus earned helped provide essentials for our families. Father went with these harvest crews. He had nothing to harvest at home. Again, our vegetable garden was the victim of a night frost in August. Only some kind of "seven-year onion" survived. The land in the Ledwyn area was marshy, wàter-sogged and shaded by thick woods. Even in mid-summer ice could be found under moss in some places. It seemed the night frosts occurred almost yearly in June and August.

Why then had we settled in such a place?

The reason is traceable to our lives in the Old Country. There "bush land" (forested land) was reserved for the wealthy, the nobility. It was a mark of high station never to be obtained by one born to a lower class. Even the woods on top of Obich mountain belonged to nobility. They were overseen by the local squire and guarded by his forest rangers. Villagers could not even gather twigs or brush in the forest. These fagots of kindling they had to buy. Sometimes the villagers picked mushrooms in the squire's woods (twigs, too, whenever possible). But if a ranger came upon them, he would throw their mushrooms and twigs aside and drive them off the grounds. Small wonder then that when Ukrainian

immigrants chose their land in Canada, they felt the "bush country" of more value than the farm land on the prairies of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The Ledwyn district had a minor immigration of its own when a serious job shortage hit the cities in the fall of 1914. In those years, there were no relief rolls nor other facilities for aiding the unemployed. Many of these men came to seek a livelihood in the country. A number of them hired out to families in our Ledwyn district, cutting wood to work off their board and room. Many were European immigrants and they had a bond of mutual interest and understanding with our settlers.

Two from our old village of Myshkiv stayed with us. They were Semko Katerynych and Bodnar (a relative of Peter with whom I used to play on Obich mountain). There was plenty of meat that winter to feed our people and the newcomers from Winnipeg; little variety though in rabbits, fried or boiled.

The woods teemed with rabbits that winter. With one shotgun blast, one could knock down two or even three. It was one of those years when there is no infectious disease in these animals, and at such times they breed very rapidly. I was told that wild rabbits normally breed rapidly for about seven years. Then an epidemic takes most of them. This is nature's way of thinning out their ranks, keeping them under control. If it were not so, they would become so numerous that they would destroy all the vegetation in the forest. They would eat

the bark around the bottom of tree trunks until there were no more trees.

At any rate, these little animals provided us with plenty of meat that winter. Meat we had, and bread. There were no vegetables. For potatoes we substituted dumplings, homemade macaroni and whatever kitchen ingenuity and flour could create.

The railway connection from Gimli to Riverton had been completed so there was no further market for railway ties in our vicinity. Cordwood was the only marketable timber to be salvaged from the forest, and tamarack was most in demand. But there was no more dry tamarack on our farm. Father found a large tract of such timber on a school quarter-section about six miles northwest of Riverton. It was so far from home, however, that he built a small shack in the woods where he and his two helpers lived while they cut wood. Several others also built shacks and worked in this section.

When the wood was cut, it was loaded on a sleigh and hauled by ox team to Riverton. The oxen would walk at about two or two and a half miles per hour, so the trip took approximately three hours each way. At Riverton the tamarack brought two dollars a cord. Two dollars at that time would buy a 98-pound bag of the lowest grade flour. This was XXXX brand, and made into bread that had a slightly bitter taste.

The better brands were "Five Roses" and "Robin Hood". The latter is still popular.

Top: Transition from the "ox stage" to the "horse stage" in the district of Ledwyn. Below: A pioneer farmer, T. H. G. Bjornson, of Riverton.

When a farmer returned home with a bag of flour in his sleigh, he concealed the label if it was XXXX grade. But if he had purchased "Five Roses" or "Robin Hood", he kept the label prominently displayed for all to see!

We used a 98-pound bag of flour each week; since it

had to provide bread, dumplings, homemade macaroni and other substitutes for the potatoes which were scarce. Father's earnings thus went to buy flour, tea, sugar and such clothing as overalls, sweaters, jackets, mittens, mocassins, etc. Despite these expenses, he managed to save a little money for his two helpers, and when they were returning to Winnipeg in the spring he gave them twenty-five dollars.

That summer (1915) we were fairly well off. We had plenty of food and clothing. We also had a good vegetable crop from our garden. There were no night frosts that June or August. Conditions were also better in the city. There was little unemployment, so we had no help from that quarter when wood-cutting time came again. Father had to rely on my help that winter. Sometimes I even took the ox-team and the wood to Riverton while father stayed behind to work in the woods. Other times, I stayed and worked while he went to town.

The summer of 1916 was exceptionally warm and we again had a good yield from our garden. Our little crop of wheat also had plenty of time to ripen.

Next winter my brother John was old enough to help father. It was time I looked for outside work. I wanted to become a logger.

I had heard that Sveinn Thorvaldson, who owned a sawmill as well as Riverton's largest general store, was hiring men for his logging camp. A group of us, John Bib, Peter Boyko, Steve Storoshchuk, Andrew Kutsyk, Tom

"I felt that I was already a successful logger."

Abramsky and myself went to apply for jobs. I was the youngest and smallest of the lot. Afraid of being rejected, I stood on tiptoe when my turn came to be interviewed. However, Mr. Thorvaldson merely asked my name and I was hired!

While waiting for transportation to the logging camp nine miles north, we stayed at the Riverton hotel, owned then by Bill Rockett. Cost of our lodging was to be deducted later from our earnings. On the third day we were taken by sleigh to the camp where we found our quarters large, warm and comfortable. We found, too, that logging was not an easy job.

Our foreman, Mr. Oddleifson, was patient. He knew he had a bunch of "green" youths with no previous experience, and he carefully taught us what we must do. How to make a deep ax cut just a little below the saw cut on the other side of the trunk so that the tree would fall toward the ax cut. How the cut must be gauged to fell the tree in an open space. How important it was to cry "Timber" as a warning to others, just before the tree was felled.

We were very clumsy at the trade those first few days. But Mr. Oddleifson was very kind and understanding. He was almost fatherly in his attitude toward us, and took the time to show us, over and over again, just how a particular phase of the work should be done. As a result, we tried our best to please him. And when we did it right he would slap us on the shoulder in approval.

We had good food at the camp and were satisfied with our wages. After deductions for board, we earned $1.10 per day. We were not able to save the full amount, however. We had other expenses for such items as mittens, socks, mocassins, overalls, etc. In spite of these incidentals I brought home seventy-six dollars at the end of the season.

That was a lot of money in those days, and I turned the entire sum over to father. With it he bought another cow; a cow named Redda. Shortly thereafter, she brought forth two little calves. Father commented: "Redda has already paid our Gus a nice dividend and the calves may provide him with more dividends in the future."

I felt that I was already a successful logger.

CHAPTER IV

Soup and Society

Life in the back country was becoming more tolerable. The narrow wooded lanes were gradually widened into open roads, letting more sunlight into the district, and into our hearts. The roads were still water-sogged and barely passable, yet they seemed to bind us more closely to our neighbors.

That spring father got a job with a road crew. Since his work took him about five miles north (too far to commute) he lodged at a farm home in the work area and we brought his food supplies to him every few days. One day mother prepared a large pot of beet soup—without beets! It tasted almost like the real thing, but was made from two wild pot-herbs (pig-weed and sorrel); a recipe she had learned from her mother. Both plants are non-poisonous and have a slightly sour taste. But mother cut them into small bits, dumped the ingredients into a big pot of boiling water, added salt and a few spices, then seasoned it with plenty of cream. This was to be a treat for father.

I was elected to bring him his food supplies for the next few days: a large tin of this soup, homemade bread, boiled pork meat and a little cheese. It was a five-mile walk to Shorncliffe, where he worked, and I was in the

habit of making a "rest stop" about halfway, at the Mandryk home.

On this trip, I found Mrs. Mandryk ill and abed, her two small children playing nearby. She was a pleasant, gentle young woman and I felt sorry for her and her little family. I gave them some soup and bread. They were very grateful and Mrs. Mandryk exclaimed:

"It's been a long time since I tasted such delicious 'borshch'."

I took my leave and walked the remaining distance to father's lodgings. My father was lodging with a family that recently arrived from Europe. When I entered the house I found there several young children and two women. Both women were married. Their families lived together in one house temporarily. The women asked me to sit down and began to ask me all kinds of questions. They were hungry for news. In time they also asked me what I brought in the large tin can. They lifted their eyebrows in surprise when I replied: "Borshch". They were wondering where my mother got hold of beets so early in the spring. They asked me if they could taste it. I was even glad to let them taste my mother's good beet-soup that had no beets in it.

After the first spoonfuls of my mother's pot-herb "beet soup" the women remarked that it tasted excellent. I could see that it tasted excellent. By and by I got alarmed when I noticed how quickly the borshch was

disappearing from the can. Both the two women and their children were simply delighted with it.

I saw what was happening. I knew that there would be no "beet soup" left for my father. Yet I was helpless. I knew how delicious borshch would taste to me if I ate no borshch for two or three months. All the people in the Ukraine eat beet soup daily and like it. So I could understand how hungry these recent newcomers from the Ukraine were for beet soup.

"Don't worry about the beet soup, Augustine," said one of the two women. "We'll fix your father something else. Are you a good shot? Good! Here, take this shotgun and get a rabbit. Aim well, because there is only one shell left."

I went into the woods, drew a careful bead on the first rabbit I saw, and dropped it. Soon the rabbit was in a big pot, changing into soup and meat for the supper meal.

As I sat, still chatting with the two housewives, the youngsters flashed shy smiles of gratitude at me, as they gulped the last of their "beet soup", spilling an occasional drop or two on their clothing in their haste to get it all down.

As I hiked back home, I felt uneasy about the incident and hoped that mother wouldn't ask about it. She didn't. I went directly to bed. But I had difficulty falling asleep. I couldn't blot out the picture of the hungry and lonely newcomers from Europe who had just settled in Canada

and who were overjoyed to hear at least some news from me and were delighted with my mother's pot-herb "beet soup". And I reflected that, by comparison with these new settlers, we were already in very comfortable circumstances. We, and our neighbors, each had a few acres of tilled land, plenty of vegetables and potatoes, and a little grain. Some even had a small grist mill and made their own flour. Each farm had a few head of cattle, one or two pigs and some chickens. Some were already selling eggs in town. Most of us had meat throughout the year. And some even made tasty drinks from bush cranberries, moss-berries, chokecherries, etc., to brighten their backwoods existence.

Yes, our life had improved. We even acquired some of the social attainments. Young people had dancing parties from time to time, in one of the nearby homes. Walter Lahodowsky, who was a good musician, played his violin at these affairs. Neighborhood wives who had learned to dance in the Old Country took their time to teach us. It came easily to me, and I enjoyed it very much. In time I became even a little conceited about my talent.

Then one night, while dancing with one of our instructors, I blundered horribly. I guess I was showing-off. At any rate, in one of the steps, I stamped zestfully down on my partner's toes. She let out a piercing, anguished scream of pain—and collapsed to the floor! Terribly embarrassed and ashamed, I begged her forgiveness. She graciously smiled away my humiliation; but the accident

sidelined her for the rest of the evening. How my spirits soared when at our next party she consented to dance with me again—and complimented me on my dancing ability!

We were beginning to enjoy life in this new country. But I couldn't stay in Ledwyn without employment, especially after my season in the logging camp had introduced me to earning power. So, late in May, I announced that I would like to go to Winnipeg to look for work. My parents gave their consent, and father added a bit of advice:

"You may find good employment, son," he admitted. "And you may also learn something that will serve you well later in life. Be diligent and willing to learn; then people will like you wherever you go."

"The girls help me select a suit."

CHAPTER V

First Coat of Polish

It was a tearful leave-taking. Even father controlled his emotions with difficulty. I cut the good-byes short, turned and walked briskly down the road toward Riverton. Mother had put a couple of clean shirts and some other clothing in my suitcase and I carried lunch in a paper bag. At Riverton I found lodging for the night in a shack used by railway workers. The next morning I took a train to Winnipeg.

Everything was new to me when I reached the city. Even the C.P.R. station had been rebuilt and refurbished since I first saw it on our arrival in 1912. I felt as if I was in a grand palace, and I sat there for some time admiring the magnificent surroundings.

Then I began to worry about my next step. Where would I find work? How would I get along with the few English words and phrases I knew? I looked around and noticed an elderly man, about sixty I guessed, seated on the next bench. Although I had never seen him before he seemed familiar — and I just knew he was from the Ukraine.

"Do you speak Ukrainian?" I inquired.

"Naturally, son," he smiled kindly. "In fact I have

never spoken any other language. I know very little English."

He asked me where I had come from, and I explained my background and my desire to find work.

"Don't worry about a job," he encouraged. "We'll find you one. There is plenty of work now that the war is on and so many young men have joined the army." Chatting engagingly and at some length, he explained: "Now, even old men like myself and youngsters such as you can easily find work. As a matter of fact, I am going to join a railway "extra gang" myself. If you wish you may come along. I know the foreman and he will hire you on my recommendation. Stick with me, work hard, and you can earn a lot of money this summer."

This was a stroke of luck! I was happy to snap up his offer.

"Come along," he said. "Let's have lunch."

We went to a nearby boarding house where, for ten cents, we were served some very tasty headcheese and plenty of bread. Later we had supper at the same place, also for just ten cents. Lodging for the night we found for fifteen cents in a big building just across the street from the station. Eighty single beds were lined up on the second floor. Some were already occupied by sleeping men when we came in.

Before we lay down, my new companion asked, in a whisper, whether I had any money with me. When I replied that I still had fourteen dollars, he cautioned me

to pin it in the bosom of my shirt Guess I was probably lucky it was still there when we got up the next morning.

After breakfast we went downtown and visited all the important places in Winnipeg's business district. The kindly gentleman told me all he knew about each place, addressing me in a fatherly fashion as "son" or "sonny".

By chance, that afternoon, we ran across one of the men who had boarded with us and helped father in the woods a couple of winters back. When I told him I was looking for work, he suggested that the Royal Alexandra Hotel needed a lad about my age as a kitchen helper.

"If you take the railroad job with your friend here," he pointed out, "you will probably earn more money. But if you take the hotel job you may gain more in other ways, learning much that will help you in later life."

I recognized this as sound advice. When he offered to take me to the hotel and help me get the job, I consented. I thanked the old man for his kindness, explained my change of plans, and bid him a fond good-bye.

I started in the hotel kitchen the next morning. My main duties were to polish the knives, forks and spoons after each meal. The kitchen routine was new to me, and I didn't feel more at home when I realized that the two girl dishwashers were discussing me in undertones. Then one of them spoke up:

"Do you speak English?"

"A little."

At this she rattled off questions so fast I had difficulty

keeping up. I tried as best I could to reply in my somewhat halting English. Then she switched to Ukrainian and the familiar sound was music to my ears. I learned that they were both from the country, from Saskatchewan where they had attended school and learned English. Annie was a brunette, rather short. Mary was a tall blonde.

They returned to their dishwashing and I resumed my clumsy silver polishing. Their occasional side glances made me uncomfortable, however, and I soon realized why. The neat white kitchen jacket was in strange contrast to my faded worn overalls and heavy unpolished shoes. My hair was long and almost bushy. It hadn't been cut in a long time. My face wasn't washed as clean as it might have been. All in all, I imagine I appeared very much out of place in the hotel surroundings.

We were off work from three to six each afternoon. Just before three, Mary and Annie held another of their whispered conferences. Then Mary came over and asked whether I had any money. I checked an impulse to blurt: "What kind of girls are you, asking about money?" Instead I shrugged indifferently and said I had about twelve dollars on me.

"Good!" she replied emphatically. "We're going to take you to a store and pick out the clothes you obviously need. You have to be reasonably well dressed when you work in a big hotel."

I knew she was right. We went to a store just across

the street. There the girls helped me select a suit, a couple of white shirts, black dress trousers, black shoes and a hat. The bill was almost twenty-five dollars! But the girls advanced me the difference, and I went to the rear of the store and changed into my new outfit.

Next they took me to a barber shop and ordered: "Give him a nice haircut and wash his face." When I stepped down from the chair, I looked like a well-dressed city youth. The girls gave me a long approving look and Mary muttered in English:

"Not bad!"

I understood that much of the language. We exchanged understanding grins. I felt good.

From then on I enjoyed my work in the hotel kitchen, particularly since Annie and Mary were such jolly company. Slowly, some of my rough spots rubbed off as I acquired a bit of the social polish that marks the city-bred. I learned how to dress and how to conduct myself in the company of others. In time I could even speak English with less hesitation. I had my own room at the hotel, could eat all I wanted and was altogether satisfied.

From my first pay cheque, I repaid the girls the money they had loaned me. I was becoming accustomed to city life and liked it. Everybody was kind to me, yet I began to feel homesick. After about four months, the feeling grew so strong that I quit work and went home.

Home, sweet home! How much truth there is in that. Never had our house looked so good to me as when I

walked in that day. I was overjoyed at being with my family again. It was exciting, wonderful, satisfying. They questioned me at length about city life, and I glowed in retelling my experiences.

This feeling dimmed after a week, however, and I began to feel disenchanted. I saw our country home through the eyes of one who had lived in one of Winnipeg's largest hotels. I saw it as small and uncomfortable. I think I even began to pity my parents and neighboring farmers for the miserably primitive life they led on the marshlands of Ledwyn. I saw only a sparse present and a bleak future for the district. I was disappointed, frustrated, unhappy.

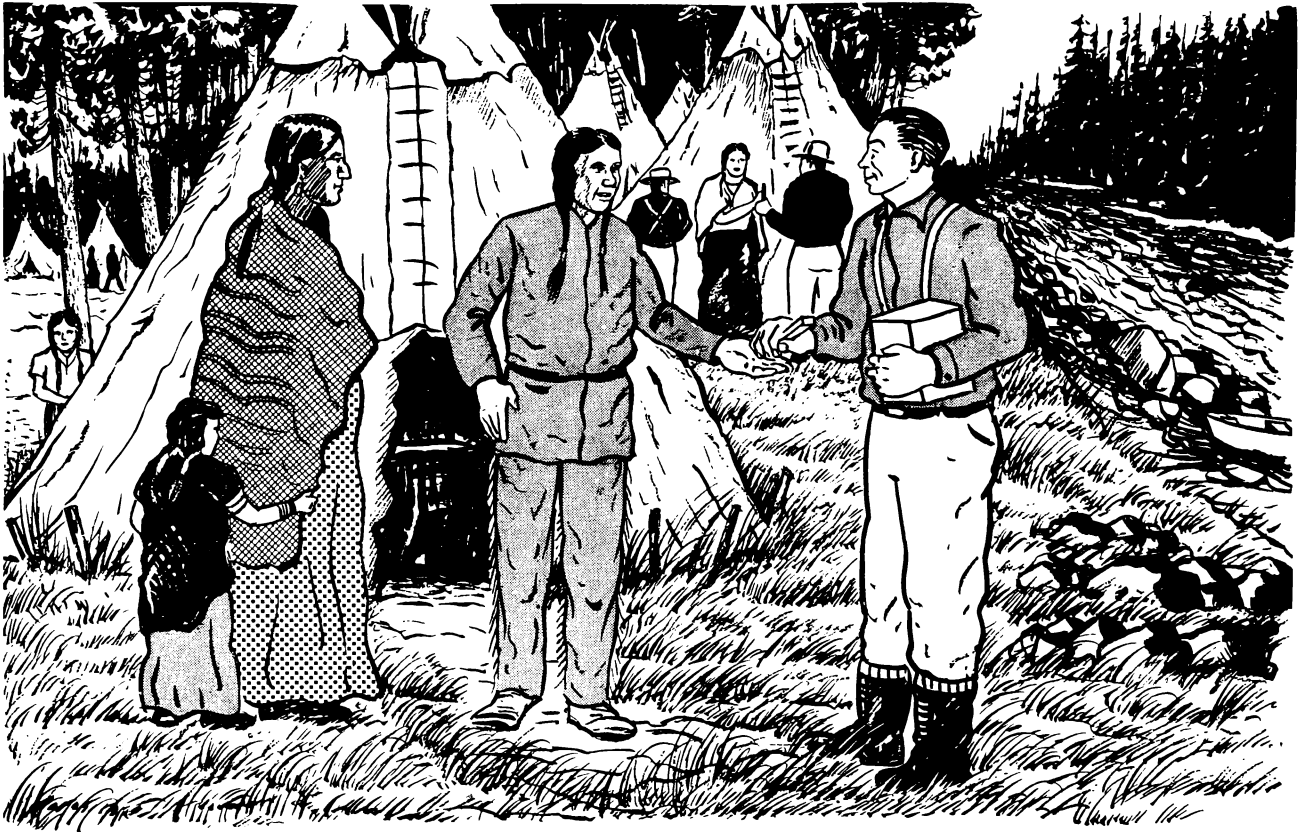
My more sophisticated conclusions were strengthened, too, when father told me of a tragic accident that had recently happened in one of the nearby quagmires. "Not long ago," he related, "Thomas Lisowyk, one of the farmers at Okno, and his wife were riding in a wagon. One of the wheels hit a stump and the wagon upset. He leaped out in time, but his wife was thrown into a roadside quagmire and lay pinned there by the overturned wagon. He tried with all his might to lift the wagon and free his wife, but without success. So he ran to a nearby farm for help. But she was dead, drowned in the quagmire, by the time help arrived!"

I shuddered involuntarily as I thought: "Such a thing could happen to my own mother or father, to my sister

or my brothers—to anybody in this forbidding marshland."

During the next few weeks I helped with the farm chores. But when the first snow fell, I left home again to work as a logger. It was hard work, but I liked it. It gave me a warm feeling to be out in the clean woods among the evergreen trees, with the white snow under my feet and the blue sky above. Besides, the food and wages were good. I saved a considerable sum of money by the time I returned home in the spring.

I stayed with my family for a few weeks, then decided to go to Winnipeg again.



"The gifts established friendship."

CHAPTER VI

High Spirits and Indians

Two friends of my own age, Walter Lahodowsky and Bill Mospanchuk, accompanied me. Since I was somewhat acquainted in Winnipeg, they looked to me to show them the points of interest in the city. We were young, high spirited as three colts and as full of curiosity as cats with a ball of yarn. But our eagerness "to see everything there was to see" had little regard for our pocketbooks.

When I was in Winnipeg alone the previous year, I had been able to save some money from my earnings. But this time, urged (or inspired) by the congenial company of carefree companions, I spent, as they did, with reckless abandon and little thought for tomorrow. By the fifth day of our city "adventure" we were so broke we couldn't buy another meal. So we went to an employment office and signed on to join a railway "extra gang" near Cochrane in Ontario.

Our train left that evening and was not due at our destination until two days later. We boarded without supper, and with no food for the journey. We went without breakfast, or dinner, or supper the following day—when our fellow workers ate their lunches, we tried not to look in their direction.

Finally one noticed that we had nothing to eat. He

offered us some cooked sausages and bread. "I have plenty. Help yourselves. Eat as much as you like," he invited.

I was about to pounce on the welcome food when Walter politely declined, for the three of us! "No thank you. We're not hungry," he said.

I could scarcely believe my ears. My eyes hurled daggers at him as I drew him aside and hissed: "Whaddaya mean, we're not hungry? I'm starving! Fine time to get proud. You may be ashamed to accept favors, but why include me?"

The damage was done. We went to sleep hungry again that night. We arrived before noon the next day, and immediately approached the "extra gang" cook for something to eat.

"Dinner isn't ready, yet," he said, "but you may eat whatever you find in the storeroom."

We found plenty of three things: biscuits, prunes and raw weiners! We stuffed ourselves with biscuits and weiners, and topped off the meal with prunes for dessert. Then we sat on the grass outside, while the road crew was being organized.

Within an hour or so, we were no longer sitting. We were rolling on the grass, groaning with pain. Our stomachs rebelled against the quantity and nature of the food we had devoured. Each of us suffered from acute gas attacks. After a few hours, however, the distress passed and we went to sleep in our bunks in one of the cars.

The next morning we started work, cleaning out the ditches on either side of the railbed. Our duties were varied, but not hard. In some places ditches had to be deepened. Rotted rail ties had to be replaced. Low spots had to be raised (by putting more sand under the ties). The "extra-gang" cars shuttled us back and forth, from job to job; one week here, another week there. One to two weeks was as long as our work usually kept us in an area. Then after about two and a half months, we were taken to a job that would keep us in one place for at least three weeks.

About a week later, while we were stretched out on the grass resting after work, Walter advanced a suggestion:

"Have you noticed the observation car at the end of each passenger train?" he ventured. "Well, people who can afford it, take a holiday for two or three weeks each year and spend the time in travel. They sit in observation cars, enjoy the beautiful scenery and, after a good rest, go back to work again." He smiled as he continued: "Of course, we're not well-to-do. But we are young and we have earned some money in the last ten weeks. Why shouldn't we take a holiday?"

"Imagine, two weeks of fun," I mused aloud. Then, on more sober reflection, "but we have no money for a long trip."

"We don't have to take a trip," Walter argued. "There is so much to do and see right here: lakes, rivers, water-

falls, mountains. There is even an Indian camp in the area. All we need to do is take a couple of weeks off."

"Great idea!" Bill enthused. "But where will we sleep?"

Walter even had that one figured out. "No problem at all," he countered with sly grin. "We'll sleep in our bunk-cars as usual. After all, we're not quitting our jobs; just taking a two-week holiday."

So it was decided. We would start the next day.

In the morning, when the others went to work, we three hiked to town, about a quarter of a mile away. There we found a man who owned a good boat. When we explained our plans to him he gave us a royal send-off.

"Take my boat, boys," he urged. "The river is just about a quarter of a mile from here. You can fish and enjoy the scenery. The Indian camp, too, is just three miles upstream. Of course, you'll have to paddle against the current to get there."

We were elated to accept this very generous offer and told our benefactor we would love to use his boat from time to time.

"Let's try the Indian camp for a starter," Walter eagerly suggested.

We were game. First we bought a lot of candy, tobacco, cigarettes and cigars; things we thought the Indians would like. Then we went to the boat. The river was about one hundred paces wide, but it flowed slowly.

Each of us had a paddle and, with Walter at the stern, Bill in the middle and myself at the bow, we made good progress even against the current.

After about a mile of easy going, however, the river narrowed and the current became faster. We heard the muffled roar of white water, then saw a swirling, rushing, tumbling, forbidding rapids ahead. We weren't experienced boatmen, and we were young, bold, perhaps foolhardy—we decided to continue up the rapids. We made headway against the heavy current until we reached the center of the swirling water. There our boat was buffeted about among the big boulders. We had about one hundred yards of rocky, swirling, treacherous water to paddle through to reach the calm ahead.

Then, suddenly, we were caught up in a whirlpool that spun our heavy boat like a peanut shell. I looked back towards Walter, but saw only a spinning red top—his mop of red hair! We were helpless.

My story could have ended there in that sucking vortex. But we were lucky. The spinning water flicked our boat aside like a burnt matchstick. Then the swift current thrust us back almost a quarter of a mile. We were safe! And we were not unhappy for having lost headway.

No further discouragement was needed to convince us that the rapids were not for us. We paddled back as close as we dared, then we pulled to shore and portaged overland around the rapids. On the other side we found

smooth water that took us the remaining two miles to the Indian encampment without incident.

The river bank was lined with canoes when we arrived. Set back a safe distance were many wigwams; a small, cheering fire in front of each. Near our landing point were three large wigwams side by side. There we found a group of Indians; men, women and children. Walter took the initiative, shaking hands all around. We followed his lead. The Indians seemed glad to see us, happy for the company.

An old squaw sat cross-legged on the ground calmly puffing on a pipe. Walter advanced, took the pipe from between her teeth, and replaced it with a big cigar. He lit it, and she puffed appreciatively, savoring the mellow tobacco. We passed cigars around to the grownups, cigarettes to the young bucks and maidens and candy to the children. The gifts established friendship. In fact, we moved among the Indians like visiting royalty. They followed us in eager affability as we toured their little village, examining with curious interest everything we saw.

We came to some strips of meat and fish hung up in long strings to dry, and we inquired in English whether we might sample the food. They nodded assent almost in unison, and one proudly replied in English: "You want? Eat." We were hungry and needed no further urging. The meat was tasty and we ate our fill. Then, bidding our new friends good-bye, we put our boat back in the

river and moved easily downstream with the current. It was late that evening when we returned to our bunk-car. It had been a big day, and an exciting one.

For the next two days of our truancy, we relaxed and fished a number of the small streams tributary to the river. Once we were so absorbed in fishing that we narrowly avoided going over a high waterfall. We kept forgetting that this was northern Ontario, a land of mountainous rock, deep valleys and swift, rushing water; a startling contrast to the marshy woodlands of Ledwyn and Riverton.

On the fourth day we again visited the Indians. This time our pockets bulged with candies, chocolate bars and 15-cent rings. Walter ringed all four fingers on the hand of a beaming old squaw. He also put four rings on her husband's right hand. There were rings enough for all the older Indians, candy for the others. They were so pleased with the gifts, they laughed like merry children during the two hours we visited among them.

We had enjoyed five days of our stealthy vacation before the foreman discovered our absenteeism. He called us on the carpet for skipping work. But he wilted like a starched shirt in a downpour when Walter calmly explained:

"We are taking a two-week summer holiday."

"What!" he roared when he had recovered his composure. "Why, you green, country hicks. I'll show you if you can take off whenever you feel like it. Galivanting

around with a pack of Indians won't be so funny when you get your cheques at the end of the month. I'm going to charge you for board and room while you're not working. I'll be darned if we'll support you, too!"

"O.K. Take out for board and room," Walter tossed back. "We're still going to finish out our two-week vacation."

The foreman spun on his heels and stalked off. He was a good boss, expecting only a fair day's work from his men. He could be firm and sharp-tongued when necessary, but our approach stopped him cold.

We continued our vacation acting like "tourists". We visited all the streams, rivers, waterfalls and lakes in the neighborhood. When we had good fishing we provided the entire "extra-gang" with fish dinners.

We returned several times to the Indian camp and were always welcomed with open arms. It wasn't just the gifts that paved the way for this hospitality, however. I learned later that the Indian is very friendly by nature. He is usually happy to share with a hungry stranger whatever food he has. If there is a pot of boiled meat in front of the wigwam, no invitation is necessary. One may simply sit down beside it and eat his fill. The Indian seems to regard it as a privilege to share his food with others.

It was a glorious vacation. But it had to end. We went back to work, and I do believe, we worked harder and with more zest than before. Our foreman noticed it,

too, and tossed us an occasional encouraging word of approval. But the big surprise came at the end of the month. We expected very slim pay cheques, having worked half-time while eating and sleeping full-time. We could have been bowled over with a feather when we found our cheques were as large as those earned by the rest of the crew. The paymaster hadn't even taken out for room and board!

But our foreman called us aside. He looked grim and forbidding. We expected he had learned of the payroll error and would ask for our cheques. Instead he surprised us, saying: "Well, boys, I was young once, too. I remember how homesick I got when I was about your age. The fun you had on your holiday probably relieved that homesick feeling. That's why I didn't take anything out of your cheques. Good night, boys."

We really worked after that, and stayed on with the railroad until late fall. Then we went home.

That winter we returned to the logging camp where we worked through the season. In the spring, after a week's rest at home, my brother John and I joined a group of youths from our district and set out in search of work. We stopped in Winnipeg for a short time, then went on to Fort William, in Ontario.

There we hired out as dockhands, loading and unloading lake vessels. It wasn't steady employment, however. We worked two or three days when a ship was in port. But when we had it loaded, we might have to wait several

days for another ship. Whatever we earned while working, we spent during the lay-off.

John, Bill Mospanchuk and I tried to put in longer work shifts when a ship was in, in order to make up for the time lost between dock jobs. John worked straight through 48 hours without sleep. But Bill and I worked three days and three nights, 72 consecutive hours, stopping only to eat.

During the last few hours of this endurance run, I was so tired and sleepy I could hardly move. I was asleep standing up. When the grind was over, I had supper and sat down by my bed to have a smoke. There I fell asleep, at about seven o'clock in the evening, and slept straight through until nine the next morning.

Even at this pace, the lay-offs between ships ate up our earnings. We couldn't save any money. So eleven of us quit and hopped a freight train for the west. We stopped at several places and tried to get work with the railroad, but had no luck. At last we were broke, except for two dollars which I had, and the pocket watch, for which I had paid fifty dollars; leaving it with a railroad foreman at a little station west of Fort William. I had to buy food for all of us, and the fourteen dollars had to stretch pretty thin.

We kept hopping trains west, riding in box cars. I repeatedly cautioned the others against standing by the car door, or leaving it ajar to look out, particularly when the train was just leaving a station. I pointed out that

we could get into trouble if we were seen by any of the train crew.

Once, after a water-tank stop I noticed someone holding the car door slightly ajar and peering out. Angrily, I leaped forward, grabbed the chap and half threw him back into the car. He cried in fear. Then, panic stricken, he rushed to the car door and leaped from the train.

Alarmed at this unexpected reaction, I threw the car door open to get enough light to see which one of our group was missing. We were all there. But there was an extra bundle and a pair of shoes in a far corner of the car. Apparently, someone else had climbed aboard at the tank stop. In the darkness, he hadn't noticed us, and we hadn't seen him. His panicky reaction was understandable under the circumstances. He evidently thought he had the boxcar to himself. We tossed his belongings out the door, hoping he would find them.

In time we reached Kenora where most of the boys found jobs. John and I, however, decided to go further west, to Saskatchewan, since it was already harvest-time. At Weyburn we were hired by a local farmer. We worked through the threshing season, and by the time we got back home it was late fall. I mailed twelve dollars to the railroad foreman and got my watch back.

John decided to stay at home and help father that winter. I wanted to try fishing with the crews that worked on Lake Winnipeg. Walter Lahodowsky agreed to go with me.

CHAPTER VII

Lake Winnipeg Treachery

Walter and I went to Riverton to make contact with a fishing gang. Riverton is situated on the bank of the Icelandic River, just three miles from Lake Winnipeg. It was founded by Icelandic people many of whom engaged in commercial fishing.

It was Steini Thorsteinn Eliasson who hired us to join his fishing crew. An Icelander, Stefan Stefanson, went with us. At Hnausa, six miles south of Riverton, we boarded a large lake ship that was transporting fishermen to their licensed stations. Mr. Eliasson's fishing camp was at Big Bullhead, a large peninsula of land extending into the lake in a pattern not unlike the head of a bull.

Fishermen operate on Lake Winnipeg, summer, autumn and winter. It is the largest lake in Manitoba, approximately 350 miles long and 80 miles at its widest point. Its waters hold pickerel, jackfish, whitefish, catfish, suckers, saugers, sturgeon, sunfish, perch, goldeyes and tullibees. Some are found in deep water, others in the shallows. Some lie off the bottom of sandy areas, others off muddy sections. There are no clearly-defined boundaries between the varying habitats, which is why several species are usually caught in the same net, even though

the fishing crews may be concentrating on one particular species.

It was early November, a little in advance of the fishing season, when we arrived at Big Bullhead. It would take some time to get the nets and other equipment ready. By the middle of November the cold evenings lay a sheet of thin ice over the waters near shore. Waves kept breaking up the thin crust, however, and for the first few days the shallow water was covered with something that looked like "ice pudding". Then one night the temperature dropped very low, the "pudding" congealed and, in the morning, we found a more substantial section of ice near shore. When this layer became about two inches thick and extended out for three or four miles, it would be safe to start fishing.

From the standpoint of commercial fishing there are two kinds of autumn or fall seasons: good and bad. It is good, when the weather remains consistently cold, the lake has a workable layer of ice by mid-November, and the ice cap pushes steadily outward each succeeding night. It is bad, when the weather is warm, or alternately cold and warm. In the first instance, there is no ice. In the second, the early ice formations are broken up by waves and warm winds. A wind blowing toward shore will tumble the thin ice cakes ahead of it. A shore wind, on the other hand, pushes the ice away toward the open water in the center of the lake. In either case, fishermen tending their nets in such weather may find the "floor"

blown from beneath their feet and their very lives imperilled by icy waters.

The autumn of 1918 was not a good one. Warm weather seemed reluctant to depart, and frequent strong winds kept crushing the ice into "pudding". Later, however, the winds subsided, nights grew intensely cold and the ice crept steadily out into the lake, spreading over a larger area each night. When we started to set our nets out from Big Bullhead, the shore ice was about four inches thick and the sheet spread out for at least five miles. Its thickness tapered from the shore to the open water edge and about three miles out it was only two inches thick.

We set the large gill nets under the ice behind a long thin wooden pole. The pole is inserted through a hole in the ice and pushed outward from the shore. It floats to the surface and can be seen just beneath the ice. A fisherman follows it and cuts another hole at its far end, so that the pushing-out process can be repeated. In this way, the nets are set out, extending two or three miles from shore. Usually, they are set in strings of ten or so; a second string of ten requiring a separate setting. Each net may be 90 to 100 or even 300 feet long and 8 to 9 feet deep. A long rope is secured to the first and last net in each string. The nets are then pulled up by the rope nearest shore, and reset by pulling back on the rope at the farthest end. Thus the "pole-process" is employed only in the initial setting.

Fish are caught by the gills when they try to swim

Top Left and Bottom: Winter fishing of Tulibees in Lake Winnipeg caught by W. Johnson and his assistant. Top right: S. R. Sigurdson and C. Goodmanson holding a large Sturgeon (caught during summer) weighing 149 pounds.

through the net openings. Nets are pulled up every two or three days. A shorter period would yield too few fish; a longer one, too many dead fish. Fishermen quickly and skillfully detach the netted fish and throw them on the ice where they freeze in a matter of minutes. They are packed in large wooden boxes after they are frozen. (If they were packed directly from the nets, they would freeze into a solid lumpy mass.) Then the boxes are hauled to shore by dog sleigh. When all the boxes are in, the fish are again dumped onto the ice and sorted according to species. Then they are packed in separate crates, tullibees in one, goldeyes, in another, etc. They are weighed and the weight (usually 125 to 140 pounds) marked on each crate. Then the crates are stacked to await transport sleighs that take them to Riverton from where they are shipped out by rail.

Tullibees were in great demand that first season I fished Lake Winnipeg. Later, however, they fell into disfavor when a prominent fish expert publicized a claim that they had some kind of disease. Since then the market, particularly in the United States, has been negligible. It was a terrible blow to Lake Winnipeg fishermen, for these fish are abuandant there. I am not in a position to debate the merit of the disease claim, but I do know that we fishermen thrived on a diet in which tullibees were the main fare. Tullibees and goldeyes were also the major part of our catch that first season.

An essential part of our equipment was a metal spike

heel which we clamped to our shoes. It made it possible for us to work and walk without slipping or sliding on the smooth ice. One day I learned, too, that with these "heels" one can run over the ice. The extra traction they provided may have helped save our lives that day.

Walter, Stefan, Mr. Eliasson and I were setting out nets about three miles from shore. We were preoccupied with our work and failed to notice that the wind had shifted and was blowing from the south. It brought warmer air with it, but we were too busy to notice the steadily rising temperature.

It announced itself, with a terrifying booming report that reverberated all over the lake! The ice was breaking up! Water began to seep through cracks all around us.

"Grab the nets!" our boss yelled.

"Nets be dammed," Stefan screamed. "We'll be lucky to save ourselves."

Already the ice was breaking into blocks the size of a room floor, or smaller. Steini saw that Stefan was right. The two grabbed opposite ends of a setting-pole and began to run. I tied one end of a rope under my arms and Walter lashed the other end to himself. We ran like frightened deer (though not as gracefully) toward shore.

After about a quarter-mile, we began to feel dizzy. Then we realized that we were running on a treadmill of ice moving northward under us!

We kept running, stumbling, scrambling toward shore and had covered almost two miles when we came face to

face with a new peril. We had less than a mile to go. But we couldn't run on water! We had run out of ice. Between us and our camp, the water was heaving up and down bouncing huge chunks of ice off the crest of each wave.

Alex and Emil Bjornson, along with some other fishermen, were standing on the beach mutely witnessing our perilous predicament, yet helpless to rescue us. No boat could make it through that angry froth.

We couldn't reach camp, neither could we retreat! Behind us, about three miles south, towering waves rolled northward heaving a wall of tumbling ice blocks ahead of them. We ran in the only direction left open—northward with the moving ice.

We ran. We zigzagged. We leaped and stumbled from one block of ice to another. Walter missed his footing and I hauled him to safety. I slipped into an open crack and he yanked me back. Mr. Eliasson and Stefan were also trading heroics.

Moving in this hesitant fashion, we could not match the pace of the ice wall relentlessly closing the gap behind us. We ran blindly, gropingly, more by instinct of self-preservation than planned direction. There was no escape, no shore, no refuge. Only time; minutes, perhaps seconds. Time was running out.

Then, through eyes half blinded by sweat of fears and tears of despair, I saw mistily, as in a mirage, a dim dark shadow—a point of land!

"Run! Run!" I screamed. "There's land! Land!"

Hope gave us strength to speed our stumbling footsteps and somehow we reached shore. Lying there in the snow, gasping air into aching lungs, half sobbing through burned throats, we saw the wall of ice move closer to us—then it swept on by as the wind propelled it to open water.

How narrow was our escape! Even though providence led us to that point of land, had we arrived seconds later—it would have been too late. The ice mass would have carried us out into the lake where we would have drowned or been crushed to death.

When we fully realized that the danger was over and we were safe, reaction set in. We were overcome with such exhilarating joy, gratitude and emotion that we bawled like babies. Then, through red-rimmed eyes I looked at Walter. He looked at me. We shook hands as if meeting for the first time. From an inside pocket I drew a dry pair of mitts and dried his face. There we sat, arm in arm, like the last two humans alive, while we rested and regained our composure.

When we were able, we started to walk along the shore toward our fishing camp. It was a long way off, but before we had gone very far a searching party from Big Bullhead met us and took us back.

Others in our crew had been working nearer shore when the breakup began. They had time to reach safety before the shore ice blew apart. However, there had been fishermen from other camps who faced the peril that was ours. We heard that a few of them didn't make it.

Later I learned that three other fishermen from our home district, Ratynsky, Romanowych and Paulson had also been far out when the breakup came. They, however, had a sort of amphibious boat with them, a boat with runners on the bottom. This they slid across the ice until they reached open water, then they climbed aboard and rode the waves the last two hundred yards to safety.

Even though our lives had been spared, the weather shift had tragic consequences for the fishing crews. All set nets were gone. The financial losses were heavy.

"I reached down and grabbed him by the hair."

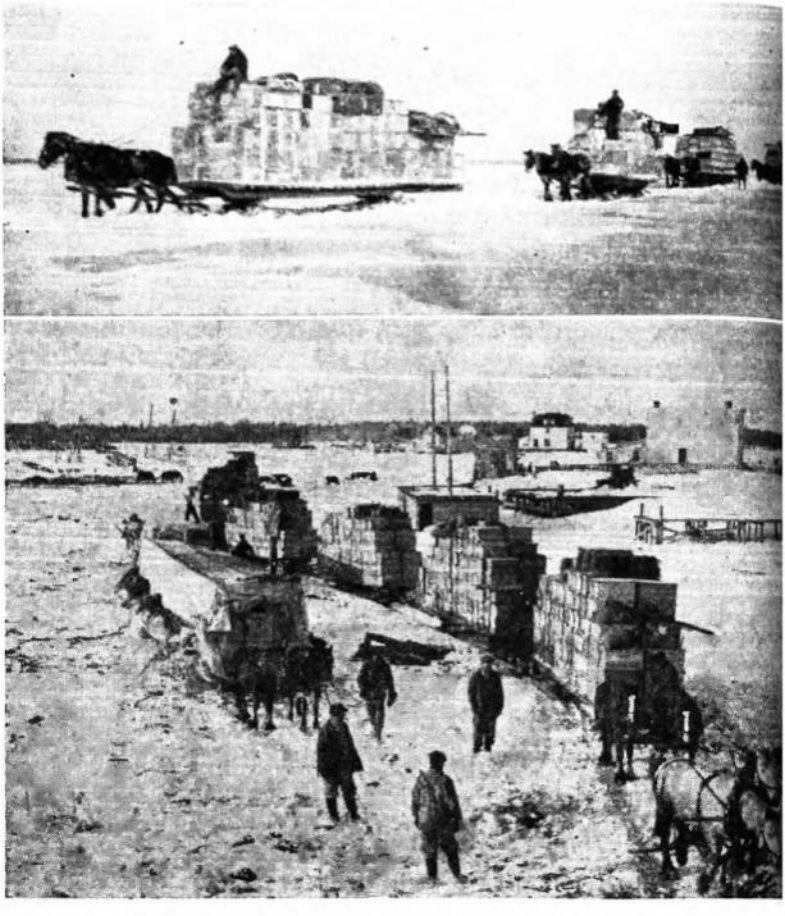
CHAPTER VIII

By the Hair of His Head

The warm southerly wind continued for the next two days. Then it shifted to the north and freezing temperatures again set in. The surface of the lake froze over and, three days later, the ice sheet was over three miles wide and thick enough to support a man. On the fourth day we went out about a mile from shore and started to set our remaining nets. We walked very warily, however. The ice was still quite thin, as were our nerves following our harrowing escape.

We were running short of stones for anchoring our nets, so Mr. Eliasson said he would pick some up on shore the next day and bring them out. The anchor stones are used to weigh down and stretch the nets, making it easier to catch fish in the opened netting. They weigh on the average about 12 pounds apiece and must be shaped so that they can easily be fastened to the bottom of the nets. Large corks keep the top side floating against the ice and help hold the nets in a vertical position.

We had been at work a couple of hours or so the next morning when we saw Steini about five hundred paces away dragging a stone-laden sleigh. We turned back to our work. Then we stopped abruptly as the cold still air



One of the "horse-age" fish transports entering Riverton from Lake Winnipeg. This one belonged to Joe Jonatanson.

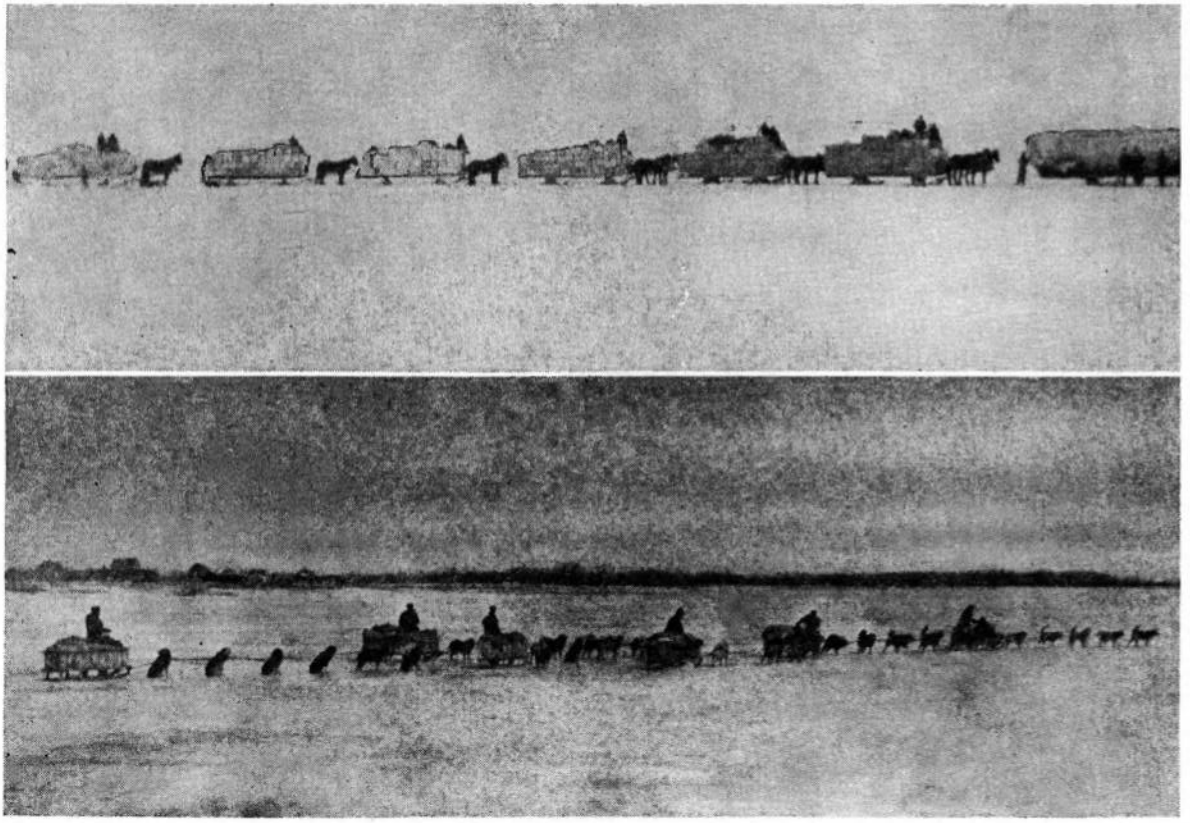
was shattered by an ear-tearing scream! We ran toward the sleigh (then about three hundred paces away). There was no sign of Steini; only a mitt-covered hand frantically clutching a shelf of ice. I started running toward the spot and vaguely heard Stefan yell:

"You'll go down. Use the pole."

But Steini was already under water and couldn't have seen a pole if I had pushed one out to him. So I ran to the edge of the break, plunged my hands into the water and grabbed him by the hair. I yanked back and he practically flew out of the water to safety. A clothed body has so little weight in water, it doesn't require any great feat of strength to pull it free. Our combined weight caused the ice to buckle, however, and I barely managed to roll away as it went under. Then, crawling on hands and knees, I pushed the sleigh, sliding it to a safe distance from the break.

I tipped it over, dumping out the stones. Then we lifted Steini onto the sleigh; I wrapped him in my parka and tucked Walter's parka around his legs. I ran with the sleigh towards the nearest fishing camp. I had to run to keep from freezing in the intense cold. Steini's saturated clothes were already stiffening with ice. There was nobody at the shack when we arrived, but it was warm and we made ourselves right at home. I stripped Steini, bundled him in blankets, then propped him in a sitting position near the stove.

"Will you go over to our camp and get me some dry



Top: A fish transport. Below: Dog Transport carrying furs from the far north Hudson Bay's trading posts.

clothes, a couple of blankets and a bottle of rum?" he asked.

I went out, returning in a short time with the articles he had requested as well as a dog team and toboggan. (I might explain here that a "toboggan" is a planked bottom conveyance, with built up canvas sides and top. It is used for personal transportation, or very light hauling. A "sleigh" on the other hand is a runner-supported load box used for hauling heavy loads.)

After helping Steini change into dry clothing, I passed him the bottle of rum and he took several long gulps of the fiery liquid. Then he handed the bottle to me and suggested I have a drink. I tasted it somewhat gingerly, then took a big swallow. It burned all the way down, but the warm feeling was good after the cold we had endured. I helped him into the toboggan, covered him with blankets and we drove to our own camp.

He urged me to stay in for the rest of the day, and we sat down near the stove and talked. Rather, he talked; I listened and asked an occasional question. He seemed to know everything about Lake Winnipeg fishing, and I was eager to learn.

Especially fascinating was his account of the manner in which crated fish were transported across the ice. We had not seen any stage of this operation since the ice is not thick enough even in December to support the eight to twelve ton weight of a loaded sleigh. If the winter is

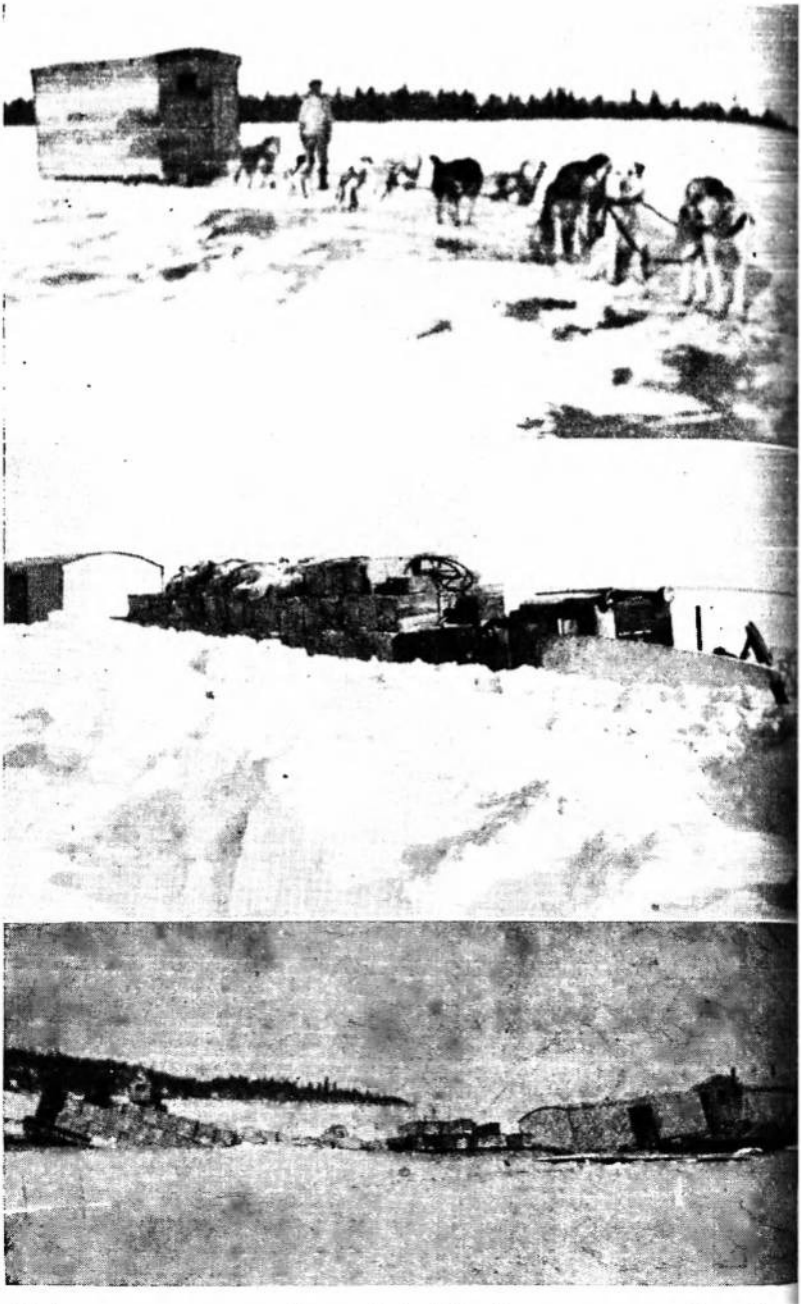
Top: A fish transport bunkhouse with the stable tent folded up.
Below: The stable tent set up.

cold, the ice is usually thick enough in January to carry the heavy loads, he explained.

Once a load is started, a two-horse team can keep it moving across the ice, but it cannot start so much weight unassisted. The transports usually traveled in caravans and had an extra team that doubled between "starter-boosting" and snow plowing. When the loaded caravan was ready to start, this team plowed a track for about a mile or so ahead. Then it returned to help start each load. When all sleighs were in motion, the team was driven around past the caravan and again hitched to the plow ahead.

Sometimes as many as three large caravans of twelve to fifteen sleighs each, set out from Riverton. They would bring supplies, food, clothing and equipment to the fishing camps, and return with loads of fish. The round trip usually took two or three weeks. Enroute, the transports would camp on the ice of Lake Winnipeg.

Just before dark, the snow plow would clear an area of ice. Then the transport men chiseled holes into which tent rope pegs were inserted. In a matter of minutes, the pegs froze firmly in place and a huge tent would be erected. The tent wasn't for the men. It was a horse shelter. Hay would be spread over the ice floor and each horse led into the shelter. The horses would eat their fodder from the caboose manger. A long, canvas-covered sleigh served as combination bunkhouse and chuck wagon for the men. Often, the caravans had to camp out for



Modern transports operating on Lake Winnipeg at present. Sometimes they run into trouble like the one in the last picture. This outfit belongs to the Sigurdson Fisheries Company of Riverton.

several days in a raging blizzard. The huge tent, however, afforded ample protection for the horses, and the men could withstand sub-zero temperatures in their sleigh bunkhouse . . .

Gradually, however, tractors forced horses out of this work supplanting nearly all of them by 1928 or 1929. Each tractor is a self-contained unit that can push a snowplow ahead while pulling eight to twelve heavily loaded sleighs behind. Further north, however, horse-drawn transports were continued in use until quite recently, hauling to and from Indian settlements and Hudson Bay trading stations. Even further north, dog-drawn transports are still in general use for terrain that would be virtually impassable for either tractors or horses. Planes have made inroads, too, and are now in general use for hauling mining equipment, etc., into isolated spots in the far reaches of the wilderness country.

That afternoon by the camp stove, I learned, too, of the summer fishing on Lake Winnipeg. Riverton fishermen, Steini Eliasson told me, concentrated on the northern half of the lake, about 150 to 200 miles north of Big Bullhead, where the lake is about 80 miles wide and very deep. In these waters they would catch whitefish that weighed from two and a half to ten pounds each. Fishing camps were maintained on the nearby shore, and each camp had its own ice house. The day's catch would be immediately cleaned, packed in ice in large wooden boxes and transported by ships to Selkirk or Winnipeg. Indians

collected the fish entrails, from which they separated the fat. This the squaws used throughout the year for frying, for shortening (in baking their bannock bread), for skin cream and a multitude of other purposes.

Summer fishing was not without danger, either. Storms often came up with little warning, overtaking the fishing launches. Waves large enough to upset one of these boats, would leave the fisherman little chance for survival. Gasoline explosions were another constant source of danger. Then, too, the late summer fishermen ran the risk of being trapped and cut off by a fast freeze-up . . .

It was a pleasant afternoon, following our harrowing experience. When Steini wasn't telling me fishing tales, he was thanking me for saving his life. Even today, whenever I chance to see him in Winnipeg (where he now lives), he shakes my hand enthusiastically and thanks me over and over again for rescuing him.

"If it weren't for you, Gusti," he exclaims, "I wouldn't be here today."

To which I frequently reply jokingly: "Lucky thing you still had hair on your head; otherwise, I'd never have been able to pull you out."

CHAPTER IX

The Lake—a Living Thing

The cold weather continued and we fished daily. Walter and I became quite proficient at the work, even began to like it. If anything dampened our spirits, it was the grimmer work being performed by the "flu".

A number of fishermen and local Indians had died from the illness since our arrival at Big Bullhead. Several stricken men were taken out by the last ship that sailed to Winnipeg before the freeze-up. When the ice severed our last connection with the outside world it seemed the number of cases increased to near-epidemic proportions. Almost daily we heard reports of new victims.

News came to us by word of mouth only during those cold isolated days in the fishing camp in the early winter of 1918. The war ended on November 11, but we had no news of it until December 10, when we heard it from a man who came from Riverton by dog team. When word got around to nearby camps, all the fishermen came over and we shouted "Hurrahs" and held a brief celebration over the glad tidings.

We were happy to hear that the war was over. But we didn't know who had won! We fired questions at our news bearer, but he was vague, even about the most im-

portant detail. Matters of war were none of his concern, he shrugged. It was not until we returned to Riverton several weeks later that we learned the outcome.

Steini Eliasson was pleased by the manner in which we did our work. But each day the ice was getting thicker and thicker and our catches were decreasing in proportion, as the fish moved to deeper water seeking oxygen. By mid-winter the ice usually freezes to a depth of three or four feet. But, no matter how thick it gets, it may still be treacherous.

Lake Winnipeg, in many ways, behaves like a living thing. In winter it may become a wild, dangerous monster. When there is little snow the cold north winds play directly on the surface of the ice, and it freezes deeper than when protected by a white blanket. But even then, treacherous cracks are everywhere to be found.

Through the winter the immense ice sheet is constantly shifting — expanding and contracting. When it contracts, like a cold bar of steel, huge cracks snap and zigzag across the surface from shore to shore, from shore to island, from island to island. These glacial crevices may be many miles long and vary in width from a foot to two, three or even ten or more feet. Almost invariably they zigzag east and west, cracking at virtually right angles to the prevailing wind.

Travelers from the east or west may not cross these crevices, because they are actually moving parallel to them. But anyone traveling either north or south, sooner

or later, will be faced with the problem they present.

The experienced Lake Winnipeg traveler carries a couple of planks in his sleigh, to bridge these ice cracks. A narrow break may be ignored, and crossed without incident. A crack, approximately four to ten inches wide may be wedged with ice chunks to close the gap. But planks are needed to bridge cracks two feet wide or so. The planks are laid crosswise and splashed with water which freezes them in position so that horses and heavy sleighs may cross in comparative safety. Wider gaps are all but impassable, and travelers sometimes must ride some distance out of their way until they find a narrow gap which may be crossed, closed, or bridged.

This stretching-squeezing proclivity of the frozen lake raises still another barrier to winter travel. When the wind shifts from the south the cracks move together with unrelenting force. Thinner ice which has formed in the openings is crushed between the heavy jaws of the two ice sheets and forced upward, forming a scar-like ridge above the sealed gap. Repeated opening and closing during frequent wind shifts may build up this ridge until it becomes a wall of ice.

On calm, clear moonlit nights the ice cracks give life to Lake Winnipeg in a smoky white mist that billows upward creating strange, wraith-like creatures; a mirage of polar bears or sheep. These apparitions may strike terror into the heart of one who is seeing them for the first time.

The smaller fish take and our shortage of nets slowed work almost to a standstill. Finally, in February, Steini gave us our time.

"There just isn't enough work now," he said. "Here are your work accounts. Turn them in at the office in Riverton and collect your wages. You may leave now if you like."

Riverton was fifty miles away. We had one dollar for eating expenses. We hiked about ten miles before dark, stopping at a fisherman's shack for the night. It was unoccupied, but it was warm and well stocked with groceries. Deep snow made walking difficult the next day, so we followed the ice along the shore and made about thirty miles, stopping for supper at D'Arcy's Inn at Washow Bay.

Supper took our lone dollar and we were ashamed to ask Mr. D'Arcy to put us up on credit, so we kept walking into the night. It was very late when we reached Riverton and deposited our weary bodies at a friend's house. When we awakened our legs and feet were still so sore and worn out, it was an effort to move at all. We went out to collect our pay nevertheless, then rested another day in town.

We were happy to be home again. I stayed home till the end of winter, helping father in the woods and enjoying visits with my friends, neighborhood dancing parties, and an occasional home talent stage play at Okno.

"His words doused cold water on my puffed up ego."

CHAPTER X

A Business Venture

In the spring of 1919 I again left home in search of work, hopping from one job to another, looking for higher pay. For a short time I worked on the railroad, then helped a farmer harvest, then worked with a threshing outfit.

By this time, I had a sideline. I had learned a little bit about barbering and wherever I went I took along a good razor, shears and a pair of clippers. Performing tonsorial services for fellow workers wasn't too lucrative, but it kept me in tobacco.

I spent a couple of weeks at home in late autumn, then went to a logging camp in Ontario. Here, too, I was barber as well as logger.

The following spring, Bill Mospanchuk and myself were hired by a railroad contractor north of Humboldt in Saskatchewan, working as mule team drivers hauling fill for a new railbed.

I was almost nineteen and growing quite concerned about the future. I would lie awake nights turning over and over in my mind the possibilities of making a place for myself, and, some day, a wife and family.

"The Ledwyn district offers little future," I reasoned.

"The land is marshy and densely wooded, one of the poorest areas I have seen. I would do better to settle somewhere else . . . It would be nice to buy myself a farm somewhere in the southern part of Manitoba, or here near Humboldt, or on the prairie of Alberta . . . But where would I get money for such a venture? Whatever I have left after buying clothing and other necessities I must turn over to father to help out at home . . . "

I rolled and tossed and turned, even talked in my sleep. Bill slept like an untroubled baby. He couldn't understand my brooding.

"Aren't you at all concerned with planning for your own future?" I asked.

"Why should I worry?" he replied with a carefree grin. "Remember the turkey that was found dead after he tried to think hard? Well I'm not going to be a dead turkey. I'm young and happy. Let others worry and get old before their time. Better follow my example, Gus. Eat, sleep and be merry. Thinking and worrying will only get you in trouble."

And he was so right . . .

A few days later, I was lost in thought while driving my mule team on the high roadbed across the marsh. Daydreaming peacefully, I failed to notice that the wagon was dangerously near the edge of the fill. Suddenly it slipped off and rolled down the side slope into the muddy marsh below, pulling the mules behind. I was lucky, I fell behind the cart. But I landed headfirst in the mud!

What a sorry sight I made, and what a mess my wagon and team were. It took almost the whole crew to right the wagon and mules and get them back to solid ground. As I stood there, bespattered, I reflected that maybe Bill had the right idea after all.

We worked at that job until harvest time when we went to the Melville district and found work with a Mr. Reimer, a well-to-do farmer of German descent. The wages were good, six dollars a day, so I wrote my brother John to come out. John worked with a binder cutting wheat. Bill and I followed behind putting the sheaves in stooks. Later, when threshing started, I was put in charge of the tank wagon, supplying water for the steam engine.

During harvest time we worked from seven in the morning to seven in the evening. When threshing started we began earlier, at six, and worked until seven at night, or even eight or nine when the light held out. When Reimer's threshing was done we used his equipment on the other farms in the district. Thus we were employed until December 14.

It had been a good summer and fall. I had earned a considerable sum. John had done well, too. Together we had over seven hundred dollars. I reasoned that so much money was excellent working capital, and I persuaded John to join me in my first business venture.

"Mr. Reimer has a lot of good horses," I argued. "We

can probably buy them at a reasonable price, resell them to the farmers at home and show a good profit."

We both knew that the "ox-cart" era was rapidly passing into history, even at Ledwyn. A number of farmers already had horse teams. Others had been victimized by sharp horse traders who sold them either half-wild beasts or worn out nags. Even such teams brought from $350 to $500 and often the farmer had to put a lien on other livestock to float the deal. The old horse might die, the untrained one get injured, and the farmer would have nothing—maybe even lose the pledged stock.

Mr. Reimer offered us some of his horses at $50, $60 and $70 each. "Why we can undersell the other dealers, do our neighbors a favor, and still make a good profit," I pointed out.

That clinched it for John. We pooled our money and made a deal for ten horses and three colts. I agreed to pay the rest of the money later. We also picked up four more horses from a neighbor of the Reimers. We loaded the horses aboard a freight train and John and I rode the caboose with the crew.

It was late at night when we arrived at Riverton. We unloaded, tied the horses to a nearby fence and gave them fodder and water. Then we spent the night at a friend's home. The next morning I was brought sharply to the realization that we had imprudently spent all our money for horses, not even holding back enough for the freight bill.

I had to ask the station master, Mr. Torrie, for a loan to cover the bill, until I could sell one of the horses. He was kind-hearted and understanding and agreed to the arrangement.

I was terribly impatient to get home as soon as possible to show off what a good businessman I had become. I led the best team down the road. The others came behind, and John followed at the rear to see that none of our stock strayed.

The whole family rushed out to greet us when we entered the yard. They stared in surprise at the horses, at me, then at John; and back to the horses.

"Look, father," I cried. "Look at all the horses we have. And this finest team is yours."

He looked perplexed, bewildered, even displeased! A practical farmer who had never ventured into the business of buying and selling, he couldn't fully comprehend my scheme. He saw only horses, seventeen (counting the colts), and wondered where we would keep them.

"Until this moment, son," he deflated me, "I thought you would make a fine farmer. But what a mess you've made. What are we to do with all these beasts? Where can we keep them? . . . "

His words doused cold water on my puffed up ego. I felt terribly humiliated. But I reasoned: "We can build a big barn in a very short time. We can use the horses to haul the logs from the woods. We'll roof it with hay and have a very satisfactory stable."

There was no other way. We built the stable. Almost immediately I sold one of the horses and paid back the station master. Later we sold all the full grown horses and one of the colts, holding back two teams and two colts for ourselves.

We made money, and even father finally realized that it was a good deal all around. The farmers who bought horses from us were also satisfied. They got good, strong, healthy teams at a fair price. My first business venture was a huge success.

Emily used to bake bread in this kind of farm oven.

CHAPTER XI

Another Venture

Emily was proud of my business deal, too. She was Walter's sister, a very pretty girl who was more and more in my thoughts each year. I first met her when I was thirteen, and I saw her frequently in the intervening years—three or four times a week when I was at home in Ledwyn. Her home was only two miles from ours, and it was a frequent gathering place for the young people of the neighborhood.

It was only natural that we should have many of our social gatherings at the Lahodowskys. Emily's parents were charming, sociable hosts. They loved company. They had a large house and it was filled with gaiety, the music of Walter's violin, dancing, pleasant conversation and special treats Mrs. Lahodowsky always seemed to have on hand.

Emily's mother was a charming conversationalist and could talk engagingly on a variety of subjects. Her charm is still very much in evidence despite her now advanced years. Her practical, cheerful philosophy of life was handed down to her children, whose lives and personalities were richly enhanced by this inheritance.

Mr. Lahodowsky was a well-read, civic-minded man; a frequent speaker at community meetings, and a leader in district political affairs. He was influential in the election of Mr. T. Ferley as our constituency representative in 1914. He helped organize our school districts and he was one of the first to recognize the need for provincial government intervention to improve the roads and drainage conditions in our marsh country. His untimely death from a stroke in July of 1917 was a tragic loss to the community. His influence, however, left an indelible impression on his family. His children inherited his ambition, his thirst for knowledge, his seriousness and his genteel behaviour.

Of course, in my earlier visits to their home, Emily was just Walter's little sister to me. As the years went by, however, I became more aware of her as a person, as a girl, then as a young woman. We danced together often. I admired her ability in dramatics when she frequently took part in plays presented at the Ukrainian community hall at Okno.

We had much in common and frequently got so absorbed in conversation that we would chat almost until daybreak. Such time passed so swiftly. But when the first rays of dawn penetrated the Lahodowsky living room, I would bid Emily a hasty good-bye and hurry home. Usually the sun would be well above the horizon before I covered the intervening two miles.

Whenever our neighbor, Mr. Abramsky, saw me

walking home so early in the morning he presumed I was returning from an errand. One such morning, I remember, he lectured his son Tom on my account:

"Get up, you lazybones!" he chided. "You should be ashamed. Gus Romaniuk is already on his way back home from some errand. You should be such an early bird . . ."

Of course, Tom knew where I had been. But he didn't give me away. He kept tactfully silent, enduring his father's tirade. It was painful, he told me later, but kind of funny, too.

Emily was pretty and she moved with grace and dignity. Her long wavy hair and bright eyes, shining with intelligent good humor from beneath prominent black eyebrows, attracted admiring attention wherever she went. She was very industrious, too. When her father died, and Walter began to join me on jobs away from home, she had to help out on the farm; plowing, sowing, hay-making and caring for the cattle. She had to bring the cows home each evening, and milk them. Sometimes she had to walk several miles through thick brush and marshlands following the tinkling cowbells to where the cows had gone in search of greener pasture.

Danger lurked in these woods, too. One could easily get lost, or come face to face with a prowling bear. Emily saw bears in the woods on several occasions. Once, when she almost bumped into one, she turned in fright and ran so fast she left most of her clothing hanging in strips from the bushes.

Yes, Emily worked hard, but she played the same way. She was very fond of dancing and we frequently went to parties. Such parties were held at farm homes in the area where the farmer and his wife were fond of sociability and actively participated in the festivities. It was the obligation of the hostess to provide lunch, after which the dancing began. Usually, Walter provided the music with one of the other lads playing drums. At times, the orchestra would be augmented by an Old Country harp.

Sometimes the parties were as many as five, six, or even ten miles away. I would walk to the Abramskys and meet Tom and his sister, then others would join our group from the Romanowych, Dziadykewych, Palkewych, and Mospanchuk homes. We would pick up Emily and Walter, and before we reached the party we made quite a parade.

For the long walk through the marsh we wore our everyday clothes, carrying dress clothes and shoes in bundles. Two of us usually blazed the trail, carrying a smoking tree stump suspended from a stick between our shoulders to ward off the buzzing swarms of mosquitoes. This chore we rotated among the boys.

When we neared the party home, boys and girls separated, each group going behind a clump of bushes to change into dress clothes. When all were dressed for the party, we met again and entered the house.

These parties usually lasted the night, until daybreak. When the sky grew pale in the east, the party would

break up and we would again retire to the bushes to change clothes. This latter change was always an uncomfortable one, for the clothes were damp and cold from the night air and morning dew. Neither did we find comfort in brushing cold drops of dew as we made our way through hay-grass. The smoking tree stump was a vital part of our armor on the return trip, too. And as we walked, the parade grew smaller and smaller. First Emily and Walter dropped out at their home. Others left when we arrived at their homes and, finally, I walked down the marsh road alone.

Dancing parties made our life more tolerable despite cold damp clothing, marsh grass and mosquitoes. We became accustomed to such inconveniences. To us, they seemed natural. Weddings, however, were the high spots on our social calendar. The routine was similar to that followed at our dancing parties, except that weddings were gayer and we met many more people.

When I was twenty the weddings seemed to take on greater significance. I felt I was getting old enough to take a bride, and that I should marry soon and settle down on my own farm. Thinking thusly, my feelings for Emily began to ripen and mature.

I was in love. I spent as much time as possible at Emily's home, and was convinced I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her.

But there was the problem of money. So I went away again and worked at various jobs through the spring,

summer and autumn of 1921. When I returned I couldn't wait to see Emily. We chatted eagerly for a very long time. When I learned that a play would be staged at Okno the next evening, I asked her to go with me.

The next evening I picked her up in my sleigh, proudly holding the reins of a fine, high-spirited animal that had once been a race horse. I had named him "Jack". I was proud of him and of my rig, and when I helped Emily aboard, I could see that she also appreciated this display of finery.

I had to hold the horse back on the trip to Okno. He liked to trot. But with Emily by my side, I wanted to ride as slowly as possible. It was a beautiful, moonlit night as we rode down the narrow road between walls of pine, fir and spruce trees. It was exciting and enchanting, too, to see the clear sky illuminated between the stately treetops by bright moonbeams that hung millions of glittering jewels on the snow-covered branches.

We chatted gaily during that ride. It was a perfect setting for a proposal. But the words wouldn't come.

There were many more such rides and long conversations before I grew bold enough to ask her to marry me. Of course, she had been expecting my proposal, but in true lady-like fashion she deferred to her mother, saying: "You'd better tell mother. See what she says."

(This will take more nerve than proposing to Emily, I thought. But I had no choice.)

I braved Mrs. Lahodowsky and, in a clumsy fashion made more awkward by my shyness at involving a third person in my romance, I said:

"I love your daughter and I want to marry her. She sent me to ask your permission."

She burst out laughing. "I'm happy to hear this from you, Gus," she said. "If you children love each other, I have no objections to your marriage. Of course you have my blessing."

I relayed the news to Emily and we embraced, happily contemplating this long overdue, but still unexpected turn of events.

"When do you want the wedding?" her mother asked later.

It was already late in the winter, so after much discussion we decided to wait until the following autumn, when I returned from my summer work.

When Walter heard how matters stood, he showered me with good wishes. He was my best friend, but it was nice to have him say: "I always figured you would marry my sister, Gus. That's the way I wanted it to be."

When I went off to work that spring, it was Emily's good-bye I carried with me; cherishing it through a summer that somehow seemed much longer than usual. I worked very hard and saved all my money for the forthcoming wedding. We wrote to each other faithfully, but it seemed that separation would never end. I was happy

as a young colt when work was over and I could return home.

We immediately launched wedding plans, setting the date for November 21. The year was 1922. We knew almost nothing of Canadian marriage customs, so ours was to be in the colorful, ceremonial tradition of the Old Country.

The ceremony actually started on Saturday evening with the making of the bridal wreath at Emily's home. Traditionally, only the bridesmaids, girl friends and invited married women participate in this ceremony. They fashion a bridal wreath (usually from periwinkle) and sing special wedding songs. The ceremony opens with a song which asks God and the bride's parents to bless the wreath-making. At the same time, the older women, who are the acknowledged culinary experts, begin preparing the special wedding dishes.

The next day, Sunday, Bill Mospanchuk (my best man) picked me up in his wagon and drove me to the bride's home from where we were to go to the local church for the nuptial ceremony. When Emily and I left her house, we received blessings from my father and mother and from her mother and a close friend who stood-in for her deceased father.

While blessing our new life, our parents held large plates of bread and salt in their hands. By Ukrainian custom, it is a great honor to receive a blessing or greeting from one holding a platter of the basic food, bread and

salt. It is an expression of an old proverb that states: "You do not starve when you have bread and salt."

After the nuptial ceremony at the church, Emily and I found our way to the wagon barred by a solid wall of well-wishers. One of the men challenged: "Let's see if the bridegroom can left her to the wagon seat with one sweep of his arms!" This also is traditional, and Bill had chosen a high-seated wagon especially for the test.

I shudder to think what might have happened had I failed. But I took Emily in my arms and deposited her on the high seat with one swift upward lift. The guests roared their approval, crying "Bravo! Bravo!" Thus they consented to my taking my place beside my bride.

Today, a reception customarily follows the wedding. We had a gala wedding party. I stood in the wagon and extended this invitation:

"We were not able to come to all your homes to invite you to our wedding party, but we do want you there and you will be most welcome. We'll go now to the bride's home. There will be plenty of good things to eat and drink for all. Come along to our party."

It was a big party. There were so many guests, they had to be seated by turns so that everyone could eat and drink. There was much gay laughter, merriment and dancing.

That evening the festivities ended with the final ceremony "the zavitannia" (the presentation), in which the assembled guests pay their respects to the newlyweds,

placing wedding gifts on a plate in exchange for a drink from the bridegroom.

Emily and I were seated at the head of the table, the bridesmaids by her side and the best man beside me. The "starosta" (master of ceremonies) invited the guests to come forward. This they did in this order: near relatives, close friends, then other guests. I gave each a drink, and they deposited gifts of money on the plate before us.

In the Ukraine, newlyweds are quite often presented with very expensive gifts: an acre of land, a horse, a cow, or other items to aid their start in wedded life. We received over $250, which was a considerable sum when we reckoned by the relatively poor economic straits of our Ledwyn district.

After deducting wedding expenses, we still had about $150 from the "zavitannia". This financed our honeymoon trip to Winnipeg and bought some of the immediate essentials we needed. After the honeymoon we returned to Emily's home where we were to live with her family, until able to set up housekeeping for ourselves.

We were still very young, and very much in love. Mrs. Lahodowsky seemed to enjoy our adolescent carrying-on, and quite often joked at our expense. One evening when I was seated beside Emily, being as amorously attentive as if I was still courting her, my mother-in-law injected playfully: "Well, children, what do you intend to do next?"

She had a twinkle in her eye and asked the question

with such a droll inflection, that we all burst out laughing. But, really, I was not prepared with a satisfactory answer. And that made me ask myself over and over again: "You're a married man now, Gus. What do you intend to do next?"

CHAPTER XII

A Skill and An Heir

Emily and I were happy together. I had achieved my most ardent desire: her constant companionship. But the future was something else again. I wanted to give her so much more than either of us had known. First, I had to find an opportunity that would offer security and a hope for improving our circumstances.

That winter Walter and I worked cutting cordwood. He made five or six trips to Riverton each week to sell the dry tamarack. After school, and on holidays, his young brother Jimmy would haul a load with Mrs. Lahodowsky's ox-team. We couldn't make much money at this, but it was enough for food and other necessities for the winter.

However, I envisioned my future as a farmer with a place of my own. That spring of 1923, I left Emily behind with her mother and went to find work; work that would pay well enough to give us a good start toward our dream.

I found myself a job with a road gang on a government highway project between Keewatin and Kenora in Ontario. It was common labor; shovel work, or carrying rock for the roadbed. I was paid thirty-five cents on hour. After about two weeks of this, the boss called us out of our tents one morning and told us to line up.

"All of you who signed on as drillmen step forward," he ordered. Several men did. "Now, any of you who are drillmen, but are not so registered, step forward," he continued. "The scale is sixty-five cents an hour."

Those last words jolted me into some rapid mental and physical activity. The physical came first. I stepped forward with the drillmen! (I hadn't the remotest idea of the job. But for sixty-five cents an hour, I had to do it. I have a wife to support now, I thought. I need that extra money.)

I looked at the others—the drillmen. Most of them were tall, strongly built Swedes. There were only two Ukrainians in the line; and only one was a drillman. I was bluffing.

The foreman put us into three-man working teams. I was standing with two Swedes at the end of the line and when he got down to us, one of the Swedes asked: "Do you want to work with us?"

I could only nod my head affirmatively. I wanted to, so badly. But I had no idea where, or how to begin!

We were sent to pick out our tools. I chose a drill hammer that looked like a good one. (But it was the heaviest.) When I was told to select some drills, I was really on the spot.

Thinking quickly, I excused myself for a minute and hurried into the nearby woods . . . When I returned the other two men had already set out the drills we needed. (That was close!)

We picked up our tools and were directed to a work area, where the road was being hacked out of a rocky precipice. There, in front of us, was a huge rock that had been marked by the construction engineers.

"Who wants to hold?" asked the first Swede.

"You hold the drill for the start," the second urged, turning to me.

"Oh, you hold it," I rejoined casually, as though granting him a favor.

He did. Seating himself on a hay-filled cushion, he took one of the drills firmly in his hands and held the sharp cutting end against the rock, right on one of the marks.

Then I understood what my sledge hammer was for.

I stood facing the first Swede, the drill between us. He swung his sledge full force, bringing it down squarely on top of the drill. Sparks flew from the impact. I did my best to imitate him, swinging my sledgehammer free and full. But I checked its downward swing just before it hit the drill. (I was afraid of hitting the hands of the Swede who held it.) No sparks flew from the rock. They knew I was not a drillman.

"You'd better hit it carefully, or you may cripple me for life," chided the worried drill-holder.

"I can do it," I pleaded. "Just give me a chance. I've used a sledgehammer before; put a lot of spikes in railroad ties with one."

They were good fellows. They helped me along. And

within the next few days I learned how to hit the drill squarely and firmly and how to handle the drills.

At first I felt as if my back was broken. But when I learned to swing the sledge expertly, I felt no further pain. After about three weeks, I was a reasonably expert drillman. I felt good. For this was skilled labor, and it paid more than the ordinary work I had been doing.

There is really an art to being a good drillman. The heavy sledges must be swung at a steady tempo, with a rhythmic matching stroke. A split second misstep by one of the team may endanger the other two. To help maintain this tempo and eliminate possible accident, the drillmen often sing songs with a strong, well-marked beat. Usually they sing in turn.

In our crew, the Swedes sang songs of their native land, and sometimes English music. My fellow Ukrainian always sang one of our folk songs, the one that begins: "The reapers work in the upland field, and the cossacks march through the valley below". In my turn I usually sang the old folk song, "My mother sent me to the well to fetch some water. Heigh-ho, to fetch some water . . . "

There was only one among us who really sang well. He was a Swede with a strong, pleasant, deeply resonant voice. When he sang the nearby cliffs echoed the notes as if it were a concert hall.

I worked hard and saved my money. Hair cutting paid for my incidental living expenses, and when work ended that fall I had accumulated a very satisfactory sum.

I felt doubly proud as I returned home. I had plenty of money, and I had a trade. I was no longer an unskilled laborer—but a drillman.

I had another reason to be proud, I learned, when I saw Emily. The stork had paid a visit to our home and left a gift that even then was ordering more milk in a very dictatorial way. We named our first-born, "Harry".

Later, when Mrs. Lahodowsky was bathing her grandson, I overheard her cooing to the baby and half talking to herself: "Now, you must have your bath. You are a helpless little thing. But you'll grow big and strong, and ambitious. And someday you will get married and have children of your own."

That seemed to be rushing things a bit, but it made me swell with pride, a pride that almost burst whenever I looked at Emily. She was now in full bloom of womanhood. In my absence she had blossomed like a beautiful flower and motherhood had made even more captivating the charms which first attracted me to her.

When I asked her about Harry's birth, she told me a new, young doctor from Riverton—a Dr. Thompson—had assisted the stork.

"The doctor is a very young man," she exclaimed, "but he is very serious; tall, broad-shouldered and handsome."

I felt a twinge of jealousy at hearing such praise for another from my wife's lips. After all, I was only twenty-two myself, and I was fully aware that I lacked much of

the polish and social consciousness that an educated man such as a doctor must have acquired. I tried to conceal my feelings, even while replying somewhat peevishly:

"Good for him. Have you paid him his fee?"

"Not yet," she answered with a curious look. "Anyway he didn't ask a fee. Just looked around before leaving and said we could send him a bag of potatoes or some other vegetables some day." And when I appeared puzzled by this, she added: "He seems to be such an understanding, kind-hearted doctor."

"Very strange, anyway," I interjected. "Never heard of one asking to be paid in potatoes."

"He's a good man," commented my mother-in-law. "What he said shows that he understands how poor the farmers of our district are."

Several days later I called on the young doctor, who had settled in Riverton just the year before (in 1922). I made a quick appraisal as I paid him his fee and, despite the jealousy I had felt earlier, I could readily understand Emily's enthusiasm. He impressed me as favorably; an impression that was to touch everyone in Riverton, the Ledwyn district, our entire constituency and even the Manitoba legislature through the years. For Dr. S. O. Thompson was destined to become a truly great man. One who, perhaps, contributed more to the progress of our section of Canada than any other single individual.

CHAPTER XIII

Foolishness, Kindness and Servitude

That winter of 1923 was a repetition of earlier ones—cordwood and more cordwood. Young Jimmy helped me haul the tamarack to town, in the hours when he was away from school. The work served to help me put in sufficient supplies, however, to tide the family over when I again went away in the spring.

I set out about the middle of April, teaming up in Winnipeg with a man from Okno, whom I knew as "Nick". We joined a railroad gang at North Portal, Saskatchewan, near the American border. We were a two-man team hired to put ties under rails, and we were paid according to the number of ties we laid.

I liked the work. But Nick quit, claiming it was too hard. I had to leave with him since there was no one available in the crew to team with me.

"Think I'll go to Weyburn," I confided. "I know some farmers there, and one of them may hire me again."

"I'll go with you," Nick agreed. "Maybe some farmer will have work for me, too."

If my memory serves me correctly, the train fare to Weyburn was $3.20. We had sufficient money for tickets, so we decided to take the two o'clock train. While we

waited, however, Nick suggested we hop a freight instead.

"Why should we pay $3.20 apiece, when we can ride free?" he argued.

"Yes, we can save the fare," I countered. "But we can also get into trouble if we run into a trainman or a station policeman."

"Forget about them," Nick argued. "I travel in boxcars most of the time, and I've never been caught yet." Then he mapped out the plan: "There's a water tank stop about six miles from here. A freight train will stop on the way to Weyburn a little after sunset. We can still make it."

It was against my better judgment, but I went along. When we arrived at the water tank, we found the surrounding ground under several inches of water. However, we spread dry grass over some higher ground and lay down to rest, and wait.

It grew dark, but still no freight train. Clouds blackened the sky and the air grew chilly. It began to drizzle. Then it rained, and the rain came down in cold torrents. We huddled in blankets we unpacked from our suitcases, but soon even this covering was futile. The blankets were soaking wet, as were our clothes. We shivered in the cold.

The rain changed to snow. Large flakes settled over us. The wet ground beneath our feet began to freeze. Our wet clothing grew stiff.

"If this keeps on, we could freeze to death," Nick spat through teeth that chattered from cold and fear.

I shared this dim view. "If there was a forest nearby, I could make a shelter and start a fire," I mused aloud. "But in this prairie country, I'm helpless."

The cold north wind blew its blood-chilling breath into our very bones. We looked frantically about for a sign of a light in a farmhouse, or other shelter. But there was nothing but wind and snow, and the water tank mocking us in the darkness.

Our situation was desperate. We could have hiked back to the railway station (and had we been older and wiser we would have done so). But we were young and foolishly stubborn. We waited for the train, not realizing that its arrival would do little to alleviate the cold that was in our bones, or the dampness that had worked through our clothing and the pores of our skin into our very flesh.

We ran back and forth, flexed our knees up and down, waved our arms and slapped our sides to keep from freezing. The activity probably saves our lives, but it didn't seem to help much at the time. We shivered and froze.

The train finally arrived at about three hours past midnight. It stopped for water and we climbed aboard one of the boxcars. Even inside it was bitter cold. We kept stamping our feet and slapping our hands until the train got underway. Then I lit a lighter and, by its flickering light, we found paper, some scraps of thin boards and a piece of tin. We flattened the tin and started a small fire on it. We could at least warm our hands. But

we had to keep the fire low to avoid setting the car afire, or being discovered by the train crew.

We were still shivering with cold when our train arrived at Weyburn. But it wasn't the end of the line for us, nor the end of our foolish adventure. When the train came to a halt, our car was right in front of the station house. And there, on the platform, stood two mounted policemen!

"We'll wait and hop off when the train gets underway," we reasoned. But that plan, too, was foiled. When we were about to jump, the train was crossing a bridge not far from the station. By the time we passed over the bridge the train had gained speed and jumping would have been foolhardy. We had to stay on.

By then our clothes were dry and we began to feel a little better. When the sun came up we opened the car door and sat with our legs hanging out, soaking up the warms rays.

Our train arrived in Pasqua and we got off. We were terribly tired, still a bit numb from the cold, and starved! But there were no stores or restaurants at Pasqua, and we found we would have to walk back several miles to find a place to eat.

We walked about two miles. Then we had to rest. Neither of us could walk another step. Near the railroad tracks, we spread out some grass and lay down. Nick had his head resting on a rail, and I suppose he was too numb to notice, much less care.

We didn't intend to fall asleep. But we did. I have no idea how long we lay there. Then the ominous sound of a train whistle pierced my numbed brain. I sat up in terror as I saw the train bearing down upon us. Horrified I glanced at Nick, lying with his head on the rail!

I reached over, grabbed his legs and tugged and stumbled backwards. The train rumbled past just as I pulled him clear. That was really a hairbreadth escape!

It was some time before we shook off the effect of being so near disaster, and regained our composure. We got up and walked over to wash our faces in a puddle of water nearby. I looked at Nick and was alarmed to see that he was dark blue, his face looked like it had received the full contents of an ink bottle.

"Migosh! You look like you washed in ink," I exclaimed.

"So do you," he rejoined, looking at me.

I took a little mirror from my suitcase and examined my own face. It was dark blue! I looked at my hands. They were blue, too. So chilled had we been.

We picked up our suitcases and walked down the tracks until we reached a small town where we found a Chinese restaurant. We ordered dinners and, when the food arrived, we ate ravenously, gulping the food down in no time. Then we asked to have the order repeated.

Amazed by our appetites, the restaurant owner inquired: "Did you enjoy the dinner that much?"

"Yes, we did," I answered, thinking to myself that

any food tastes good when one is near starvation. Then I inquired whether he had some place where we could sleep.

He showed us to a room above the restaurant. It had a wide, double bed. When we saw it, we practically fell in and passed out. We slept straight through until morning.

When we got up, we found that our faces and hands were literally covered with itching red spots. Bedbugs! There must have been armies of them, and their attack obviously had been well concentrated. They hadn't disturbed our sleep. But the thought of them disturbed us now. And we were very self-conscious. Everywhere we went it seemed that people stared at our speckled faces.

We took a train that afternoon. This time we had to ride "back" to Weyburn. And we rode in a passenger car, paying $3.00 each for the privilege. How much cheaper it would have been had we bought train tickets at North Portal!

When we reached Weyburn, we were still so tired we rested another day before looking for work. Then, down the street, I met Mr. G., a young farmer who been kind to me on an earlier working visit to Weyburn.

"I can use one man for a month, for seeding time," he said. "I'll pay fifty dollars."

I took the job. Nick was hired by another farmer. So we parted.

Mrs. G. greeted me like an old friend when we reached their farm home. "Welcome, Gus," she smiled. "I am glad to see you are going to be with us."

It was late in the evening. Nevertheless, she prepared tea and lunch. While I was eating I was conscious of her studying me closely.

"What's wrong, Gus?" she asked. "You don't look like your old self. You don't look at all well. What has happened to you?"

"Just tired," I evaded, not wishing to talk about the harrowing experience of the last two days. "I think I need a good night's rest more than anything."

I doubt that she was satisfied with that explanation. But she showed me immediately to my room. I went right to sleep and slept soundly until morning.

I didn't feel any better upon awakening. However, I had hired out to work, and that I was determined to do. After breakfast my employer took me to the stable, showed me the team we would use that day and pointed out the seed-drill. We harnessed the horses, hitched them to the drill, filled it with seed and went out to the field. We sowed all day long, quitting at supper time.

It must have been even more apparent, then, that I was not well. I caught Mrs. G. watching me closely. She knew, I think. But she tactfully refrained from asking how I felt.

After supper we talked for awhile and they congratulated me when I told them about my marriage to

Emily and about our little boy. I excused myself rather early and went to my room. I slept through the night, but I did not feel well when I got up the next morning. However, I kept working in the field. At supper, Mrs. G. again asked if I was ill. I still refused to admit how poorly I felt, explaining that I was just a little indisposed.

There was little question about my condition the third day. I felt miserable! But I worked through the day. When we quit I stabled the horses. But when I tried to hang the harness on a wall peg above my head, I couldn't do it! I was too weak to swing the harness high enough to reach the peg.

I didn't realize that my feeble efforts were being closely observed by Mrs. G., who was milking in a nearby stall. She came over, took the harness from me and, with little effort, hung it on the peg. Then she looked at me sympathetically and said:

"You can't explain this away, Gus. I told you you were sick."

At supper, I related how Nick and I had practically frozen to death trying to get to Weyburn.

"I knew it," Mrs. G. exclaimed. "You used to be so cheerful, so full of life. Your voice was loud and vibrant and you laughed a lot. But this time you have said very little, laughed not at all, and when you talked, you spoke so softly we could hardly hear you."

Her "before and after" recital made me realize for the first time how gravely ill I must have become. I felt

very weak. Sad, too, when I thought what a blow this could be to my family.

The next morning I was too weak even to get up. I had a fever and my chest felt as if a heavy weight were pressed upon it. I had to give in and stay in bed.

Mrs. G. brought me my breakfast, but I managed to swallow just a cup of coffee. Then I urged her to take me to a hospital.

"That won't be necessary, Gus," she placated me. "I'll make you well again, myself. Just do what I say, and be patient."

She was a wonderful woman; so kind and sure of herself. Somehow I had implicit faith in her, so I consented and tried to be an obedient patient.

She started by giving me a strong drink. Rum, I think, seasoned with something. Then she rubbed a burning linament into my chest, massaging the skin so hard and so long that drops of perspiration stood out on her forehead. She took a goose feather, dipped it in salve and applied it to my chest. Finally, she put mustard plaster over this and bandaged it tightly to my body. After covering me with warm blankets, she ordered:

"Now, don't uncover. Lie still. I expect to find you in this same position when I come in again." The she left to do her household and farm chores.

I got warmer and warmer. I began to sweat. Soon my whole body seemed afire, and the bed clothes became soaked with perspiration. It felt like the mustard plaster

was burning clear through to my back. I didn't think I could stand it much longer.

Mrs. G. looked in. I pleaded with her to remove that damnable plaster. But she grinned and warned: "Hush, now. We'll spoil all the good we've done if I take it off too soon."

I suffered under that mustard plaster for twenty-four hours. When she stripped it away, strips of skin went with it. My chest felt like a huge open wound. I glanced down, and saw it was blood red.

She dipped the goose feather in some soothing salve and very gently applied it to my reddened chest. Then she covered it with a thin layer of absorbent cotton and bandaged me again. She changed the bed sheet, covered me with blankets and warned me to lie still and not remove any of the covers.

I lay there, swathed in bandages, for the next four days. Mrs. G. visited me from time to time, bringing me light, easily digested foods. Each time, she asked if I felt any better. The fact was that I was really improving each day. I told her so.

On the fifth morning, I felt well enough to get up. My chest itched like it had been lashed with poison ivy. But aside from this, I felt good. Besides, I was eager to get back to work. That's what I had been hired to do. And I thought it shameful to have imposed so on these good people.

I went into the field with Mr. G. From then on I worked regularly and, by the end of the month, all the seeding and other spring work was done. Mr. G. paid me off, but before I left I thanked them profusely for their kindness.

"You are a wonderful nurse," I lauded Mrs. G. "You saved my life. For your ministrations I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Perhaps, some day, my wife and son will also thank you for what you have done."

We shook hands warmly. Then I left.

I looked for work on other farms in the district, but there was little to be had. Finally, I hired out (for two and one-half months at $40 a month) as a farm hand for a wealthy farmer in the district. I had to agree to stay on until August 20. If jobs hadn't been so scare, I don't think I would have fulfilled the contract.

My new boss was just the opposite of Mr. G. He showed almost no consideration for others. He planned every available minute to accomplish as much as possible. He also saw to it that every ounce of energy, both from horses and men, was used up. He had a large stable of horses and he used a fresh team each day, in order to get more work done. (It is doubtful if one team could have taken two consecutive days of that pace.)

He was not only a slave-driver to his help, but to his own family, as well. He awakened his sons very early each morning—with a club in his hand. He was the first farmer ever to treat me not as another human being, but

as a hired lackey. He rarely spoke other than to assign more work, and even then his tone was quarrelsome.

My sleeping quarters could scarcely be called that. I was assigned a "hole" in a small granary. Many farmers had better quarters for their dogs. It was unimportant, however, since he left one little time for sleep. I had to get up at five o'clock in the morning, sometimes even earlier. My day began immediately with feeding the horses and throwing out the fresh dung. This I had to spread in the field. Next, I had to clean and groom the horses, harness two or three teams and feed the pigs. When these chores were completed, I could have breakfast.

At seven o'clock it was my duty to take the horses to a long trough and pump water for them to drink. Then I had to hitch one team to a plow, disks, or cultivator (depending on the work to be done) and start my day in the field.

I kept up this back-breaking schedule each day for a month. Not even rain interrupted my work. On such days I was assigned stable chores, or sent out to repair fence breaks. This boss saw that I was kept busy every minute.

In July, he changed the schedule. I had to get up at four instead of five o'clock in the morning. It was haymaking time.

The earlier hour was necessary to allow me to complete my stable chores, and still leave for the hay field

by six o'clock. This land was about six miles from the main farm. Two farm hands, hired by the day to make hay, lived in a shack there.

I would leave at six o'clock with a wagon and team. I cut, raked, stacked and carted hay until six in the evening. Then I had to cart a load home and pitch it into a loft above the stable. Only then was I free to have supper. My evening meal was always very late during the three-week hay-making season.

By then, I was so terribly tired I decided to quit. But my boss had an answer for that.

"Quit before your contract time is up, and I'll hold back your pay," he warned.

I had no choice, but to work it out (like a prison sentence). My "sentence" ended August 20, just at harvest time. That day we had been finishing preparing the binders and other equipment for harvesting. At supper, I reminded my employer that my time was up.

"Well," he snorted. "I can use harvest help now. You can stay on if you want."

I didn't want. And I didn't even acknowledge his invitation. I got up from the table, went to the stable and climbed into the hay to rest. There I fell asleep. And I slept for almost twenty-four hours!

When I showed up at the house, my boss said he had been growing worried over my sudden disappearance. But I wanted to get even farther away. He paid me what I had coming, and I left.

CHAPTER XIV

Labor Trouble and Steam Engines

I went into town, where I was pleasantly surprised to find my brother John, Bill Mospanchuk, Bill Dziadykewych and two others from home. They had come to find harvest work.

"Good Heavens! What happened to you, Gus?" Mospanchuk blurted. "You're so thin and your skin is burned almost black." After we shook hands he exclaimed: "You must be carrying sandpaper in your palms. And what callouses! Bet a spike would bend in them."

I told them about the slave-driving farmer for whom I had worked the past two and a half months. They were properly sympathetic—even apprehensive, hoping such wouldn't be their lot.

It wasn't. We all found work with a threshing outfit working the wheat fields of the district. The owner was a fine, understanding man. He treated us well, as did our foreman. Wages were good—$5.00 per day. We lived in one tented wagon and had our meals in another. The board was good, too.

We were getting along famously, and could have earned a lot of money on that job. But one of the crew was a malcontent, an older man who was born a grumbler.

Probably nothing ever completely satisfied him. Our mistake was in giving ear to his complaints.

"We're underpaid," he kept griping. Even though $5.00 a day was the existing wage scale for threshing crews.

After dinner one day he called us together in our wagon and launched into a tirade on his favorite subject: "Let's not go back to work today, boys," he said. "We'll strike for higher wages. We can stand the cooking, even though it's not the best. But we should have more money. Let's demand $6.00 a day. If the boss refuses, we'll quit. He can't thresh without our help. Besides, he is growing rich anyway. Why should we help him grow richer? C'mon, let's tell him, now!"

Young blood naturally responds to rebellion. We were young. Even though some of us were reluctant to spoil our working chances, we had no choice but to follow the clamoring majority.

We faced our employer and our spokesman curtly laid his cards on the table: "We demand a raise to $6.00 a day. If we don't get it, we'll strike and you'll be without a crew."

The boss seemed more hurt than alarmed at this turn of events. He patiently explained: "Look, boys. I'm satisfied with you, and I'd like to keep you on. But I simply can't pay $6.00 a day. Not while the other outfits are paying five.

"You see," he continued, "if I pay you more, I shall

have to charge the farmers more. If they would pay it then I could pay you. But they won't. Why should they? They can hire other outfits at the current rate per bushel. So, if I raise your wages, you and I will be out of work in no time."

That seemed reasonable to me. It was even better when he made a counter proposal. "However," he offered, "I will do this. We'll keep your wages at $5.00, but I'll give you free board on the rainy days when we can't work. There'll be no further deductions for board on such days—even if the rain should idle us for several weeks."

It was an excellent offer. We had a lot of rain that autumn. But our leader was stubborn, as were his rabid followers.

"Nothing doing," he rejected. "We quit. Pay us off."

We had lost a good job. I was one of the minority reluctant to leave. But none of us wanted to be labeled a "turn-coat" or "backslider". We went along, back to the little town. From there the six of us took a train to Colfax to seek employment.

It rained for days. The threshing outfits were idle. There was no work to be had. We put up at a boarding house and the cost ate heavily into our funds. Some of the fellows loafed around the pool room, too, spending money there. Several were soon flat broke. They went to work for neighboring farmers, just for board and room during the rainy period. Others hopped a freight to other

farming districts. Only Bill Dziadykewych and I remained. We were the only two with enough money left to wait out the rain.

It stopped a couple of days later, and we were hired by a Mr. Innis, to work with his threshing outfit. His farm was just two miles from town. He was very well-to-do and his land reached out as far as the eye could see. He kept everything in perfect order. In fact I had never seen a more orderly farm.

The sheaves of wheat were still damp when we started threshing, so the work went very slowly. Straw that fueled the steam engine was also damp, and the fireman had difficulty keeping steady boiler pressure. At times, operations would halt entirely for lack of steam. Some flax straw was brought up and it gave more heat, but the difference wasn't noticeable in steam pressure.

After three days, the straw was dry enough to burn steadily. Even then our fireman couldn't keep steam up. This puzzled me. I had worked around steam engines a little, and just couldn't understand why he should be having difficulty. Finally I went over and asked:

"Why can't you keep steam in this engine?"

"Why?" he looked at me disdainfully. "Cuz it's an old engine. That's why!"

"How about letting me see what I can do?" I ventured. "I've had a little experience at firing."

"Go right ahead," he waved his hand and grinned

skeptically. "Fire this blankety-blank engine, if you think you can. I'll take your team of mules."

"Better ask the engineer if it's all right with him," I suggested. "I don't want to cause any trouble."

"Why not?" the engineer agreed. "Let him try."

I had a pretty good idea of how much straw to use to keep a steady head of steam, and how to feed the engine for an efficient fire. An hour or so of steady firing and I had it singing with steam. It kept the threshing machine working steadily, too.

From then on I was fireman for our outfit. The job paid well and I liked it, even though I had to get up at four o'clock in the morning to fire up. It was three o'clock in cold weather when it took longer to get the boiler hot.

A sort of continuing contest among firemen kept the work from becoming monotonous. We would race to see who could build up full pressure the fastest. Honors for the day went to the fireman who first pulled the whistle cord in a long triumphant signal. It was often a close race. Sometimes I had my hand on the whistle cord, just about to pull the string when another engine would beat me to it. Poised, waiting for the whistle to stop so I could at least be second, some other fireman sometimes got his whistle in ahead of mine.

At such moments, I would be angry with myself, and resolve to be first the next day. On a number of occasions I was first. It was fun. We also got a kick out of sending whistle signals back and forth, becoming so adept we

could almost make music like a calliope with just that one whistle.

Sometimes on Sundays, or rainy days, we firemen would meet in town and have fun kidding each other and debating who had the best record.

The threshing came to an end in autumn, and I went home, my pockets loaded. As the train wheels click-clacked over the rails I thought how much I missed my family . . . It was a long time to be away each summer . . . I would have to find some other work . . . Wonder how big Harry is . . . I must give him a better start in life than I had . . . Should I buy a farm or go into business . . . Where should we settle down? . . .

The train pulled into Riverton and it was late at night when I arrived home. Emily got up and met me as soon as she heard my footsteps. She was prettier than ever. After kissing me tenderly, she went into the next room and returned with the baby.

"Look how Harry has grown, since you went away," she proudly noted.

I took the child in my arms, fondling it tenderly (though awkwardly).

"We have company staying with us," Emily said. "Walter and his wife are here."

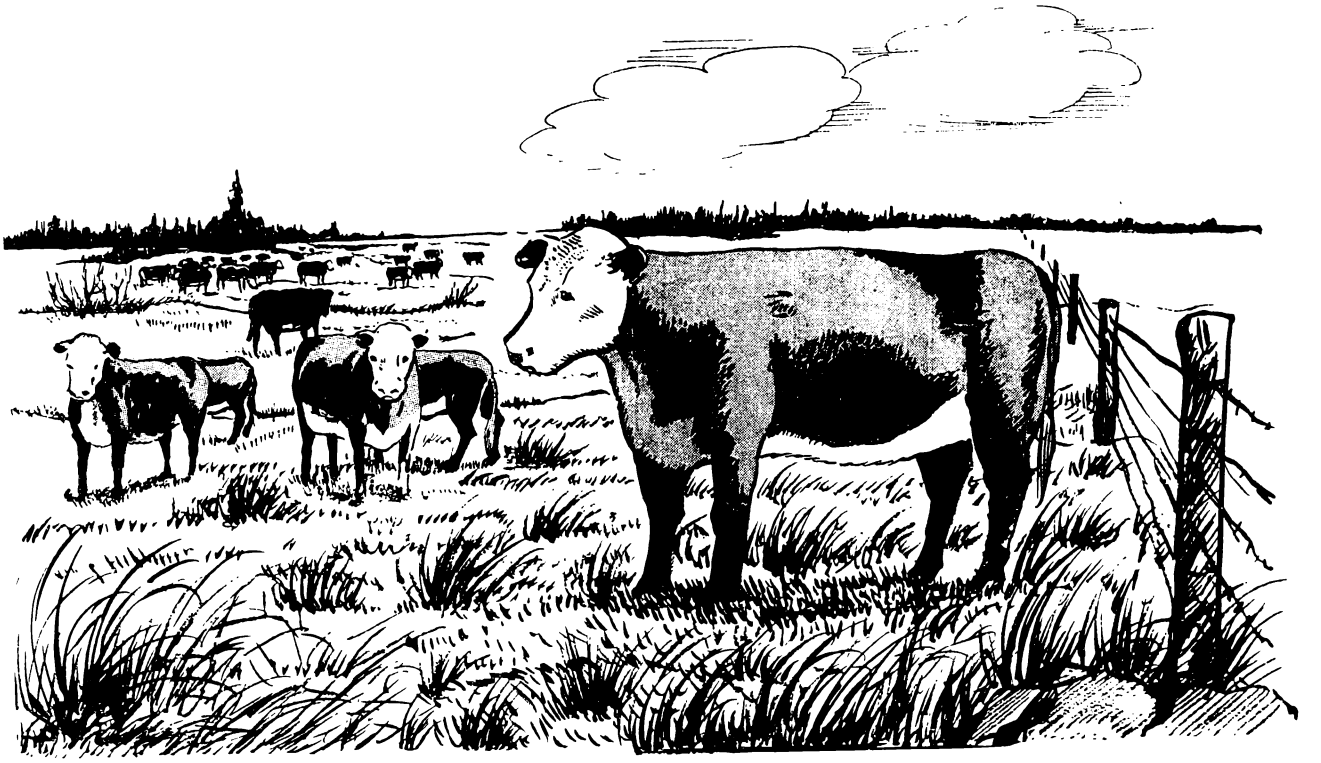
Just then Walter's wife came into the kitchen, with a child in her arms. "Look, Gus," she said. "Haven't we a pretty little girl?"

I looked at the baby, and almost dropped Harry! But

it wasn't Harry. I had been holding Walter's daughter, Eleanor. His wife had Harry in her arms. I felt sheepish and we all laughed heartily at the joke they had played on me.

Harry was an active little boy, learning to walk that winter. It was wonderful to be at home with him, with Emily, with all our family. How I enjoyed chatting with my mother-in-law, or with Stefanie or Jimmy, who were progressing wonderfully at school.

These were the lighter moments. But for them, the winter was much like the others. I cut wood and hauled it to Riverton, where I sold it or traded for supplies.



" . . . rented a large meadow and put them out to graze."

CHAPTER XV

Riverton, Barbering and Business

The land in our Ledwyn district was again flooded that spring of 1925. It was almost impossible to get a wagon through to either Arborg or Riverton. Only the higher ridges of our country roads were above water. Tilled fields were reduced to small patches by each house. The rest of the land was a jungle of woods and marsh water.

All attempts by representatives of our Gimli constituency to interest the legislature of Manitoba in the rich black soil that lay hidden and unusable under the marsh of the Ledwyn area had gone unheeded. Drainage was the only answer. Yet the provincial government refused to appropriate funds for the project.

Many farmers, their complaints and pleadings falling on deaf ears, left their water-sogged land and moved to other parts of Canada. New settlers came and worked the abandoned farms, but with no success. Only those of us who were able to clear off and till a few acres of land to eke out a bare existence, remained.

Short of all-out drainage, there was no hope for anything better. I could see no future for myself, or my family if we remained here. Yet, neither did we want to

sever connections completely, and move far away from our families and friends.

Emily and I thought the matter over carefully and finally reached a decision. I bought a lot in town, in Riverton, and that spring we built a small, 22 by 14-foot, two-room house. As soon as it was completed we moved in. It was a beginning; our first roots in Riverton.

Riverton lies on the bank of the Icelandic River some eighty odd miles north of Winnipeg. The river is a connecting link with Lake Winnipeg slightly over three miles north. Originally settled by Icelandic fishermen, it was known as the town of Icelandic River until 1914 when the present name was adopted.

When we built there in 1925 it was just a little town, catering to poor farmers and fishermen. There were farms to the south and west of town. Fishermen lived just south, along the river, or east on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. North, there was nothing; nothing but wilderness and quagmire and all but impassable marshland.

This was the real back country, populated by Indians and trappers; and moose, deer, coyotes, mink, otter, muskrats and other wildlife. The many small lakes and ponds to the north were home to thousands of wild geese and ducks and the region was a prolific breeding ground for these waterfowl.

Riverton was thickly populated, if one counted the dogs. It had more dogs than people. Dogs of all breeds, but huskies and similar sled dog breeds were predomin-

ant. The community was not overrun with the animals, however. They were kept chained to the houses, and many of them were tied up to the huge warehouses where the frozen fish were stored in the winter. The summertime dog population was owned by local fishermen who used them to transport fish in the winter. They also were used for light delivery work.

There were even more dogs in the winter when fur traders brought their pelts in from the far north country, or Indians and other far north settlers came by dog toboggans to pick up mail and supplies.

Farmers came to town with ox teams or horse teams, and two old automobiles occasionally belched their precarious way down the street. The Canadian Pacific Railway line also ran into Riverton.

Radio was non-existent for us. But the howling dogs would have drowned out reception anyway.

Our business district had the railway station, hotel, bank, four general stores, two poolrooms, a drug store and a livery stable. We also had a sawmill, recently purchased from Sveinn Thorvaldson by Mr. Howard. It employed 25 to 30 men. We had a schoolhouse and a beautiful church, the Icelandic Church, which still stands on the shore of the river.

Our largest buildings were the fish warehouses. They were built on posts, so that they would be level with the railway cars for easy freight loading.

That first summer in Riverton I got a job at the saw-

mill, working there until harvest time. Then I again went to the Innis farm at Colfax. During the winter I sawed cordwood in the woods near Riverton. All the money I earned, I turned over to Emily. She would take out enough for our living expenses, then deposit the balance in the local bank. We had agreed that neither of us would touch a penny of this savings account. It was to be our nest egg for starting our own business.

Mine weren't the only earnings to go into this account. When she wasn't doing housework or mothering Harry, Emily sewed dresses for a number of women in the town. Part of these earnings went into the bank.

In that first year, we became well acquainted with our neighbors in Riverton and grew to like the community very much. One of our neighbors was Mr. Briem, who owned a large livery stable. Fishermen stabled their teams with him. His horses and sleighs, or buggies, were our main public transportation service. He took passengers wherever they wished to go. And, if they were short of cash at the time, he would just nod his head understandingly and say: "Oh, I can wait. Pay me when you can." He was a kind hearted man, and a good neighbor.

Victor Eyolfson was our postmaster. He also owned a general store, where the postoffice was located. He was an expert at letter writing and he knew how to complete legal documents. At times I asked his help in filling out some papers, or had him write some letters in English for

me. He had an assistant named Ole Olafson. Both were very interesting men and I enjoyed chatting with them.

I learned much about the "old times", too, from Bjossi Sigurdson, pioneer storekeeper at Riverton.

Of course, Sveinn Thorvaldson had the largest general store. He was the man who had given me my first job as a logger, the day I stood on tiptoe for fear of being rejected as too small. He was one of the most prominent men in the district, and he played a very important role in its building. He was a kind man, who treated all persons alike, regardless of race or creed. Had it not been for the liberal credit he extended to everyone in the lean years, many settlers might have been without food and supplies. He gave them what they needed during the summer, and they repaid him with cords of tamarack in the winter. His lumber camps, and the sawmill also provided employment for many needy persons.

In those days, Riverton was part of the Arborg-Bifrost municipality, and Mr. Thorvaldson served for a time as reeve. He was keenly aware of the sad financial straits of the area and worked to get maximum improvement at a minimum of expense, giving approval to only the projects of immediate necessity.

That year, too, I met G. J. Guttormson, the Icelandic poet. He still lives on a farm near Riverton, and his stories of Icelandic pioneers there, at Hecla Island, Gimli and other settlements along the shores of Lake Winnipeg, have lost none of their flavor and literary excellence.

In the spring of 1926, Emily and I decided I should enter the barbering profession seriously. I enrolled at school in Winnipeg, paying $150 for a three-month course. I began to learn the trade right at the bottom—at the last chair in the back row. But my previous experience served me in good stead. After performing my first hair cut, I was moved up to the fifteenth chair. My instructor seemed to like my work.

When I gave a man a pompadour cut, the style that was all the rage, my teacher examined the work with amazement. He walked all around the subject, examining the hair cut from every angle.

A student who had been studying for six months, commented admiringly: "It is perfect!"

"Of course it is," snapped our instructor. "It is perfect, and do you know why? Not because Romaniuk has had some barbering experience. No, he has that inborn feeling that tells him how a good haircut should look." He looked from me to the advanced student and commented: "You should have more of such feeling."

I felt exhalted at this high praise. However, when I completed the course, I didn't rush to Riverton to open a shop. There was hardly anybody in Riverton during the summer season who could afford a haircut. Instead, I went again to Saskatchewan to help harvest and thresh crops.

When I returned in autumn I was fired up with plans for a real business venture. I invited Walter (my brother-

in-law) over to discuss them. I hoped to interest him in a partnership venture.

"Here's the plan," I outlined when he arrived. "I've been thinking of a general store and barber shop under one roof. Each would have customer appeal that would help the other."

Walter liked the idea, but he had some practical objections. "We would need much money to start out," he said. "And we should have some business knowledge or experience. We have neither!"

"We can learn the store business," I tossed off cheerfully. "You can speak a little English, and read and write. You will be in charge of the store. I'll operate the barber shop in the back part of the building."

"What'll we use for money?" he wanted to know. "I would make a very poor partner with my four hundred dollars."

"I've got it all figured out," I pushed further. "I have some money in the bank. I could sell my team of horses and I would have about eleven hundred dollars, altogether. With your money we would have fifteen hundred; surely enough for a start. The profits, if there are any, we will share equally.

"Now, how about it?" I urged.

I knew it was a good proposition for him. Too good to turn down. Actually neither of us had anything. I stood to lose $1,100; he stood to lose only $400.

"All right," he finally gave in. "We may go bankrupt

and be the laughing stock of the district. But we may as well take a chance."

Looking around for a suitable building, we found one back of Dr. Thompson's drug store. It had been his first store. He built a larger one as business expanded.

We told the doctor of our plans and asked if we could rent the building.

"The location isn't good," he cautioned. "But we can fix that. I have a lot across the street. Move the building there, fix it up and it should do very well."

We were much relieved at having crossed the first hurdle so easily. "How much rent will you charge for the building and the lot," I asked.

His stipulation proved once again what a remarkable man he was. "Well, you'll be dealing in wood as part of your business," he reasoned. "Let's settle it this way. From time to time, you may give me a cord for fuel. It needn't be the best wood you have. Some cords that don't sell, will do very well."

I doubt that any new business ever received such a gracious send-off. We moved the building to the west side of the street. Fixed up the interior, and installed a lot of shelves. Then we went to Winnipeg to buy our stock.

We didn't even know where to find a wholesale store in the city, and we got only evasive answers from several storekeepers whom we asked. Finally, a Ukrainian general merchant on McFarlane street, told us where to get the merchandise we needed.

CHAPTER XVI

The Fur Almost Flies

In November, 1926, we opened our combination general store and barber shop. At first people came out of sheer curiosity. But as time went on, more and more came to buy, or to get a haircut. Some farmers began to sell us their wood, and bought supplies in exchange. We had figured on a potential market in the fishermen, trappers and farmers who came to Riverton. But we were doing more business with the local people than we had expected. It was a good beginning.

We were open for business from early morning until midnight. The evening hours usually found the store crowded with people who came to buy goods, or get a haircut, or just to pass the time of day. Both Walter and I were happy in our new business. The store I left entirely up to him. The barber shop was my domain.

Shortly before Christmas, Walter left for Winnipeg to buy stock for the holiday trade. "I will also check on current prices," he said before leaving, "so we don't undersell some of our stock."

It was a busy season when Walter left. The late fall fishing on Lake Winnipeg was in full swing and hunters and trappers were bringing pelts to town. Many of them

Gus, Walter and John as fur traders.

stopped in for haircuts and supplies. I had a number of opportunities to buy furs. After thinking it over, I reasoned: "Why not? We could probably resell at a profit."

I showed more interest when the next trapper brought some pelts in. I questioned him about the furs.

"This one is wolf," he pointed. "This is a fox pelt and this one's mink."

"What do you want for all your skins?" I ventured bravely.

"One hundred and twenty dollars," he replied.

"I'll give you a hundred," I shot back swiftly, trying to drive a bargain.

"Sold."

We were in the fur trading business!

The purchase took most of our cash and when I bought some more pelts from another trapper, our working capital was gone. I hung the furs in the store and admired the result. "How pleased Walter will be," I thought, "when we sell these at a good profit."

The more I thought about it, the more sold I became on the idea. When other trappers came into the store, I decided to plunge. I borrowed four hundred dollars at the bank and spent it all on furs. Then I began to get a bit worried. What if we had to take a loss?

On the evening when Walter was due home, I kept watching the door for his arrival. I went out several times and looked down the street to see if he was on his way. Peering thus in the semi-darkness, I saw a stranger in a long fur coat and fur cap coming toward the store, a big bundle in each hand. As he drew near, he greeted me:

"Hello, Gus."

It was Walter! He was happy and smiling. He looked

prosperous, too, in the bearskin coat and lambskin cap. The coat, however, was unusually long, giving him a bear-like appearance.

I thought to myself, "How nice of him. He must have bought that coat for both of us, that is why it is so long on him." But I didn't thank him. Instead, I laughed (tactlessly, I fear) at his strange appearance. And that laugh started a chain of unpleasant events.

Walter saw the fur pelts hanging on the walls and a frown creased his forehead. "What are these?" he demanded sharply.

"Which ones," I replied in mock innocence.

"These, right here," he snapped, pointing to one group of skins.

"Why those are wolf pelts," I answered, somewhat more subdued by his mounting anger.

"And these?"

"Mink skins," I answered, continuing, "and next are fox skins, then fisher skins."

"Well, whose are they?" he wanted to know.

"Ours."

"What do you mean, ours?" his voice shot up half an octave.

"I bought them."

"You bought them!" he shrilled, reddening with anger. "You bought them! What do you know about furs? . . . What kind of skin is this? . . . "

"I told you before, Walter. That's mink skin," I explained with mixed feelings.

"And how do you know it's mink?" he mocked. "Maybe it's cat."

"The trapper told me it was mink," I defended somewhat lamely.

But that served only to impress him further with my gullibility. In disgust, he threw his new fur cap to the floor, his body seemed to shake with the mounting force of his anger. But he controlled his temper and asked, in a more reasonable tone: "What did you pay for all these furs?"

"Six hundred dollars." My reply was barely audible.

"Where did you find so much money?"

"Borrowed some of it from the bank," I explained uneasily.

"Hmph!" he snorted. "Evidently the banker hasn't any more brains than you have." He grew more bitter. There was a note of despair in his voice and injured accusation in his eyes as he said: "They could be cat skins, or dog skins. Now we are bankrupt! . . . If I had known you would do a fool thing like this, I would never have been your partner . . . "

His words cut deeply, cleaving a gaping open wound in our long friendship. A funereal silence descended. We sat drawn within ourselves, shrinking from worry.

Our two families shared my home. But we did not leave together that night. Walter stalked out. I put out

the store lights and sat down in my barber's chair, overcome with disappointment at this unexpected outcome to what I had planned as a happy reunion. His reaction caused me to reappraise my purchases, and I became worried, too. Maybe we were bankrupt! In my eagerness to turn a good deal, had I destroyed our little business?

It was late, but I didn't feel sleepy. I had had no supper, but I didn't feel hungry. I had been in the store since early morning, but I didn't want to go home. When I finally did go, it was very late indeed.

Nothing seemed to disturb the gloom that settled over us in the days that followed. Walter and I did not speak. We even tried to avoid looking at each other. I slept but little and had no appetite for food. When I wasn't cutting hair, I sat despondently in my chair. Occasionally, a trapper would enter the store to sell some furs. Walter would point an accusing finger in my direction. By then, I hated the very sight of furs. I told each trapper I had no more money—at least not until I sold the skins I had on hand.

It seemed as though our business and our partnership had come to the end of the road. Then one evening a stranger entered the store. He showed great interest in the fur pelts that hung (like Damocles' sword) from the walls. "So many wolves and minks!" he exclaimed. And, turning to Walter, asked: "Do you buy furs?"

Walter cast his usual accusing glance at me. I didn't even acknowledge that I had heard the question.

"Yes, we buy furs," Walter replied in a tired voice.

"Will you sell them to me?"

The query dropped like a thunderbolt, shocking us into showing the first interest we had felt in days. Walter was immediately all business.

"Yes, we'll sell them to you, if you pay a fair price," he casually tossed off. Where he had acquired this aplomb I do not know. I do know that we had been almost ready to give them away, just to get the mocking reminders out of our lives.

I sat on the edge of my barber's chair as the stranger inquired:

"What do you want for the lot?"

By then, Walter had taken them all down and piled them in front of the fur trader. "Here," he said. "Look them over. Appraise them yourself, then make us an offer. If we like it, the furs are yours. If your offer is too low, we'll wait for a better one."

I fidgeted in my chair as the trader carefully examined, classified and priced the skins. I thought I detected beads of sweat on Walter's face. We had no idea what the furs would bring. We wouldn't know a fair price from highway robbery. We only knew that I had invested $600 in a venture that was promising to wipe us out.

It seemed to take the man forever to get through the pile. To us the waiting was endless. My own curiosity

threatened to burst its bonds, before the trader announced:

"Well, I've checked them all, priced each one, and I'm ready to make you a fair offer."

I thought Walter showed remarkable control when he parried in an even, unhurried voice: "How much for the lot?"

"Seven hundred and fifty dollars!"

I almost fell from my chair, as I exclaimed: "What? Seven hundred and fifty dollars?"

My obvious eagerness and amazement was imprudent, I know. But Walter immediately forgave my outburst, smiling at me for the first time since he returned from Winnipeg. I felt absolutely wonderful! But I withheld further comment that might hurt our bargaining position.

"It's too low," Walter replied.

The man wanted our furs, he haggled, explained, and wheedled—even raised his offer a little. But Walter only repeated: "Sorry. It's not enough."

When the trader finally walked out empty handed, it was my turn to display impatience. "Why didn't you sell the furs to him?" I demanded, incredulous at the thought of turning down any deal that would get back the money we had thought lost. "He offered more than I paid for them!"

"That's right, Gus," Walter answered smugly. "But he was buying to resell. So he must have offered us less than he expected to get for the furs in Winnipeg. I'll take

them to Winnipeg myself, tomorrow, and we'll probably get an even higher price for them."

Then he put a friendly hand on my shoulder and apologized for our misunderstanding. "You did well to buy them, Gus. Let's forget our little misunderstanding. From now on, I'll do my best for our business and you do your best. We may make a profit, or we may take a loss. But whatever happens, let's not get sore at each other again."

It was a happy ending to a grim impasse. And it was even better when Walter got a better price for the skins in Winnipeg. I felt good. Not so much for the profit we showed on the furs, but because my venture had proved to be sound. I felt a little proud, too, like the time John and I made our successful horse deal.

We obtained the special license required and, from then on, fur trading became a regular part of our business.

CHAPTER XVII

We Spread Out

Business was good that first winter. But it slowed to a standstill in the spring. The farmers had laid in supplies of food and bought clothing through the winter, trading their cords of wood. During spring and summer, what purchases they had to make would be on credit advanced against the wood they would have the following winter. Cattle prices were down and what little the farmers got for their cattle went to pay taxes and buy needed farm implements. They had no money left for purchases at the store.

It was off-season for fur trading. Local fishermen, too, had left Riverton for their summer fishing grounds on Lake Winnipeg. And the fish they caught would not come into town, but be shipped by boat directly to Selkirk or Winnipeg.

By May, there were so few customers coming into the store that it seemed senseless for the two of us to be putting in our time. So Walter suggested: "There's no reason why both of us should sit here idle during the summer. Somebody may want a haircut, so you'd better stay here, Gus. I'll go out and find a job."

He left a couple of days later. I remained behind,

idling in my barber's chair. But everyone was too busy working to even think of a haircut, and they had no money for store purchases. No one came in for several days. I grew tired of the inactivity, so I said to my wife:

"We're not getting anywhere this way. There's so little business, you could take care of what few customers straggle in. If anyone wants a haircut, I can be here in the evenings. I'm going to try a flyer in cattle. By day, I'll be a cattle dealer."

I knew nothing about the cattle business. But two previous ventures outside my experience had paid off. I knew the market was low, but I felt there would be a little margin there I could work on. I passed the word to the farmers in the district that I was buying young cattle, one to two years old. Soon they were letting me know what they had for sale; a young heifer here, a pair of steers there. Another cattle dealer was bidding so low they didn't want to sell to him. I paid a few dollars more and got the cattle.

I bought twenty-four head, rented a large meadow and put them out to graze. Then I went to Winnipeg to see what I could learn about marketing. I learned first, that the stockyards were not in Winnipeg, but just across the Red River at St. Boniface. Everything was very strange. But, little by little, I began to understand the marketing routine.

I watched the commission traders, noting their selling prices. I stood for hours by the large scales trying to

estimate live weight. I would study a heifer, guess its weight, then check my guess against the scales. I followed the same practice when steers were weighed. Thus I learned something of cattle classification.

I wandered all over the stockyards, observing and learning. On my third day, I entered the stockyard office, intending to get acquainted with commissioners who sold cattle for others. I wanted an outlet for the cattle I had bought.

I was lucky there. I met Ingi Ingaldson, our representative in the legislature. When I told him what I was doing, he advised me that he was manager of the newly-formed Canadian Livestock Cooperative. "You can sell your cattle through us," he suggested.

I was happy to use his organization, knowing that I would be treated fairly on all transactions. I was in a good frame of mind when I returned home.

I shipped my young cattle to Winnipeg, consigned to the cooperative. They were sold at a considerable profit. I continued to buy cattle in the district and sell them through the cooperative. My profits amounted to quite a large sum. Walter returned from his summer work and I learned he had done well, also.

With our replenished capital, we were able to do much more business that second winter. We bought wood from farmers and furs from trappers. They bought more and more goods at our store. Then, the following spring, Walter decided to strike out for himself.

"There is a large power house going up at Seven Sisters Falls," he said. "I think it would be a good idea for me to start a store there."

I hated to see him leave. But it was a good opportunity. I agreed, and we ended our business partnership. With his share from our store he erected a building at Seven Sisters Falls to house a general store, pool room and barber shop. My brother John, now married, joined him as barber and manager of the pool room.

That summer, for us, was a repeat of the one before. Emily watched the store, while I pursued the cattle business. I did well. So well in fact, that by late summer we built a store onto the back wall of the house. In so doing, we enlarged the store and consolidated our business and family life under one roof. It made it more convenient to take care of the store and the house at the same time.

I had a good stock of merchandise, a few hundred dollars in cash and our business was thriving.

CHAPTER XVIII

Dame Fortune Is Fickle

That autumn (1929) there was no more dry tamarack to be had in the woods near Riverton. This could have seriously hurt our business. Tamarack cords were practically the standard of exchange in the "goods for wood" trade by which merchants and farmers existed.

Something had to be done, and I decided to do it myself. I set out to try to locate a suitable stand of tamarack. I found it, on a fairly large island in Lake Winnipeg, just about twelve miles from Riverton. When I told the farmers where they could find tamarack, many of them went to the island, built small shacks and lived there cutting wood through the winter.

After Christmas they plowed a road across the ice and brought the wood over by sleigh. They were so grateful to me for finding the tamarack stand that they brought me all their cordwood. As a result, I had so much business we had to have help. Both Emily and I worked in the store. Jimmy, my young brother-in-law, had finished school and he worked with us. Stefanie, who was living with us while she attended school, also helped in the store. We were so busy, we hardly had time for a decent meal. Most of the time we ate on the run, even

while waiting on trade. Our store was full of people from morning until midnight.

Most of the purchases were paid for in wood, and it was coming in so fast I had to hire my old friend Bill Mospanchuk to handle that end of the business. He measured each load, directed the unloading and issued receipts. Then he took charge of loading the cords into railway boxcars for shipment to Winnipeg, where I had an oral selling agreement with wood dealers. As many cords as possible were loaded into boxcars each day. Even so, we had to stack much of it on the ground to await loading. The wood pile spread over almost half the free ground in Riverton.

My arrangement with the wood dealers promised me $5.50 for each cord of dry tamarack delivered over a two-month period. I shipped about two hundred carloads and had a considerable sum due me. The wood dealers were to settle in full at the end of the contract period in February. Meanwhile, they sent me from time to time, at my request, cheques for a thousand dollars or more.

I paid the farmers $5.00 per cord, mostly in goods. It seemed we were on our way to a fortune. But we had reckoned without the economic crash! When I received the full statement from the wood dealers at the end of February, I found I was paid only $4.00 per cord—the price current at that time!

We had known nothing of the falling market and had

been too busy even to be curious. In that one stroke we suffered a terrible financial loss.

And I still had some four hundred cords of tamarack on hand. I had bought it at $5.00 per cord, but the market kept falling. I sold what I could for $3.00 a cord and the balance, later, at $2.50—half of my cost price!

By the end of winter, I was almost squeezed dry. I had no more cash, I still owed $3,200 to Winnipeg wholesalers—and my store was bare (except for about $150 worth of goods, mostly remnants nobody wanted). I had some money on the books, of course, but the farmers who owed me were in no position to pay, either. They were caught in a similar squeeze, although of lesser proportions.

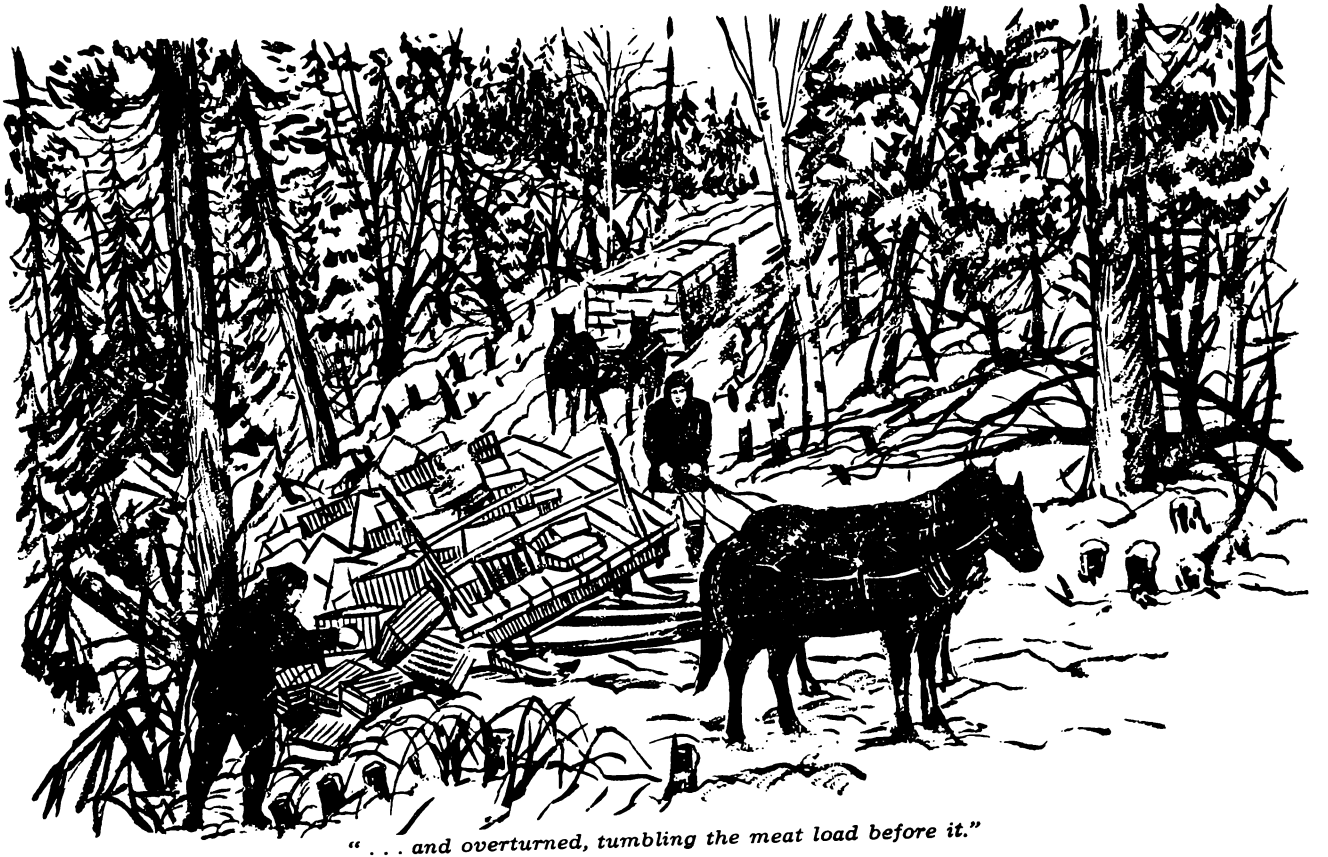
It was as though my whole world had collapsed around me. I had never felt so utterly lost, so defeated, so incapable of fighting back. My loss hit my customers, too. They needed supplies—and I didn't have them. Since they had dealt exclusively with me, selling me all their tamarack that winter, they couldn't expect any of the other merchants to extend them credit.

Many wouldn't believe that I was flat broke. They had seen my wood going to Winnipeg by the carload. They had seen cords piled high all over Riverton. By all reason, I should have been riding the crest of prosperity. Some suspected me of feigning the loss as a clever (though unscrupulous) business trick, to avoid giving them goods

on credit. Some threatened to boycott me and organize their own cooperative store to break me.

I sympathized with them, for I knew I was their only hope for supplies. And I did my best to help. I tried to get at least the bare essentials, sugar, tea and some other articles to tide them over. But my creditors, the Winnipeg wholesalers, were pressing me for payment. I began to get letters threatening legal action.

We were at rock bottom. The situation looked hopeless; just when we had been so close to a goal. I was dejected. Emily wept daily. Jimmy and Stefanie also felt the loss. We had all worked so very, very hard. Then overnight, we were not only broke—but hopelessly in debt.



" . . . and overturned, tumbling the meat load before it."

CHAPTER XIX

The Long Road Back

My creditors in Winnipeg pressed harder. Some even demanded that I go through bankruptcy if I was unable to pay. This I was unwilling to do, not wanting to dishonor the family name.

I went to Winnipeg and talked to each of the wholesalers, to whom I owed money.

"You will be paid every penny," I assured them, "no matter how hard I must work and sacrifice to clean the slate. But I must have goods for my store. If I can't supply my customers, I will have no business and no income from which to pay you."

Every wholesaler agreed to carry me. So, through the summer, I was able to supply at least the essentials for my customers.

In autumn I called on Mr. Sinclair, manager of the Hudson Bay Company's fur department in Winnipeg. I had had dealings with him before and he had confidence in my ability as a fur trader. I explained my predicament, and suggested that if he would advance me sufficient money, I would buy furs exclusively for his firm. He arranged a large loan for me, and I was back in the fur business.

I used half the money to stock my store and left some with my wife to purchase furs from traders who came in. Then I took a packsack and went north into the woods to buy furs from the Indians and trappers. I travelled hard and fast, at a slow run most of the time. Sometimes I would be out in the woods for three or four days at a time; sometimes even longer. I bought furs as long as my money held out, and always returned with a large load of pelts. These, and the furs my wife bought, I took to Winnipeg where the Hudson Bay Company advanced me more funds to continue the trade.

At times I went as far as sixty miles into the north country. Going in was easy, hiking through the woods or over the lake. But the trip home, with a heavy load of furs on my back, was a chore. I didn't mind, however. I knew that the heavier the load, the more money I would earn.

One day I left early in the morning, hiking twenty-six miles into the woods. I made all my fur purchases by the end of the day. At three o'clock the next morning I started home, hoping to cross the lake before the freshly plowed road was again covered with snow, making walking more difficult. I made good time, and was home by ten o'clock.

It was a bitterly cold day and I sat down by the stove in the store to warm up and rest from my trip. My feet were cold and tired and I rubbed them with my hands to restore the circulation.

About that time, a farmer who had brought in a cord of wood came and stood by the stove. Plucking bits of ice from his mustache, he said:

"What an easy life a storekeeper has, sitting comfortably beside a warm stove like a king . . . Now, take me. I have to be out no matter how cold it is. Already today I hauled a load of cordwood five miles!"

Being a tactful businessman, I looked sympathetic and agreed: "How right you are." He probably wouldn't have believed me anyway, if I told him I had just walked twenty-six miles with a heavy load of furs on my back!

During the spring of 1931 I bought muskrat skins, then in good season. I had to wear high rubber boots to wade through the many marshes between Riverton and Washow Bay, fourteen miles north; or Sugar Creek, twenty-two miles north. Even the trip out was tough going through the marshland. But it was worse coming back, with a loaded packsack weighing from fifty to seventy pounds. It was not a pleasant time to tour the back country, but it was worth the trouble. For even during those depression days of the early thirties, there was a good market for furs—any kind of furs.

That summer we had sufficient stock in our store to supply the farmers in the area and extend them credit for the essentials they needed. A man might plead: "Give me at least a bag of flour. My wife and children are almost starving. We must have bread." What could one do, but carry such people on the books?

The depression showed no sign of letting up in the fall of 1931. Prices for farm produce were so low there was practically no market at all. Farmers began to bring chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys and pigs to my store, begging me to take them in exchange for other merchandise.

"But I can't use them," I would argue. "There just isn't any market for meat."

Then they would explain how they had no more grain to feed the stock and so they had to kill off some. Typical of their plight was the farmer who pleaded: "We must have clothes for the winter. Please take all this meat in exchange. Maybe you can sell it to some of the fishermen."

I knew there was no market in Winnipeg, and I doubted that there would be much demand from fishermen. But I couldn't let the farmers down without trying to help. I sold them the goods they needed, and took their meat in payment. Soon I had quite a supply of frozen meat in my storeroom.

I had also been dabbling in horses, buying a few when the price was right. I sold some to fishermen, who had learned that one horse could replace a team of five dogs for hauling boxes of fish across the ice to shore. Anticipating a growing demand in this market, I always had four or five horses on hand.

Then one day I got an idea. I could put my horses to work, hauling my stock of meat to remote places where

it might be in short supply. I had heard of a gold mining camp across the lake, far removed from transportation or supply lines. Why not haul my meat and sell it to the miners, I reasoned.

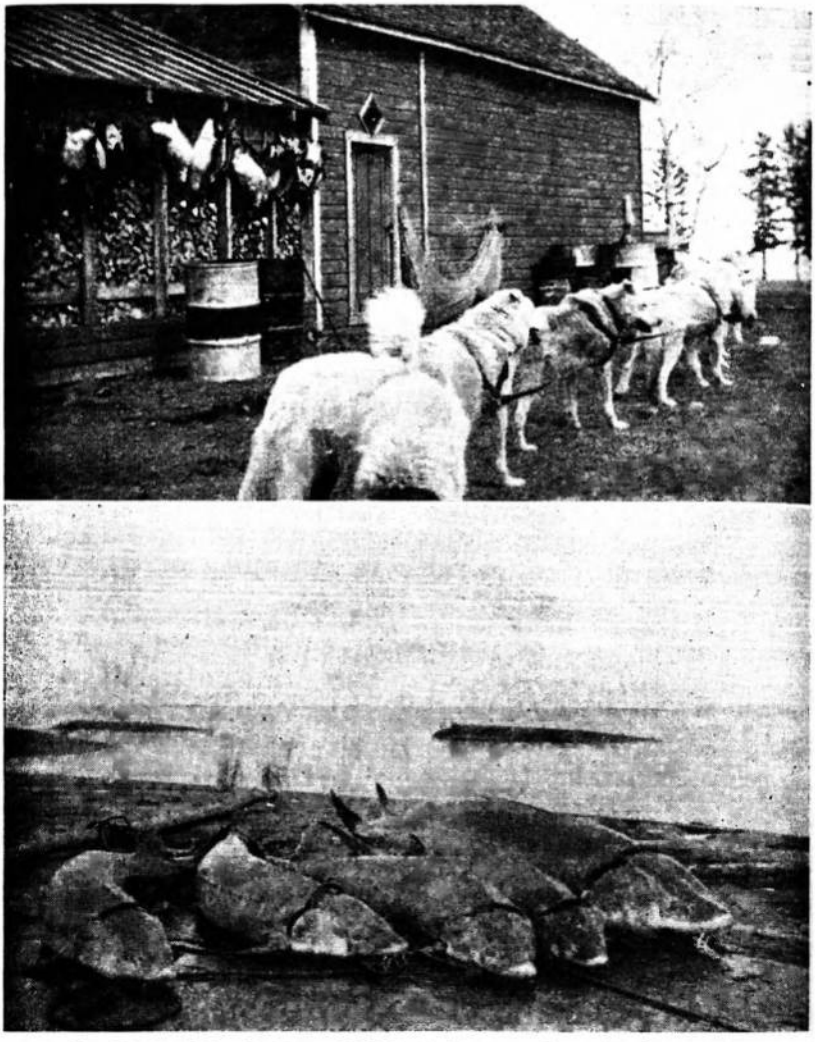
I inquired around town to see if I could find out anything about the gold mining district. I learned that Oddur Olafson carried mail there, so I had a long talk with him.

"The gold mine town is known as Bisset," he told me. "It is some eighty-five miles east of Riverton. The route crosses Lake Winnipeg to Manigotagan, about fifty miles away, then to Bisset, about thirty-five miles further.

"The road between the two towns is not good," he warned. "It twists and turns through rolling country, climbing over high hills and dropping into deep ravines. Very little traffic moves over it. But it is passable."

Olafson was to make his mail run December 17, so I arranged to follow him. I loaded two large sleighs with meat and hired a driver for each team of horses: Bill Mospanchuk and Anton Joba. I, of course, was going along. I hoped we would be able to sell the two huge loads of meat, although I still knew nothing about the gold mine town, nor whether I would find a market there.

Olafson led the way with the two mail sleighs. From Riverton to Manigotagan was a two-day trip. We spent the first night on Hecla Island, arriving at Manigotagan about nightfall the next day. We spent the night there



On Hecla Island—Top: Helgi G. Tomason's twin-dog team. Bottom: Sturgeon Fish weighing from 50 to 100 pounds.

and set out for Bisset very early in the morning of the third day.

Two miles out we entered the steep hills. From there the road became a tortuous trail across the forbidding divide. The farther we went, the higher were the hills. Sometimes the uphill climb was so steep we had to unhitch the second team and use both teams to haul the lead sleigh to the top. Then both teams would bring up the second sleigh.

Each downhill stretch presented an even tougher problem. The heavy sleighs moved so fast down the sharp grades that they pushed the horses in front of them. We couldn't drive the sleighs; just hang on—and pray. Several times a sleigh swung sharply toward a ravine and overturned, tumbling the meat load before it. Such incidents were terribly discouraging.

The cold, the hills and the unfamiliar road were bad enough. The delay and the effort of righting and reloading the errant sleigh each time, was almost enough to make us turn back. In places, too, the road was so narrow the wide sleigh racks couldn't go through. Then we had to take our axes and widen the trail.

It was about three o'clock that afternoon when we met a sleigh coming from the opposite direction. It was coming from Bisset. Now, at least, we might learn what lay ahead.

The driver introduced himself as Harry Boulette from Manigotagan. My name was familiar, he said. He

had heard that I had a store at Riverton and was a fur buyer.

"How far are we from Bisset?" I asked, half hoping to hear that town was just around the next treacherous bend.

"Shucks," Boulette grinned. "your're only eight miles out of Manigotagan! Still got twenty-seven miles between you and the gold mine. Nope, you won't get there today, not with loads like yours. Might make it in maybe twelve hours with a light load. But it'll take you 'til tomorrow night, if your horses don't get played out."

His information was anything but encouraging, but I clutched at a straw of hope and asked: "Well, can you tell us how the road is ahead?"

"Gets better," he cheered us. "The further you go, the less hills you'll find. You'll be able to move faster."

"Where can we water our horses?"

"Well, most anyplace, I reckon. You're at 'Silver Meadow' now. There's a creek here. Lots of 'em farther on, too. Plenty of water in these parts."

We questioned Boulette at some length and he told us about the town of Bisset, and whom I should contact to sell my meat. "If you're ever out this way again, and need some help, you can find me at Manigotagan," he offered as he said good-bye.

"And you stop and see us if you get to Riverton," I waved.

We kept riding west, stopping to camp for the night

in a thick spruce forest near a creek. An area where a number of trees had been uprooted by the wind made a natural shelter. It was an ideal place to tether the horses.

I had learned the art of making a good overnight camp while buying furs from the Indians. First, we shoveled the snow from a large area. This snow we piled high on three sides, later adding spruce branches to shield the walls from the wind. Small spruce twigs were spread over the cleared ground and covered with a layer of hay. We removed the harnesses and draped warm blankets over the horses. Then we tethered them in the shelter and gave them oats and hay.

For ourselves we cleared a similar area, opposite the horses; the open ends of the three-walled clearings facing each other. I had laid out the two sites so that the northwest wind was blowing straight through the opening between them. Later we would build a fire in that opening and the wind would blow any sparks away from the horses and from us.

After clearing our camp ground, we started a big fire to warm the ground for our beds. Meanwhile, I prepared supper and the drivers laid in a store of fuel for the night. Bill and the other driver praised my cooking when supper was ready about thirty minutes later. But food always tastes better out in the woods. Maybe because one has been active and is very hungry. In this case, it also may have been because I was "the boss".

After supper we pushed the fire out into the opening

between us and the horse shelter. There, it was to burn through the night. We covered our warmed camp ground with spruce twigs and topped them with a layer of hay. That was our bed. Then we erected a slanting (lean-to) roof overhead. Trimming poles from young spruce, we drove two of them into the ground at the corners of the open side, about seven feet apart. We had left a forked stub at the top of each pole on which we rested our cross-pole. This was the high end (about 4½ feet high) of our shelter. The roof joists, or beams, were long poles laid on the ground at the rear and over the cross-pole at the front. This roof framework we covered with spruce branches and twigs. Thus our shelter offered the protection of three snow-walls and a spruce roof, with a cheery fire at the open front for warmth.

The fire radiated heat for both the horses and for us. It was a big fire, made from dry spruce which burns readily and gives off intense heat. Spruce throws off little sparks when it burns, however, and it is dangerous to sleep near such a fire. The sparks could ignite bedding or clothing. And bad burns in the northwoods, far from any medical help, can mean death.

The Indians take the precaution of heaping dry pieces of white poplar on the fire before going to sleep. Poplar does not scatter sparks. We covered our fire in this fashion, too.

It was already very late, but we weren't sleepy. We sat near the fire, hypnotized by its leaping flames and

enthralled as the deep, sad, murmur that rustled through the tall treetops wove its magic spell. The trees seemed to hum a breathless welcome to the woodland, telling us to be at peace, as all nature's creatures are at night. They served to remind each of us of a personal experience in the Manitoba woods, and it was pleasant to share these experiences by firelight.

Even the horses were brought under the spell. We could hear them rhythmically crunching hay, as if keeping time to the music in the trees.

From time to time, we could vaguely see (or feel) them prick up their ears and cock their heads at some sound inaudible to us, yet warning of danger lurking nearby.

Then, a low crackling sound in the bushes followed by a sad, yet triumphantly blood curdling cry, apprised us of danger now close by. The cry echoed and re-echoed through the forest as it was taken up by others in the stealthy invader's pack. It sounded as if we were surrounded by timber wolves!

I knew they wouldn't venture to our campfire. We were safe there. But I picked up my rifle and fired in the direction of the loudest howl to scare the wolves away. Their presence made the horses excited and nervous. When the pack retreated, the horses quieted down. We heard other wolf calls, but they were farther and farther away. Otherwise, the still of the forest night was un-

broken, save for the weird cry of owls holding court, and the reassuring murmur of the treetops.

We had other visitors, but they were quiet and friendly; white rabbits nibbling at the soft bark of twigs, or sitting on their haunches sniffing the woodsmoke and winking at us in the dim light. It was very late when we went to sleep.

We slept only three and a half hours, arising early to get on our way. We found the road much better, the grades less accented. The day passed without incident. As our heavy sleighs moved through this back country, we saw many deer and a moose. We also read in the snow the telltale footprints of other local inhabitants: wolves, lynx, mink, rabbits, grouse—even a fisher.

We made slow time with our heavy loads, however, and failed to reach Bisset that day. In fact, it was late the next evening before we saw the gold mine town. The miners were pleased to learn that I had brought dressed domestic meat, fowls and pork. I sold all of it in almost no time—at a net profit of $210.00. By today's standards that isn't a very impressive figure, but in the depression days of the early thirties it was a goodly sum of money.

Besides, it was the beginning of another business for me. During the next few years, I made several trips to Bisett each winter; timing my first trip just before Christmas so the miners would have fresh meat for their holiday dinners. There were times when the ice of Lake

Winnipeg offered only questionable support for the heavy loads we hauled. Often we traveled over dangerously cracking ice. Once one of the horses fell through a wide crack. But, we managed to pull him out safely.

On occasions we traveled in temperatures thirty and forty degrees below zero and under severe blizzard conditions. Whenever we encountered a blizzard, however, we drove as fast as possible for the natural shelter of the woods, on an island or on the mainland. In our overnite camps, we were snug and comfortable even in such severe weather.

The meat business helped us financially, but hardly enough to pull us out of debt. In between, I continued to buy furs, while Emily and her sister took care of the store.

"He would whine softly and look in the direction of the scent."

CHAPTER XX

Monkey and The Fur Country

My fur trading trips were made somewhat easier when I acquired a team of five dogs. I learned that a toboggan-load of furs is much easier on the back than the pack under which I had previously labored.

I bought four of the dogs. The other I had raised from a pup. He was "Monkey", a comical combination of Airdale and heaven-only-knows what else. He was my favorite, and he was smart. When I would camp for the night, I always tied the other dogs to a nearby tree; but not Monkey. He would always be by my side. I think he regarded me as his personal property.

If I laid my jacket on the ground and told him to guard it, he would lie down on it and never move until I returned. Once, when out cutting wood, I ordered him to guard my jacket. I became engrossed in work, and by nightfall I had moved some distance away. When it grew dark I went home, forgetting all about Monkey and my jacket. It was too late to return five miles into the woods, so I waited until the next morning. And when I returned to the spot, there was Monkey, still lying on my jacket, guarding it.

Another time, during one of my trips to Bisset, I

My train of dogs, with Monkey (black) at the back.

took him along to guard the three sleighs of meat. When my drivers and myself took lodging for the night at a small inn in town, I fixed Monkey a bed in the centre sleigh and told him to stand guard. Late that night I was awakened by his barking and growling. He made so

much noise it sounded like several dogs in a fight. I ran to the window and looked out. By the moonlight, I could see several men running from the sleighs. They ran like they were scared out of their wits. When I reached Monkey he was still growling, and I could understand why no thief would care to tangle with those healthy fangs.

At home he voluntarily assumed the extra duty of watching over little Jimmy. Whenever our son was out playing, we were confident that Monkey would save him from harm. Such devotion naturally elevated the dog to a high place in our affections. We regarded him as one of the family.

He liked nothing better than to hunt with me. While on our fur buying trips I would sometimes stop in a wood where I knew there was plenty of game. Freshly-killed rabbits or grouse were a welcome variation to the dogs' diet of fish and frozen meat. The other four dogs seemed content to be tied up and wait for the dinner they knew would be coming. But not monkey. The woods were his domain.

He never raced wildly ahead of me. Rather, he followed a step or two behind. When I stopped, he stopped. He would listen attentively, peering ahead. At times he even stood on his hind legs, resting his forelegs against a tree trunk, to get a better view from the higher vantage point.

His keen sense of smell told him when there was

game nearby. Then he would whine softly and look in the direction of the scent. When I shot, he would leap ahead to retrieve the kill. If the quarry was only wounded, he applied the finishing stroke expertly with his sharp teeth, then carried the animal gently in his mouth and deposited it at my feet.

We never hunted just for the thrill of killing, as some are wont to do. Trappers, fur traders, Indians are inherent conservationists. They hunt and kill wildlife only for food, or in the case of fur-bearing animals, for pelts. They realize that wanton killing would eventually leave the forest barren of wildlife.

Such woods are lonely. There is no wildlife to be found, for example, in recently burned-over forest land. For there is no food to sustain wildlife. Forest fires take their toll of animals and game birds, too. Even though the fleet creatures like moose, elk, deer, wolves, foxes, etc., may race to safety, the fire-ravaged forest leaves them nothing to return to.

Men who work and live in the woods know what devastation a forest fire leaves in its wake. They take extreme pains never to cause one. Many horrible conflagrations have started from a carelessly flipped match or cigarette butt in which a spark of destructive force still burned. I always made certain a match was dead before I let it fall to the ground. And I crushed my cigarette butts between my fingers and extinguished them with spittle before tossing them aside.

A campfire not completely extinguished, or set on a poorly selected site can spread to leave only charred, spectre-like stumps of trees and blackened earth where life once was. I always tried to select a flat stone or hard bare ground for my campfire. I had learned that a fire set on soft mossy ground is almost impossible to extinguish. One may pour water on such a fire, or stamp it out, or bury it under the snow, yet never be certain that it is dead. Its ashes may be cold, but underneath in a deep layer of moss a spark may remain that could cause a holocaust. Days later, a pillar of smoke may rise from beneath the cold ashes of such a fire.

Sparks, smoldering and creeping slowly through a deep layer of moss beneath the snow may contain their destructive force all winter. Then, when the protective cloak of snow is gone, a strong wind may fan them into devastating action, into flames that grow as they spread to dry grass and lick at pine trees and finally leap out like flaming torches when they reach the treetops; flames capable of devouring hundreds of thousands of dollars of timber and maiming or destroying wildlife and wildlife habitat of unmeasured value.

The forest animals may outrun some fires, but many of them are no match for flames whipped by a strong wind through dry grass. Some animals grow panicky and run in zigzag fashion until overtaken. Others may find escape cut off by a spark igniting the grass ahead. Cow-moose and doe are often caught while trying des-

perately to save their young. Other deer may get their feet so badly burned trying to leap over burning brush that they later die of pain and starvation. Rabbits often get so panicky when faced with fire that they run wildly, without direction, until the flames catch up with them. Even game birds find their wings of little avail when they delay too long to save their nesting brood.

Hunters, campers, picnickers can't be too careful to avoid causing a forest fire. Precautions even above and beyond the point of reasonable prudence are an investment in the future of our forests and our wildlife and the enjoyment of their wonders by our children.

I spent much time in the woods as a fur trader and learned to love the life and the living forest of trees and animals and birds. I found peace and close-to-God sort of happiness when camping among the forest creatures. That is why the needless ravages of fire hurt me so deeply, and why raging anger builds up inside me when I see or hear of wanton killing and destruction of wildlife.

I noted earlier that killing for food, or furs, or hides is one thing; but killing just for "fun" is something else again. To me, it is akin to murder. I met one of those "rifle-happy" wantons on one of my return trips from Bisset. I left my sleighs at intervals while I contacted trappers to buy their furs. On this occasion, when I caught up with my drivers they had two riders, whom they had picked up on the way. The men had been

walking down the road with rifles and packsacks, and had welcomed the chance to get a ride.

We stopped for lunch, and as we sat by the fire a deer crossed the road just a short distance away. One of the strangers raised his rifle and felled the animal. Then he laid his gun down and turned back to the fire. He wasn't even concerned whether the deer was killed or just badly wounded!

My drivers and I ran over and saw that the deer was dead. While they skinned it out and packed the meat they told me that the same man had taken several shots from the sleigh and had laughed at them when they asked him to stop.

I was boiling! I called the man away from the fire and assailed him for his irresponsible attitude. He looked as if he couldn't believe his ears when I asked him why he had been shooting, without apparent purpose, at everything that crossed his sights.

"I enjoy it," he explained, surprise in his voice. "I get a kick out of picking off game when it's moving, running or flying."

"I should report you to the police," I blasted. "Your conduct is a disgrace to this clean outdoors." But I read in his face not alarm, nor resentment, but lack of understanding. My anger cooled a little as the thought flashed through my mind that "the poor fellow just doesn't know any better."

"You are killing living creatures," I started to ex-

plain. "The animals and birds are as alive as we are. You didn't want that deer, didn't even know whether you had made a clean hit. You didn't want the meat, didn't want the head, didn't want the hide. You killed for no possible purpose. Yet, you took the meat and you took the hide from an Indian, who might have needed it. You took it by killing 'just for fun'.

"Every time you shoot an animal," I continued, "you are taking food or the means of livelihood from the Indians, the trappers or the traders, from the people for whom the forest is a living.

"Yet they would never kill as you just did," I explained further. "They kill only what they use, because they know there must be something for tomorrow. Wanton killing can destroy not only that one animal, but the offspring it might have fostered. Why, an Indian would live on berries, or even fast, rather than kill an animal in breeding season."

As I talked, the stranger looked at the woods around us as if seeing them for the first time. "Nobody ever took the trouble to point these things out to me," he apologized. "It makes good sense. I like the woods and I like to hunt. I hunt for meat, too, sometimes. But more often I've been shooting just for enjoyment. Never thought of the animals and birds as living targets."

There was genuine emotion in his voice as he promised: "Believe me, I'll never use my rifle that way again. I'm glad you straightened me out."

I was sure he meant it. He would have told me to "go find a soap box" if he hadn't. We shook hands and both of us felt better. At least, I know I did.

I imagine my love for the outdoors is the chief reason I enjoyed being a fur trader. But, even with my dog team, the business was not without its hardships and its dangers. I had to travel to many out of the way places to find the furs I wanted. Quite often I made trips to some of the islands on Lake Winnipeg where there were Indian villages. I bought furs, too, on the big island of Hecla, which was inhabited mostly by Icelanders. The island's population was about four hundred, with many of them living in Hecla village on the eastern shore. The Icelanders were fishermen, but a few of them were trappers, too.

The road across the island was the closest route to the village. But after a heavy snowfall, it was often almost impassable. On such occasions I was forced to travel around the island, on the ice of the lake. I camped on several of Lake Winnipeg's islands when I had to find shelter from blizzards that whipped across the ice.

As I look back, however, I may have been closest to danger one night far north in the woods, when I had to sleep in a big one-room building among thirty or more strangers—with a large sum of money in the bosom of my shirt!

CHAPTER XXI

Correction to a Collection

By the spring of 1933 we had managed to pay off almost two-thirds of our indebtedness to wholesalers in Winnipeg. All the smaller debts had been satisfied. But I still owed about $1200 to one wholesale firm and $85.00 to a hardware company.

Our store was better stocked. But, even so, we were lacking in many items. It was embarrassing to me whenever a customer asked for a staple item that we did not have, particularly if other customers were present. I tried my best to vary the stock as much as possible, but it seemed we were always long on some items and short on others. Daily, incidents like the one that follows would be repeated in our store:

"Have you any rice?" a customer asked.

"I'm sorry, I have none at present." I replied somewhat sheepishly.

"Well, I'll take some sugar."

"No sugar, either," I half whispered, hoping others would not hear.

"How about pepper?"

"Fix you right up," I replied heartily.

"I'd like two bars of soap."

"Coming up," I managed a grin.

"And some coal oil."

"Sorry, we're out of coal oil."

I guess we were still a long way from building our store back to what it had been before the cordwood market broke us in 1930. Things did'nt look any brighter either, when one day a well dressed stranger entered the store and asked for me.

"I'd like to speak with you privately," he said.

"Let's step in here." I suggested, leading him into the house. "Now, what do you wish to see me about?"

"I'm a bailiff." (His words shocked me.) "I was sent here to collect the $85.00 you still owe that hardware company in Winnipeg. If I don't get it, I am to padlock your store!"

I was alarmed, excited, angry; but mostly terribly worried. Was I to lose like this? We had paid off so many debts and worked so hard. Now to lose everything for a sum like $85.00? What irony! If he locks our store, he locks us out of our home, too. They are one. Are we now to be thrown out of all we labored and scrimped so long to save? But what could I do? I didn't have $85.00. Then I decided to play out the string as boldly as possible. Maybe I could outwit this stranger.

"Go right ahead," I said feigning indifference. "Go ahead. Padlock my store. But first, telephone my creditor and tell him that I shall demand $1,000 for damage to my reputation and $500 for each day the store remains pad-

locked." I was bluffing, but it might work, I thought hopefully.

He didn't rise to the bait. "I was sent to padlock your store, or collect the debt," he answered indifferently. "It is not my duty to discuss terms, nor to transmit such terms to the creditor."

I had failed. My mind raced wildly, and I finally blurted:

"But it's so unfair. I mailed a cheque for the full amount to the company about two weeks ago. Is it my fault if they can't keep books?"

He showed interest. "That's a different story," he said. "I'll be happy to telephone them and check on that."

"Do that," I urged. "And when you have the manager on the line, let me talk to him." When the manager answered I inquired angrily: "Why did you send a bailiff over here? What happened to the cheque I mailed you to settle this account?"

"Why, we haven't seen your cheque!" the manager mumbled in surprised apology. "But we'll look for it right now. Put the bailiff on the phone. I'll tell him to leave you alone."

The triumphant relief must have shown in my face as I called the bailiff to the phone. When he hung up the receiver, he turned to me and said. "It's all right for now. I'll leave you alone."

When he had left and I went back into the store,

Emily asked suspiciously: "What did that stranger want with you?"

I explained, half truthfully: "He was from the store in Winnipeg where we still owe $85.00. They want their money. I am going to Winnipeg immediately to try to quiet them down."

I climbed into my car. Oh, yes, I had one by then. But it would be stretching the truth to refer to it as a car. It was an ancient Model T Ford, the 1933 counterpart of what today's youngsters refer to as "a bucket of bolts". It ran rather reluctantly, but it usually got me where I wanted to go, over what few roads were available to us for auto travel.

When I arrived in Winnipeg I went immediately to the manager's office. I was ushered in and he looked up and snorted skeptically:

"Well, we've made a thorough search, but haven't found your cheque."

"Naturally you couldn't find it," I blurted forth in anger. "It isn't here. I never sent it."

Then the injustice I felt poured out in a torrent of words: "What sort of company is this? Sending a bailiff to padlock my store! Have you forgotten that I bought merchandise from you for years before the depression. I gave you many thousands of dollars of business. You made a good profit from my trade. Now you want to throw that away for a measly $85.00? Have you no sense of justice?"

I was really wound up, my voice increasing in volume with each injured accusation I hurled. The manager fidgeted uncomfortably. His face grew red. Everyone in the office could hear me. (Maybe even the president of the firm was listening in.)

"Now calm down a minute. Take it easy," he begged.

But I was going good and had no intention of stopping until I had spoken my piece, until I had spent all the honest resentment I felt at this high-handed treatment.

"I am going to tell my story to the editors of our dailies," I stormed. "I am going to let their readers know how you tried to padlock my store and lock us out of our home. I'll tell everyone of the treatment I received from you."

"Please. Take it easy and quiet down," the manager pleaded. Let's forget about the $85.00. We'll cross it off our books and never mention it again."

From his concern it dawned on me that he alone had been responsible for the bailiff "squeeze-play" perhaps without knowing or realizing that I had been a steady customer of this firm before the crash wiped us out. He had blundered, and he was willing to go to any length to mollify me.

"You may forget the $85.00, if you wish," I said in a calmer voice. "But I will not forget it. I'll settle this account as soon as I can." . . . and I stalked out of the office, knowing I could forget about that bailiff.

"The waves were steep moving hills."

CHAPTER XXII

Peril on the Lake

I am not a superstitious person, but I had noticed that unhappy events seem to follow one another in a chain; bad luck dogging one's footsteps, so to speak. Good luck also seems to build momentum in a sequence of happy events following closely on one another. That spring and summer seemed to hold nothing but bad fortune for us.

I had scarcely bridged the unpleasant incident with the bailiff, when Walter and John and their families arrived in Riverton with the tragic news that they were homeless!

Just a few days before, late in June, Walter's store and home in Seven Sisters Falls had burned to the ground. Both families had lost everything they possessed. We were shocked to hear of their misfortune, for both Walter and John had been doing well in their venture. We made room for them in our home. But our meagre income just wasn't enough for three families. Something had to be done to relieve the situation.

We called a family meeting to discuss possible remedies. My brother Walt, and two friends, also entered the discussion. They, too, were seeking a way out of the depression.

We came to the inescapable conclusion that more income (work or business) was the only solution. It was agreed that we would go to Bisset, and to Central Mine (another mining camp twenty-two miles further east) to see what we could find.

"Maybe I could set up a new general store at Bisset," Walter hopefully conjectured.

"I could take advance orders for meat at Bisset," I mused. "There might be a market for meat sales, too, at Central Mine."

John had other plans, but the others hoped to find employment in the mines.

"I could take you across Lake Winnipeg to Manigotagan in my motorboat," John offered. "But it needs some repairs. You would have to help me get it ready."

We knew we had plenty of walking to do, almost sixty miles from Manigotagan to Central Mine, and the prospect of riding part of the way was attractive.

"Fine, John," I accepted, and the rest concurred. "We'll repair the boat tomorrow, and leave the day after."

By dark the next day we had the boat shipshape. The following day (early in July) dawned bright and warm and the seven of us climbed aboard John's boat and started down the Icelandic River to Lake Winnipeg. A warm south wind was blowing and a pleasant lake trip was in prospect. The motor showed some hesitancy, coughing and sputtering, but it got over its spasms and

settled down to smooth regular piston strokes. The three mile trip down the river was pleasant.

The wind, which had seemed like a gentle breeze in the shelter of the river, was more pronounced on the open water of Lake Winnipeg. Waves rocked our boat as we left the river delta and pointed for the southern shore of Hecla Island. The waves were not of alarming proportions, however, and we didn't mind the gentle rocking of the boat.

When we reached the island we were met by a fishing fleet of pelicans, diligently working over the water. Some of our group had never seen these huge, fish-eating birds at work. For them, observing the odd birds through a telescope was a novel experience.

From the south shore of Hecla Island we had to cross about twenty-five miles of open water to reach Manigotagan. That was our shortest route. It also looked like a perilous one, for the wind was rolling high waves, with forbidding foamy crests, across the open lake.

"Looks bad," I pointed out. "We can get into trouble crossing east. Don't you think, John, it would be wiser to sail around the island to Hecla? From there we could move in easy stages.

"There would be just six miles of open water to Black Island," I outlined. "We could follow its shore for about ten miles. Then cross to Clements Point on the opposite shore, follow the shoreline south to the Manigotagan delta and take the river into town."

"Who would take such a roundabout way to reach a town only twenty-eight miles distant?" he remarked disdainfully. "That would be like going around the world!"

John was a reckless, devil-may-care fellow, anyway. He overruled my suggested course by the simple expedient of steering the boat straight east, across the billowing water.

It got worse as we forged ahead. Waves grew bigger and the wind carried a heavier accent as it boiled the water. Scarcely two miles out we already were taking in water. However, we had a good pump and two pails, so we manned them and started to bail. In this fashion we covered about three more miles. By then the waves were steep moving hills that tossed our boat up and down like a nutshell. When we slid down the back of a cresting wave it was like falling into an abyss.

We were traveling abreast of the towering waves; in the trough, then high on top. When a wave lifted us up we bailed frantically, for we took on more water each time we dropped to the trough between. At times we were so swamped the gunwales were only about four inches out of water. The threat of capsizing was always with us as the pounding waves beat against the port side of our boat. Our forward progress was slowed from about eight to three miles an hour.

Seated in the prow, facing back, I could see everything that went on. The seriousness of our situation was

plainly written on John's face. My brother was an adventurous fellow and he had always looked supremely confident when at the helm of his boat. But now, genuine alarm and misgivings at his rash decision were boldly outlined in his features.

Walter bent worriedly over the motor, enfolding it with a piece of oilcloth to keep it dry. The others manned the pump and bailing pails; working at furious pace, yet always a little behind the encroaching lake.

Then, John apparently figured our east bound course was impossible, he twisted the helm hard to starboard and we moved north with the waves. This course lessened the danger of capsizing. But it brought us face to face with a new peril. The boat creaked as though it would break in two from the impact of the waves whenever we slid forward off the frothing crest into the trough. We prepared for the worst.

John ordered us to cut the mooring rope in two and fasten the ends to the motor. "If we swamp," he explained, "hang on to the ropes until you can get a grip on the boat. If we can hang on, the waves will take us in, even keel up."

Faint words of cheer were those. Deep in our hearts none of believed we would ever reach land in an upturned boat. We were about halfway between Hecla Island and Manigotagan, but we were heading north now toward Black Island, fifteen miles away.

We pumped and we bailed until our arms throbbed

with exhaustion. Then Mike got terribly seasick. He lay in the bottom of the boat, too weak to hold his head up. I put my arms under him and held his head above water to keep him from drowning. We were making better time with the wind and were then only about six miles from Black Island. After about another mile, John saw that his crew was just about out. He tried to cheer us up, crying:

"Keep your heads up, men! Don't give up. Only a few miles more and we'll be safe!"

We tried. We bailed desperately. We prayed even harder. And it began to look like we would make it. When we came within a half mile of the island, John said: "Almost in, men, but there is another danger ahead. It won't be easy to land on that rocky shore. Our boat could be dashed to pieces, and we with it. I see only one narrow opening where we might get in."

He steered for it and ordered: "Now tie the halves of the mooring line together and fasten it at the bow. You, Gus, grab the other end. As soon as a wave hurls us onto the shore, jump off and run to the nearest tree. Snub the line around the trunk and pull the boat in as hard as you can.

"Walt and Tony, grab Mike and drag him in just as fast as you can move. Now, all of you remember this. As soon as you get on the beach, grab hold of some willows and hang on tight! If you don't, the wave following you may drag you with it when it rolls back from the beach."

John moved in close, then let a big wave carry the boat the rest of the way. We all moved quickly, following his instructions to the letter. I was pulling the boat further inland when the second wave rolled up. It drenched me to the waist. Others nearer the beach were up to their necks in water. It rolled back without us, however, and we scrambled to the safety of higher ground.

We pulled our boat beyond reach of the waves, unloaded our gear, and went even further inland to a little hill of pine and spruce. With the peril behind us, we slowly regained our strength and our spirits.

It was bright and warm on the island, so we took off our drenched clothing and hung it on tree branches to dry. Moving around unclothed, we looked like refugees from a nudist colony. But there was no reason for embarrassment. We didn't have to blush in the presence of squirrels and birds. We built a fire and fixed some food. When our clothes had dried we dressed. It was probably five or six o'clock in the afternoon.

After eating, we sat around talking over our narrow escape from the treacherous waters of that vast inland sea. When the sun began to descend we gathered handfuls of dry moss and heaped it into pallets where we would rest that night. But before retiring, we sat by the fire and talked for hours.

In the morning the wind had died down, but not so the lake. It still billowed and roiled and rolled and

foamed with unrest. We had no intention of challenging it again, and decided to wait for calmer water.

John and Walter took the .22 rifle into the woods and came back with two wild chickens and a couple of rabbits. We had meat soup and meat for dinner. We still had bread, tea and sugar from the provisions we brought along. More of the same served for supper. The lake was still restless when we went to sleep.

The next morning, however, the waves were gone, even though the surface of the lake still "shivered" a little. We set out for Manigotagan. The day was cloudy and gloomy and we still had six miles of open water to cross. We didn't feel exactly like shouting for joy. The crossing was uneventful, however, and we landed at the Hole River delta on the east side of the lake.

"Why don't we go to the Indian settlement about three miles from here and buy more food?" Walter suggested. "We're down to one loaf of bread."

"It's out of the way, though," I countered. "We could go directly to Bisset. From here it's no farther to Bisset than from Manigotagan."

The others agreed with me. We divided the bread into six equal parts. John would get something to eat at Hecla on his way back to Riverton. He set out for home and we started for Bisset.

"Then a big buck moved across the meadow."

CHAPTER XXIII

More Hazards and a Disappointment

We walked for about four miles, moving at a brisk trot over a narrow trail through the woods. It began to rain. But we pushed on for two more miles before the rain grew so persistent we sought the shelter of a big pine tree. I removed my rubber raincoat and spread it over branches above, to shield us from the rain.

We waited about two hours for it to let up. It did lessen some, but showed no inclination to stop altogether. I turned to Walter and asked:

"How many bullets have you left?"

He searched through all his pockets and came up with one lone cartridge.

"If we're down to that," I said in a worried tone, "we have no business waiting here any longer. When we have eaten our bread, there'll be no more food until we reach Bisset. Anyway, it isn't raining so hard anymore. Let's get moving."

Walking was more difficult over the soggy ground, and in places we had to wade through water. However, by and by, we reached 'Silver Meadow' (the place where I had met Henry Boulette on my first trip to Bisset). It

had stopped raining and the sun was sifting through bare patches in the cloudy sky.

There was salty ground near the creek that ran through the meadow so I turned to Walter and suggested: "We need food. You're the best shot among us, so hide yourself near that ground and wait. Aim well, because that's our last bullet."

Walter left, mumbling something about the slim chance of getting meat with one measly bullet. He hid near the ground by the creek. The wind was blowing toward him so that no animal could smell his presence. He waited patiently, for a half hour or more. Then a big buck moved across the meadow toward the creek. Walter took careful aim and felled it in its tracks with a well placed shot behind the ear.

We started to run toward the spot as soon as we heard the shot, hoping to cut off the animal's retreat if it was only wounded. When we arrived, however, Walter had just finished it with his knife. It was a heavy buck and we dragged it with difficulty to the top of a little hillock where we skinned it and cut up the meat. We were so hungry we immediately roasted pieces of meat, holding it on pointed sticks over the fire. We ate ravenously.

It had been an old buck and I don't remember if the meat was tough. We all had strong teeth, so that was of little immediate concern.

We put some meat chunks in our packsacks for future use, and moved on. We hadn't gone much more

than two miles before it started getting dark. We could have traveled a little further, but stopped because we found a large cave where we could camp for the night. We set a big fire deep in the cave to warm it up. Later we pushed the fire nearer the entrance.

We were hungry again, but decided to wait long enough to roast the meat properly, "backwoods style". I wrapped a chunk of meat in strips of birch bark and sealed it tightly with an inch to inch and a half coating of mud from a nearby creek. Then I made a rack or grill by laying dry sticks across the hot ashes of our fire. The roast I set on these sticks, and built another fire on top of it.

Meat prepared in this fashion cooks completely through in little more than an hour. When removed from the ashes, the mud is baked as hard as pottery clay in a kiln. We broke the baked mud away with sticks and eagerly sampled the meat. It was delicious. (It seems it always is when roasted this way.) Even though we had no salt or pepper, that old buck seemed to have taken on the succulence of prime beef.

The mud and bark 'roaster' I used is not a hard and fast rule by any means. Paper can be used instead of bark, if it is available. We had none, so I chose bark because it is clean. Leaves are sometimes used as wrapping, too. I steer clear of them, however. Some may be poisonous, other types may impart a bitter flavor to the meat.

We felt satisfied after dinner, and we were all tired enough to sleep, even on the hard cave floor. We tried the left-over roast for breakfast the next morning, but something had happened to it during the night. It had a rancid flavor, and a few mouthfuls were about all any of us could swallow.

It rained again that day, but we kept moving. By nightfall it had stopped, so we had a chance to dry our clothes by the fire. Some of us were experiencing pains of nausea from the meat we had had for breakfast. We had gone without dinner and supper, and our stomachs rebelled for that reason, too.

We slept through the night, but in the morning we all felt weak and tired. Walking was an effort, even though we had but eight miles to go to reach Bisset. My brother-in-law, Jimmy, lived there and when we finally arrived at his home, we were six tired, sick men.

In no time the house looked like a small hospital. Our feet throbbed from the long walk and our stomachs grumbled from our diet of spoiled meat. Jimmy's wife, Olive, took good care of us. Even so, it was four days later before we were up and around, and five days had passed before we were well enough to continue our journey to Central Mine.

Walter stayed behind. Bisset was not prosperous at the time, and a number of miners were unemployed. But he planned to hire some of these men to help build his general store. The rest of us set out on the last twenty

miles of our journey. This time we took along enough food for two generous meals. Even so we miscalculated. We had not reckoned on being delayed.

We had been told of a shortcut through the woods that joined with the main road to Central Mine farther up the line. This route would save several miles of walking. We took the shortcut. But it was not clearly marked. Several times we came to forks in the path and had no way of knowing whether to turn right or left. We walked and walked, and got lost in the woods for a considerable length of time. It was dark before we finally came out on the main road.

I later learned that we were then only four miles out of Bisset. Had we known this, we could have returned there for the night and started out with new food supplies the next morning. As it was, we spent the night in the woods. In the morning we had just enough food for a very slender breakfast.

We walked and walked and walked. We had no dinner, and the only prospect for supper lay in a small rabbit my brother Walt had killed with a stone and was carrying in his pocket. At sunset we reached the top of a high hill, from where we could look out and see Central Mine. It looked to be about two miles away. But we were so terribly tired that two miles loomed like two hundred.

Only Walt and Tony had enough energy left to continue.

"You go on," I urged. "Stay in Central Mine tonight and bring us some food in the morning. We'll stay right here."

They started to leave but I called Walt back and said: "Will you leave us the rabbit?" He grinned as he handed it over.

About an hour and a half later, however, they were back.

"We walked and walked," Walt said. "When we came to another hill, we looked out and saw Central Mine still as far away as it had been. Must be a lot farther than two miles."

We had already eaten the little rabbit. Walt looked as though he had been stoned between the eyes when I told him. He and Tony were as hungry as we had been, and they had walked farther. I came to a sudden decision:

"We are all going to Central Mine, right now," I half commanded.

There was little point in starving where we were, so the others fell in line as we resumed our journey. It was a torturous one, especially on stomachs that were pleading for food. But we made it, arriving shortly after midnight.

We dropped to the grass near the mine; tired, hungry, spent. We could see the night shift miners in the dining hall, eating lunch before going down the shaft to start work at one o'clock. I told Tony to go to the cook, tell

him our plight and ask if we could have food for five men.

"Make it clear that we have only two dollars left," I added.

Over an hour and a half went by before he returned, a bucket of food in each hand. "It's free!" he grinned.

One pail was filled with remnants of bread from the table and some slices of fresh bread, too. The other contained meat stew and some slices of bacon. It looked like a large amount of food. But five hungry men went through it in short order.

We went to sleep on the grass and didn't awaken until about eleven o'clock the next day. I lay covered with my raincoat, and was awakened by rain beating against my exposed feet. My companions slept, oblivious to the rain. I awakened them, and we huddled under my raincoat which I spread out in some branches. The rain stopped about half an hour later.

Central Mine, we discovered, was just a small village with one large general store. Our hopes hit bottom when we learned that the mining work was due to shut down in the near future. There was no hope for employment there, nor was there any prospect for meat sales. It was a bitter disappointment. Our entire journey had been for nothing. We would return empty handed.

The camp cook was very understanding. He fixed us some food for the trip home and we started back. This time we took no chances on getting lost. We stayed

on the main road to Bisset, and arrived that same day. We rested there several days before leaving for home. Our ranks had dwindled to three by then. Tony Joba and Walter decided to stay in Bisset. The other two and I went back.

When I reached home Emily hardly recognized me. I was so thin and haggard. I had lost over fifteen pounds during the journey; and had gained no business.

Some good came from the trip, however, it later developed. Walter's new store in Bisset was doing a good business by autumn, and through it I was able to sell more meat there. My trips to Bisset became more frequent and I had a market for more and more meat from the hard-pressed farmers of our Riverton district.

CHAPTER XXIV

A Naked Man In The Snow

Late in the autumn of 1937 I made my last fur buying trip into the north country. Business conditions were generally improved by then; to the point at least where I felt I could devote full time to my store. Besides, I wasn't getting any younger and these rugged trips could be exhausting.

John went with me. We went far north of Riverton, stopping first at Washow Bay. From there we traveled even further north, buying pelts from Indians, trappers and sometimes from fishermen who trapped a little on the side. We went to Blood Vein, Rabbit Point and Main Points, then on to Matheson Island and Little Bullhead. It was extremely cold and travel was hard. (When the temperature drops to the severe sub-zero range, a toboggan does not glide smoothly over the snow and ice. It moves jerkily almost freezing in its tracks.) Our dogs were almost completely exhausted from the arduous journey.

We stayed a full day at Little Bullhead to give the dogs a sorely needed rest. From there we turned toward home. We stopped at Big Bullhead, then at Loon Straits. A strong blizzard closed in and we stayed there two

days, at Joe Monkman's place, waiting for the storm to let up. The severe cold and bitter wind hung on when we again set out for home.

We moved slowly and were only a few miles out when our lead dog got sick. He would run a short ways, then stop and sit down, shivering all over. We unharnessed him and let him follow the toboggan. Then we moved Monkey to the head of the team. He was very proud of his promotion and carried his head high like a finely trained show horse. A little further on, our lead dog became so sick we had to put him on the toboggan where John and I had been riding by turns. We were nearing Washow Bay, arriving at a point of land, Barnes Point, which stretched far out into the lake. Piles of crated fish were piled on the shore, so we knew there were fishing camps nearby. We decided to seek lodging with the fishermen, even though it was only three o'clock in the afternoon.

When we neared the piles of crates I noticed a path leading into the woods and told Monkey to follow it. He did so, enthusiastically, thinking we were going hunting.

As we drew near the camp a strange sight greeted my eyes. There, up to his knees in the snow, stood a naked man!

"Stop the dogs, John!" I cried. My immediate thought was that to approach closer might be unwise. Men have been known to go mad from the rigid, unyielding routine

of life in the backwoods. We stood there staring at this strange sight.

He was a big man. Looked almost like a giant, standing undraped and outlined in sharp relief against the white snow. "That one has been too long in the brush," I thought to myself. We were undecided whether to approach closer, or turn back. Then the door of the fishing shack opened and an old friend, Oli Thordarson, cried out:

"Hello, Gus! Hello, John! Come in. Come in. Tie your dogs and sit by the fire. Darn cold today."

I waved a greeting then pointed questioningly at the naked man, and shouted: "What about him. Is he mad?"

Oli's hearty laughter echoed across the clearing: "Him, mad? No, just taking his snow bath. He does that all the time. C'mon in!"

Thus reassured, we advanced nearer. Then I laughed out loud. The nude snow bather was my old friend Bjossi Bjornson!

"What are you trying to do," I chided in greeting, "freeze to death?"

"Can't a man take a bath without people making smart remarks?" he grinned good-naturedly. "Go on inside. It's too cold out for fur traders. I'll be in soon."

Inside we met several other fishermen, whom we had known before. They all welcomed us heartily. It felt good to be received with such hospitality. The Ice-

landic people are a warm, open-hearted race, always generous and hospitable to travelers.

Bjossi Bjornson's brother, John, and his wife, Hannah, were also in the shack. She lost no time preparing a tasty lunch for John and me. We stayed the night.

The next day we returned home. And, a few days later, I sent my dog team to Walter in Bisset. I had no further need for them and Walter could use them in the fur buying business he conducted along with his store. The sick lead dog we kept at home, trying to nurse him back to health. I tried every remedy I could find, but nothing worked. He grew steadily worse and finally died. He had been a very clever, gentle animal and his death was a painful event for our family.

A month or so later (in January, 1938) I made my last meat trip to Bisset. These trips had been much in the same class as my fur buying jaunts. They were rugged affairs and I had reached the point where my health was not up to the rigors of winters in the woods. We had paid off all our debts by then, and our store was thriving. We had a steady supply of both goods and customers and it was a rare occasion when we weren't able to fill all orders from stock on hand.

The depression was over. Jobs were plentiful. There was a ready market for farm produce and fish, and prices of both were climbing steadily. Both the farmer and the fisherman had more money, and more and more of our

store sales were cash transactions. Some of the farmers who lived near town had had their land drained and were doing so well they could afford to mechanize their farmwork. I extended my business to include farm machinery, becoming a John Deere dealer. Lady Luck was once again smiling upon us. We had a new home, too; a ten-room house built across the street from the store.

It should be noted, however, that the farm prosperity was not universal. The marginal lands, marshy and without drainage (ten to eighteen miles from. Riverton) still provided a bare living for those who farmed them. These farmers continued to work elsewhere in the summer, and saw cordwood for a living during the winter.

"Why did he have to buy you, you long-bearded goat?"

CHAPTER XXV

Bringing Up Our Boys

Our business continued steady, occupying most of my time and Emily's as well. We seemed to find so little time for our sons. It was 1939 and Harry was already 16, Jimmy 12, and Lawrence 3. Since Lawrence was still our baby we always had him near, where we could at least keep an eye on him. Harry and Jimmy, however, we saw only on rare occasions.

They had both grown up in the store. But now they were growing away from it; especially when the days were warm, the green leaves whispered their invitation to play, and the fish leaped in the nearby river. About the only time they showed any interest in the store now, was when they wanted more candies or chocolate bars. As soon as they got what they wanted, they vanished.

Emily began to show concern with the fact that they were away from home, we seldom knew just where, most of the time. "We'll have to do something about them, Gus," she worried.

From time to time I brought them both to the store and made them serve some of the customers. But it was

obvious they gained no pleasure from this task. So one day I called them to me and suggested:

"How about taking a little ride with me? I have a surprise for you."

"You bet!" Harry accepted.

"Oh, good! Let's go!" Jimmy bounced with enthusiasm.

We climbed into my old car and drove about four and a half miles north to the drainage ditch leading to Lake Winnipeg.

"See that large meadow over there," I pointed. "It's ideal for grazing cows and horses. How would you like to have some livestock to care for?"

"I think I'd like that, father," Harry answered thoughtfully. "It's a wonderful idea."

"And we could ride the horses like real cowboys," Jimmy enthused.

"Such things take a lot of money, boys," I cautioned, all the while gaining satisfaction from their enthusiasm. "We have some money, but not that much. However, I could buy a farm for each of you, on instalment terms. There would be room for a large herd of cattle and, if we took good care of them, we could probably sell enough each year to meet the payments."

"Do you mean, daddy, that I would have a farm of my own?" Jimmy asked incredulously.

"That's exactly what I mean," I replied. "The cattle and horses would be yours, too. But it would mean that

you would have to care for them. You would have to give them water. Later you would have to mow and rake hay. And, by and by, maybe you could even plow some land and grow wheat," I suggested hopefully, watching them both intently to see if the prospect of work would throw cold water on the idea of ownership.

It didn't. Both boys bubbled with animation and ideas stemming from my few suggestions.

"I would certainly take good care of the cattle and horses and help with farmwork. if I had a farm," Harry noted seriously.

"I would do everything you want me to, also," said Jimmy. "But, hurry daddy," he added in youthful impatience. "Let's get them, now!"

"Hey, not so fast," I grinned. "We'd better figure out how much such a venture would cost. Let's see, each quarter-section farm is 160 acres. This meadow will go for three dollars an acre. Now, how much would the two farms cost us?"

"Well, three times 160 would be $480.00," Harry figured.

"And two times $480.00 is $960.00," Jimmy almost shouted.

"Good!" I approved. "I'm happy to see you know your arithmetic. And I think we can swing the deal. All right, you shall have your farms. But remember, it will mean work for you. You'll have to continue your school studies. The farmwork must never interfere with

them. During the school term you will work the farms only on Saturdays. On holidays you can spend all your time out here."

"I'll be diligent in my school work," Harry promised.

"And I'll study hard and work hard on the farm, too," Jimmy added.

We talked of farming and cows and horses on the way home. When we arrived, the boys fairly swarmed over their mother, so eager were they to tell her the good news. She smiled happily, pretending it was a big surprise to her. We, of course, had talked it over, and our initial enthusiasm for the plan had been as great as that now shown by our sons.

Jimmy and Harry could hardly sleep that night, they were so excited. Nothing would do but I had to leave for Winnipeg the next morning to buy the farms. I did so, returning also with a team of horses, a hay mower and a rake, which I had picked up at McLean's auction sale. The boys were enraptured. Even little Lawrence kept repeating over and over:

"Nice horsies. Nice horsies."

We took the implements out to the farms and I showed the boys how to mow and rake the hay grass. They were very awkward the first few days, but their competence improved. By the time we were ready to put the hay up in stacks they were handling pitchforks expertly. The work dimmed none of their enthusiasm, and they always seemed to be happy and smiling, now

that there was a purpose to their lives. It made Emily and me happy, too.

I bought several head of young cattle and the boys took care of them. When it got cold in the fall, we brought the cattle and the horses to our stable in Riverton. After that the boys had to get up a little earlier each morning to feed and water the stock before leaving for school. After school hours, they cleaned the stables and put out more feed for the stock. Each Saturday they used the team to bring in a fresh supply of hay from the farms.

The work kept them out of mischief and they seemed to enjoy it. Whenever neighborhood boys urged them to go one place or another, they excused themselves, saying they had to take care of their cattle and horses. Ownership gave them pride in their work and they never seemed to tire of the responsibility.

The following summer they learned to drive a tractor and maintain and repair farm implements. It wasn't long before they were able to take the machinery apart and assemble it again. They learned more than I knew about such matters and, from time to time, taught me the proper use of some features of the equipment. They enjoyed assembling binders, combines, tractors, etc., and did this task for farmers to whom I sold such implements. They continued to be disinterested in the operations of our store, however.

That winter they again took care of the stable and

kept our woodpile up. When I realized how interested they were in caring for domestic animals, I added some variety to our stock; buying pigs, chickens, ducks, geese, a couple of turkeys and two sheep, as well as more cattle and horses.

The stable was behind our store and, whenever one of us entered the yard, the babble of animal voices crying for food set up quite a clamor. This was my "Noah's Ark". And, I am afraid, it did nothing to cement relations with our neighbors.

Usually, at least one of the animals would be contributing noise to shatter the quiet of the neighborhood. The barnyard odors were never the type one purchases at a perfume counter. One or another of the animals seemed always to manage to break through the yard fence, and utilize his freedom to graze on the vegetables in someone's garden, or mess up the sidewalk in front of a neighboring house.

I liked my menagerie but I felt guilty and somewhat sheepish whenever one of them was a nuisance to the neighborhood.

Our neighbors were very patient with me and with my "Ark", however. The Garry Sigurdsons lived just east of us. They had five children, and though there were the usual squabbles between their youngsters and ours, there was never a quarrel between us. We lived next door to each other for many years. Their eldest daughter Florence, and her husband Bill Hokanson, also lived there

after their marriage. He was, and still is, a ship captain and game warden. We were on very close terms with them, too.

The Tryggvi Briems were good friends of ours from the time we first settled in Riverton. We often borrowed each others yard and garden tools and visited together frequently.

The Dori Eastmans lived just across the street. He succeeded Victor Eyolfson as our postmaster and was also justice of the peace. We were always on the friendliest terms with them, and with the three Sigurdson families; S. V., S. R. and Stebbi Sigurdson. They were Riverton's most prominent fish dealers, owned many fishing boats and had their own ship for transporting fish to Winnipeg. The three were involved in a number of other business ventures in the community, too.

A more recent neighbor was Steve Olafson, who built a home and a large garage near us. We became the best of friends.

These are the people on whom my livestock imposed more or less frequent, and always unwelcome, visitations. And it must be admitted that never was friendship put to so severe a test as when our stable grew to become a regular barnyard. Especially when I added a horned-trouble-maker, a mischievous billy goat, to the menagerie.

From the day of his arrival in our barnyard, the billy goat kept the neighborhood and much of Riverton in a

continual uproar. He intimidated most of the children and a few of the adults with his eagerness to lower his head and butt. I tried to keep him fenced in, but he always managed to get out. Finally, I kept him tied up. This reduced the frequency of his excursions, but was by no means a complete solution to the problem.

Early one morning I heard Mrs. Garry Sigurdson's voice angrily scolding. I looked out the window and was greeted by the sight of my billy goat cavorting on the roof of the kitchen wing of the Sigurdson home next door. A ladder leaning against the roof had evidently proved inviting and challenging to the mischievous animal.

"Get down from there, you bad goat," I heard her exclaim. "You'll make holes in the roof. Get down, I say."

But the goat wasn't a bit impressed; just looked at her with eyes twinkling mischievously as if daring her to climb up after him. I opened the door to go out and get that fool goat down, when I heard Mrs. Sigurdson mutter:

"I don't know what's got into Gusti. Horses, cows, pigs, chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys! A body would think that would be enough. Why did he have to buy you, you long-bearded goat? What will be next? An elephant, maybe . . . "

The goat, unperturbed by this tirade, stood placidly pawing at the roof, nodding his head as if in complete agreement. But, if he was unperturbed, it was otherwise with me. I blushed and felt so chagrined I was ashamed

to show myself. I waited until Mrs. Sigurdson stormed into her house, then I ran and coaxed Billy down. I called him and rattled a tin pail, and he jumped down and ran toward me, thinking it was feeding time.

Then and there, I decided I had imposed on my good neighbors too long. I took all the animals to the farm, and kept them there. I got rid of the goat entirely, giving him to my brother Walt, who now had his own farm. I also sold most of the domestic fowl, keeping just a few chickens and ducks.

I'm sure it was more than just imagination that our relations with our neighbors seemed more cordial after I rid the neighborhood of my "Noah's Ark".

CHAPTER XXVI

Democracy in a Melting Pot

The longer we lived in Riverton, the more we grew to understand and appreciate the meaning of freedom and democracy; not only in our community but throughout the section of Canada we knew. Although immigration had created somewhat of a melting pot of races and creeds, the definiteness of origin never set up social or economic barriers of any kind.

We were Ukrainians. Riverton was predominately Icelandic. Yet we were all Canadians; more than that, human beings—people living and working together in friendship and good will. Socially we intermingled (as I learned people do when they acquire the nationality of a free country) with never a thought for the taboos of racial origin which are so rigidly adhered to in the Old Country. In business, too, a man was judged by his character and reputation, rather than by the contour of his features, the color of his skin, or his religious affiliation.

For example: In 1942, during the second world war, wholesalers in Winnipeg gave me several opportunities to make wise purchases. Not because they were Ukrainians, too; they weren't. But because I had a good reputa-

tion for fair and honest dealing. One such dealer offered me a huge pile of goods—goods I couldn't afford—when I visited his warehouse.

"But I haven't the cash to pay for so much stock," I declined, apprehensive about buying so much at one time.

"Don't worry about it, Gus," he said. "You got a bad deal during the depression. Now, I want to help you. What if you are short of money, right now. If I'm not afraid to trust you, why should you be afraid to stock up?"

I was still hesitant. The transaction would amount to several thousand dollars. But he patiently explained:

"This is wartime, Gus. Within a few weeks all goods will be sold on allotment. When that happens it will be impossible to get an assortment like this at one time. Take it now, and you'll not be pressured so much by shortages later."

I gave in. The pile of dresses, clothing, blankets, yard goods, etc., almost overflowed a big van. I had no room for it in my store, so I had it unloaded at a warehouse until I should need it. The allotment system went into effect a few weeks later, as the wholesaler had warned me it would. The stock he had urged me to take served me in good stead through the war, since the sizeable purchase served also to increase my allotment quota. The fact that I had bought the goods before price increases also worked in my favor. It even brought me customers from other districts when they learned I had

plenty of merchandise at pre-war prices. He had done me a very big favor.

Once when I called on another wholesaler, he was involved in a heated argument with a retailer who wanted to buy some yard goods. The wholesaler turned him down, even though they were racial kinsmen. When the disappointed storekeeper left empty-handed, I dared not ask for any of the goods myself. I ordered some other things and was just about to leave when the wholesaler asked:

"Don't you need some dress goods?"

"I had intended to order some," I looked at him questioningly. "But I thought better of it after you refused that man."

"Oh, him. That's a different matter," the dealer shrugged. "He can't be trusted. You can."

"But he is of your race," I pointed out.

"True," the dealer acknowledged wearily. "But what is race? I deal only with honest people."

I was very much impressed by his confidence in me, and I did want the yard goods. I may have seemed a little over eager to stock up, however, so he cautioned gently:

"There isn't too much available right now, Gus. But you may take a bolt of each kind."

Such men made business transactions a joy. And demonstrations of democracy, such as this one certainly was, always made me proud to be a part of Canada.

CHAPTER XXVII

Physician, Humanitarian, Friend

Of all the men whose civic devotion and unselfish efforts have contributed so much to the progress of Riverton and the surrounding district, one must be singled out for special mention. His was the contribution of life, of hope, of inspiration. His works touched every farmer, every fisherman, every businessman, every child; even reaching far out into the north country to the traders, the trappers, the Indians.

He is Dr. S. O. Thompson. He first became important to our family that day in 1923 when he delivered our first-born into the world. He had come to Riverton the previous year, a young man just out of the University of Manitoba medical school. What possessed a man of so much promise to dedicate himself to the rough, primitive, almost destitute district Riverton was in those years, I do not know. But it probably stemmed from a deep inward desire to help his fellow man, a motivation that was evidenced in practically everything he did in the years that followed.

Dr. Thompson arrived in Riverton on an evening train in the spring of 1922. Guests at Bill Rockett's Riverton hotel, where he registered, were immediately

taken by his athletic stature, his serious but handsome, pleasant face. The thick-set eyebrows of the newcomer gave him the appearance of sterness, but kindness and worldly wisdom far beyond his years shone in his eyes.

"Bet anything he's a detective," one of the guests conjectured.

"I shouldn't be surprised," echoed another.

"I don't care what he is. I just hope he stays a long time," a pretty waitress sighed to the cook.

But one guest, bolder than the others, engaged the young man in conversation. Through him Riverton learned that it had acquired a doctor.

A few days later Dr. Thompson took up residence in the spacious home of Johann Briem, and opened his practice. In the days that followed he was more often seen on foot than in his old Ford car. Of course, our roads in those early days were such as to discourage even a sturdier auto of more recent vintage.

In most instances, however, the doctor would be driven to his patients in a farmer's wagon or sleigh, depending on the season. When in winter his services were required over fifteen miles away, a dog team and toboggan usually despatched him there. At times he had to travel fifty miles or more to bring medical relief to an Indian, fisherman or trapper. Freezing temperatures, blizzards, the roughest weather, never deterred him. Where he was needed, Dr. Thompson went.

There were few well-to-do people in the district

when he started his practice. It was a rare occasion when he was paid in cash for his services. In many instances a promise for future payment was all he could expect. Often his services were rewarded only by some tullibees or whitefish from a fisherman, a bag of potatoes or vegetables from a poor farmer. But the doctor seemed always more preoccupied with what he could do for others, than with payment for his services.

While still new in Riverton, he became the subject of much innocent conjecture by local housewives. He was seen frequently near the school house. And, while he may have been admiring the spruce trees that adorned the grounds, it seemed more likely that his admiration was for a pretty, young, blonde, blue-eyed school teacher named Thordis.

Affairs of the heart can't be kept secret in a small town, and it soon became apparent to everyone that the mutual attraction the two young people obviously shared was ripening into love. They met often on the forest paths near the school and, early in 1923, the doctor bought a piece of land there and started building a house. It was completed in autumn and the doctor married his pretty Thordis. It was an ideal match, and the happiness one read in their eyes in the early days of their courtship never faded in the years of marriage that followed.

When Dr. Thompson built his drug store, I am convinced he did so not only to make medicinal supplies conveniently available, but to enable his patients to

obtain prescribed medicines on the same "don't worry about the fee" basis as his medical services.

The poverty that was so prevalent in our district became even more pronounced in the early days of the depression. Then it was common for Dr. Thompson, looking at children with hunger-pinched cheeks and patched up clothes, to reassure a sick mother or father whom he had treated: "Now don't worry about my fee, and we'll get your medicine at my drug store."

He never questioned how, when, or even whether, a patient would be able to pay.

From the time the doctor made his old drug store building available to Walter and me for our store, I frequently acted as his interpreter; despite my own language limitations. Often a worried, shaken farmer would rush into the store and excitedly tell me in Ukrainian that the doctor was needed on his farm; his wife was about to have a baby, his son broke his leg, the little girl had a high fever, etc.

If I was not too busy in the store, I would ask the doctor if I might accompany him on the visit. I could help interpret the language for him and I could also be of assistance when his car got stuck in a swamp-hole, or it became afflicted with a disinclination to go. I had an old car myself, and one could never wholly rely on the performance of such vehicles.

I witnessed much suffering and tragedy on these visits with Dr. Thompson. I also saw the hope, the

promise and the healing knowledge and ability he brought to so many homes.

After ministering to the sick or injured, he would pick up his little black bag, turn to an obviously worried mother or father and reassure them quietly, saying: "Johnny will get well. Please don't worry. Just keep him warm and follow my instructions." And often where poverty was evident, he would add reassuringly: "Don't worry about my fee. Bring me a bag of potatoes when you can."

It was always a mystery to me how Dr. Thompson ever got any sleep. Often he would return from a case, barely have time for a bite to eat and be rushed to another patient, perhaps thirty miles away on an island in Lake Winnipeg.

I remember one day just before sunset, I drove to my mother-in-law's farm about twelve miles west of Riverton, to inquire whether the family needed any provisions. We visited until dark, when we heard a loud persistent barking in the yard. I stepped out to quiet the dog, and heard a little girl weeping loudly nearby. She was a twelve-year-old daughter of a neighboring farmer. I tried to console her and learn what the trouble was.

Between sobs, she managed to tell me that her little brother (two and one-half years old) had fallen from a wagon where he had been playing and had broken his arm. The parents were away, helping with hay-making on another farm. We got into my car and drove to the

scene of the accident. The youngster's arm was badly broken and immediate medical attention was needed. My mother-in-law took the youngster into the house and tried to comfort him, while the girls ran to fetch the mother and father. I hurried to Riverton to get Dr. Thompson.

I held the gas pedal hard to the floorboards and practically hurtled my old car over puddles and mud-holes. At times the motor got so hot I had to stop and cool it with muddy water. These stops consumed valuable time, and it was nearly two hours later when I pulled up in front of the doctor's home. My car shuddered, gasped, and died on the spot.

I knocked at the door and Mrs. Thompson let me in. After inquiring about the nature of the emergency she went quickly to the bedroom, awakened Dr. Thompson and briefed him on the accident while she helped him dress. We went out together. The doctor looked at my steaming, mud-spattered car, patted it tenderly and joked: "Kaput!"—an eminently accurate diagnosis.

His car was little better, but it took every mud-hole at a jump until it made a last desperate leap into a swampy hole about a half mile from the accident scene. There it was mired, and no amount of coaxing or pushing would free it. We walked the rest of the way.

The little boy was still sobbing and whimpering spasmodically when we entered the farmhouse. His parents had already arrived and were standing by, help-

less and grief-stricken. The doctor took over, soothed the lad, set the broken arm and bandaged it in splints.

"He'll be all right, now," he said getting up. "But we must get him to the hospital in Winnipeg at once. It's a bad break and should be X-rayed to be certain the bones have been set properly."

The train to Winnipeg would leave early in the morning, so the boy's mother and father got ready to leave with us. We rode in the farmer's wagon to the mired car, hitched the team to it and pulled it out of the mud. It was already long past midnight, and though the doctor drove full speed, it was daybreak when we got to Riverton. The train would leave in about an hour.

We stopped at my store. I awakened Emily and told her what had happened. She saw at once that the little boy needed better clothes for a trip to the city, so she found some in stock that were just right and helped him change. His mother called me to one side and in a low, embarrassed whisper confessed: "I haven't a penny for the journey. I wonder, perhaps, could you help me, Mr. Romaniuk?"

"That's too bad," I replied haltingly. "Didn't your husband give you any money at all?"

"How could he," she said in distress. "We haven't a penny at present."

"Emily!" I called. "See how much we have in the cash box."

My wife counted out the pennies, nickels, dimes and

quarters and came up with the sad sum of three dollars and a few odd cents. There just wasn't much money in those depression days. All our cash wouldn't pay the train fare. I felt depressed as I went over to Dr. Thompson and admitted:

"All we have is a little over three dollars, doctor. The poor woman has no money of her own. What shall we do?"

Reverting to his habit when lost in thought, Dr. Thompson raised his right hand and scratched his head just behind his right ear. Then he put his left hand in a trouser pocket and drew out a five dollar bill. Without a word he pressed the money into the woman's hand. We handed over the contents of our cash box. The total would pay her fare and leave a little over for expenses in the city.

Gratitude was written all over her face then, and even more so when she returned from the city. The X-ray had shown the bones set perfectly.

The entire Riverton district soon held Dr. Thompson in esteem akin to hero-worship. He was our knight in shining armor. He was never too ill, never too tired, never reluctant to serve anywhere, anytime he was needed. No danger nor hazard deterred him. How well I knew the risks involved when he would set out on an errand of mercy to some island in Lake Winnipeg, when the temperature was at forty below zero and winds churned the snow into an all-enveloping blizzard. Danger,

too, ever attended similar missions into the wilderness country north of town.

Mrs. Thompson was not unaware of these dangers. Often I would imagine her waiting and praying into the small hours of the night, when the doctor was long overdue from a case. My mind would see her patiently waiting in the darkness, peering every few minutes through the window into the cold, unrelenting night. The clock ticking on, patience might almost give way to despair; then, a familiar footstep. He's home again and safe!

There were few of us who did not realize how very vital was her role in the achievements of our doctor. No matter how late the hour, she always answered the door when one came to summon his services. She would question the visitor softly, learn the nature of the case then wake the doctor, explain the emergency, help him dress, hand him his medical kit and give him a calm, confident, reassuring smile as she kissed him good-bye. And how sore at heart she must have been on those occasions when the emergency would send him out in a storm to save some injured logger, trapper, farmer or fisherman far away.

She was and is a brave, wonderful woman. We grew to admire and respect her as we admired and respected the husband she served so faithfully.

CHAPTER XXVIII

In Grateful Acknowledgment

The Riverton community hall was jammed that night in 1936 when a grateful populace, from town and country, turned out to publicly acknowledge appreciation for Dr. S. O. Thompson's unselfish services to the area.

The doctor and his family were seated at the head table, and their introduction by the toastmaster was greeted with thunderous applause. During the program several distinguished speakers called attention to the doctor's meritorious record of medical, social and civic service to Riverton and the outlying district. Mrs. Thompson was also praised for the social and civic work to which she devoted her tireless energy.

The honor banquet had been long in the planning and the committee had accumulated, by public subscription, sufficient funds to buy a new car for the doctor. It was a gift we were certain would be well received, for the primitive roads over which he traveled on his calls had already taken their toll of the car he had purchased a little over two years earlier.

In making the presentation for the many people whose nickels, dimes and dollars had gone into the gift, the speaker said:

"All of Riverton and its neighbors want Dr. Thompson to know how much we appreciate his long and faithful medical service to us. We wish also to acknowledge his invaluable services to our school board, and the long-standing service Mrs. Thompson has given as the school board secretary.

"As an expression of this gratitude we herewith present to them this new automobile. May it make the doctor's travel more comfortable and speed his calls so that he may be home more often to take Mrs. Thompson and the children for a joy ride."

The hall reverberated from the thunderous ovation Dr. Thompson received as he rose slowly to his feet to acknowledge the tribute. Visibly moved, he spoke in a voice that shook with emotion:

"You have done high honor to me and to my family tonight. We are very grateful. Your praise and this costly gift are far more than we deserve. What I have done any doctor would have done, given the same opportunity. My wife and I have tried only to serve as best we can and to be good neighbors to the people whom we have grown to love so deeply. When you see us riding in this fine new car, you may be certain that we will be remembering this wonderful night, and the kindness you have shown us."

(I think we all took comfort, too, from the sight of Dr. Thompson in his new car. For we knew it would bring him surer and faster when we needed him.)

But if we had reason to show our appreciation that evening, we had even more cause to be grateful to this fine man for the services he was to perform in the decade that followed.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Doctor In a New Role

Life rolled on uneventfully until the years of the Second World War; which for us in Canada was the period from 1939 to the middle of 1945. They were years of hard work, of sacrifice, of heartbreak, and of political unrest and upheaval. By 1945, even our Riverton district which up to that date had been sluggish and apathetic, or resigned to conditions which limited our economic growth and betterment, became aroused, alive and determined to get in step with the rest of the country.

Much of this new found virility was fomented, or at least strengthened by our young men who returned from the war impatient to make up for time lost in military service; young men whose vision and perspective had been broadened through education in our schools and through personal observation of conditions that prevailed in more prosperous districts of Canada.

It was an election year and the Riverton district, which comprises the northern part of the Gimli constituency, buzzed with unrest like a swarm of bees leaving the hive with a new queen. Everywhere farmers bemoaned the lack of marsh drainage and the backward state of our roads. And they had good reason to complain,

particularly in the north where farms were still restricted to small tilled areas in the midst of marshland; where farmers still eked out a bare existence, little improved from conditions under which we had struggled more than thirty years before. The feeling that our representation in the Manitoba legislature had failed was everywhere, and the clamor for a new, effective voice in the provincial government increased by the hour.

But the movement lacked unity. It was reflected in too many factions, each with the same purpose, but divided as to ways, means and personalities. Politically it could not succeed unless the divided groups could be welded into an effective organization.

To this end, in the initial confusion of the election campaign, a group of Riverton's most influential citizens, men like S. V., S. R. and Stebbi Sigurdson, Mr. Peaker, Tony Smilski, Tryggvi Briem, Julius Maas, Percy Wood, Peter Onysko and others, met one evening to explore the possibilities of channeling this new vitality into an effective unit.

The group came to the conclusion that the only solution lay in electing a representative who, through long residence in the district, was fully aware of local problems and needs; who was a man of sufficient influence and prestige to carry weight with the legislature when pleading the cause of drainage and road improvement for our district.

There was no need to look long for such a champion.

The group was unanimous. The one man who could best plead our cause was Dr. S. O. Thompson!

A committee was delegated to call on the doctor immediately and try to convince him to enter the political race. I was one of the committee. We took the doctor completely by surprise. He considered for a moment after recovering from the shock of our unexepected request, then replied thoughtfully:

"But I am not a politician. I am a physician. My business is to minister to sick people. And my time is so taken up with the duties of my profession that I simply would not be able to attend the legislative sessions."

What he said was true. There was no one to take his place here. Perhaps we had been wrong to ask. Then one of our group injected a ray of hope into the picture: "We know how busy you are doctor," he agreed, "and how sorely your services are needed here. But there is a new hospital at Gimli, now. Why couldn't your patients get medical attention there during the sessions at Winnipeg? Our district can never hope to progress beyond its present stage without government funds for development."

Dr. Thompson thought over this proposal. "Yes, that would work," he finally concluded. "All right, gentlemen. If you think I'm your man, I'll do my best."

We started the campaign machinery rolling the very next day, and when the poll representatives for our

constituency met at Gimli, the doctor was officially nominated as the Liberal Coalition candidate.

The next few weeks were hectic ones for all of us, but especially so for Dr. Thompson. He attended most of the campaign meetings, speaking briefly, but right to the point: " . . . Where marshland has been drained, there is prosperity. Where it has not, there is poverty . . . If I am elected, I will do my best to obtain government assistance to relieve this condition and to improve our roads and other unfavorable conditions which retard our progress . . . "

Politics was the chief topic of conversation everywhere. I campaigned constantly in my store. Many of my customers were all for Dr. Thompson. Now and then, however, a farmer would point out:

"I have nothing against the 'Doc', Gus. But he doesn't belong to my party!"

"Can't we forget party differences for the moment?" I would cajole. "Dr. Thompson knows our district and our needs. He is the best qualified man in the entire district to present our cause to the legislature. You and I and the rest of us, all want the same things. Dr. Thompson is the only man who stands a chance of getting them."

I think I swung a few votes over to our side. I also canvassed the leading men in the outlying district enlisting their support for the doctor's candidacy. I attended as many campaign meetings as I could. At one such

meeting, both Dr. Thompson and the opposition candidate addressed the crowd. Each was forceful and effective. Since the audience was divided along party lines, considerable confusion followed the speeches. Then a farmer, Joseph Hrycyshyn, got to his feet and commented:

"If there is any man in our district who knows how bad our roads are, it is Dr. Thompson. He travels them more often than any of us. He knows what a hard life we lead on our marshy farms. He even knows how few comforts we have in our homes, for he has frequently had to sleep on a hay mattress in our hard beds. He knows our needs as he knows the fingers on his right hand. Now is there any better qualified man to represent us in the Manitoba legislature?"

A hush fell over the meeting hall. The plain commonsense spoken by this Ukrainian-Canadian had a magical effect on the audience. Dr. Thompson was hailed by acclamation as the choice of those in attendance.

"Let's thank him for his long and faithful service by at least giving him our votes," another farmer shouted.

The campaign was progressing famously.

Dr. Thompson and myself with son Jimmy and his wife inspecting the road leading from Riverton to Big Bullhead, recently constructed through Dr. Thompson's efforts.

CHAPTER XXX

New Life for a Tired Land

The day after the election, several of us gathered at Dr. Thompson's home to listen to the radio returns. First reports were sketchy, but as the time went on we could read in the announcements a definite trend for the doctor. Finally, we were brought to our feet with the announcement:

"Although returns from the Gimli constituency are still incomplete, the election of Dr. S. O. Thompson has been conceded."

We were elated. Mrs. Thompson planted an enthusiastic congratulatory kiss on his lips. We shouted ourselves hoarse and joyously clapped the doctor on the back. He was pleased, too, with the overwhelming margin of his victory.

I had previously referred to him as a "knight in shining armor", a phrase that certainly is descriptive of the way he championed our cause when the legislature convened. He eloquently pleaded the case for district drainage during the opening session at Winnipeg. Even those of us who were his most fervent admirers were startled by the speed with which he got action. Early in the spring (1946) soil experts arrived to take test

soundings. Beneath the marsh they found the rich, black soil we knew was there. Soon, thereafter, engineers drove the stakes that marked the route of the drainage canal all the way from Washow Bay in the north to Progress and Shorncliffe in the south, thence westward through Ledwyn and Okno.

In the wake of the engineers came huge dredging equipment carving a deep, wide canal that was to become a river of marsh water, flowing swiftly toward Washow Bay of Lake Winnipeg. The first rush of drainage water filled the canal to the brim, and even a year and a half later the river of water rode halfway up the banks.

Results of that first drainage were simply astounding. During the summer of 1946 areas of tilled land increased at a rapid pace. In the spring of 1947 large, wheat-seeded fields surrounded farm homes where formerly only small vegetable patches had been. The transformation was a miracle that even we, who had dreamed of it for so long, found hard to believe.

Prosperity came to Riverton and to the Gimli district. Farmers bought new clothes, furniture, cars, tractors, implements. Within the next few years squat farm huts were replaced by comfortable, modern homes.

My father's undaunted faith in the future of his adopted country was justified, too, as his land yielded excellent crops in this new era of prosperity. My parents were now in comfortable circumstances, the hard-earned reward of forty years of struggle.

The drainage canal was the instrument that converted Riverton, Ledwyn, Okno and the rest of the area from a primitive country into a thriving farming area. It opened more land to the sun and the warm rays all but dispelled the night frosts that had plagued farmers in June and August. Now frost damage is not an expected but an occasional thing.

This climate change had been developing slowly through the years as more and more timber was cut and the area opened up, but the drainage had the most sweeping effect. Now, our climate is similar to that of Winnipeg; a little colder and more damp, however, due to our northern location and nearness to Lake Winnipeg.

Our winters are long and cold. The lower temperatures begin in September and the ground starts to freeze about the end of October. By the last of November the lakes and rivers are covered with a layer of ice and the earth becomes a frozen crust. That is the real start of winter; and it is with us through the month of March. The cold weather hangs on, although the snow begins to thaw slowly in April. Even so, warm caps with ear-flaps are standard equipment.

May is warmer. But we sometimes have snow during the month. The ice remains on the lakes until about May 20. By then the top layer of earth has thawed to the depth of a few inches. Below this point the earth may be frozen to a depth of four feet.

However, it is then that we sow our fields with

grain. We do our seeding hurriedly, for our summer season is short. By the tenth of June, the seeding is completed. The weather warms rapidly. The earth warms, too, and seeds germinate and sprout almost in no time. Within two or three weeks the fields are covered with green carpets of grain. In those years when a night frost occurs near the end of June, little serious damage is done and the grain revives, although the speed of its growth may be slightly retarded. If flax is damaged by frost, however, it has no power to revive.

Most serious frost damage occurs in the lower lying lands, on turf lands. In the years of no frost, these low lying fields produce exceptionally good crops of barley, from 40 to 60 bushels per acre.

July is usually very warm. The grain grows unusually fast, blooms and begins to ripen by the end of the month. Harvesting is in full swing by mid-August. Where grain is not ripe by mid-August, there again is danger of night frost. In recent years, however, frosts in June or August have been rare, due chiefly, I believe, to marsh drainage. These have been good years.

In all my years in the Riverton district, there has been no drought damage to crops. We have had dry summers, but never a severe drought. We have long summers from time to time, also. Then farmers can sow their fields the end of April, and very likely experience no frost until the middle of October.

The drainage work has continued since the dredging

of that main canal. Many more side canals are being dredged, opening new land for settlement north of Riverton; land with rich, black soil for growing crops. Miraculous has been the change in our countryside. However, it is quite possible that the full miracle of marsh drainage has not yet been realized.

Dr. Thompson made good, too, on his campaign promise of road improvement. Fifty miles of good road were constructed from Riverton to the fishing settlement of Big Bullhead. A road was built across Hecla Island, linking the town with the opposite side of the island. Roads in the southern part of the Gimli constituency were widened and improved by graveling. This work, too, has continued since the doctor first stirred the legislature to action in 1945.

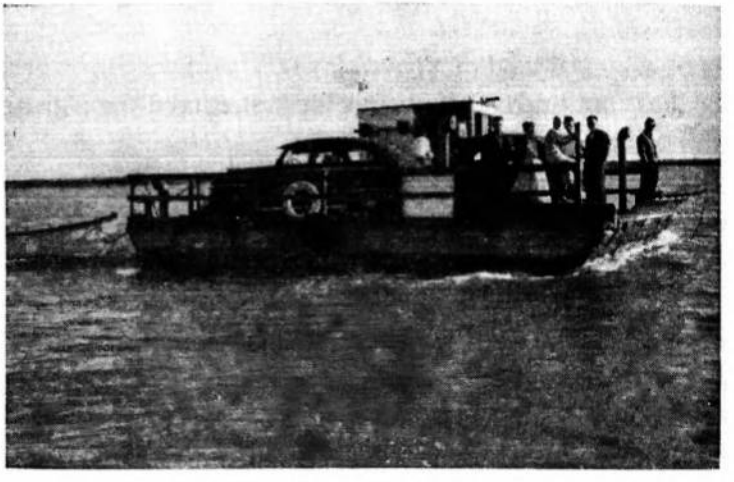
In addition, he was instrumental in 1947 in linking the entire district to an electric power network that now includes even Hecla Island on Lake Winnipeg.

In 1953 Hecla Island was also connected by a ferry with the mainland. Now the Hecla Island people can reach Riverton in two hours. Formerly it was a trip of hardships, especially during a storm.

After years of apathy and inaction, the almost overnight accomplishment of Dr. Thompson so impressed residents of the constituency that they re-elected him by acclamation in 1949 and by a sweeping majority again in 1953. They also staged a huge public celebration in his honor in 1948.

Capt. Grimolfson of the Ferry.

Ferry between the mainland and Hecla Island.



The date of his silver wedding anniversary, August 15, was chosen for the celebration and it was a grand affair. It was staged in the public park at Hnausa, six miles south of Riverton, and was attended by thousands.

The first public tribute to the doctor back in 1936 had come from grateful residents throughout the Riverton district. His legislative accomplishments, however, earned for him the gratitude of the entire Gimli constituency and the Hnausa park celebration was attended by people from all of the districts as well as from Winnipeg and elsewhere. A number of government officials also attended.

The park was filled to capacity when Dr. Thompson, his wife and family (two sons and two daughters) were escorted to the high platform in the centre of the festive area. Even an Eskimo from Baffin Island was there. He sang several songs on the program and seemed to enjoy being in the limelight before so many people. Off the platform, his behavior was almost child-like. He ate ice cream cones continually. To all attempts to engage him in conversation he would speak the only English words he knew: "I, Eskimo. From Baffin Land."

Tribute was heaped on the doctor and Mrs. Thompson in a series of laudatory speeches. Gifts of a new car, a refrigerator and a grandfather clock were also presented. Rich as was the display of oratory, to me the most impressive tribute was paid by our mayor, S. V. Sigurdson, who addressed the gathering as follows:

"We have gathered here in the good old-fashioned way to pay tribute and give thanks to Dr. and Mrs. Thompson; to commemorate and celebrate with them their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, to thank them for

Mrs. S. O. Thompson and Dr. Thompson with their Grandfather Clock.

their deeds in the past and to wish them health and happiness for the future.

"First of all, we wish to thank Mrs. Thompson for her great contribution to the community life of Riverton, for her unselfish devotion to our district, for her will to work and help in all the community affairs, in the school and the church, and for her steadfast line of thought, deeply inculcated in her family. Especially do we thank her for the part she played in making the young doctor fall so much in love with our district and its people; sinking his roots deeper and deeper into the very lives and hearts of the people of this constituency, so that we can hardly think now of any of our community affairs without immediately thinking of the doctor . . ."

Mr. Sigurdson directed his remarks to Dr. Thompson's magnificent record for unselfish participation in community affairs and for his interest and able assistance in the community hall, the curling rink and skating rink. "Looking back at any of our sports," he added, "be it hockey or a ball game, the doctor was always there to help our boys along."

The mayor dwelt at some length on Dr. Thompson's long and devoted service as a physician, then went on to his legislative accomplishments:

"We wish to thank you also for your work as a member of the legislature," he addressed the doctor. "We know how well you appreciate the difference between a good road and a swampy road, as you quite

S. V. Sigurdson, Mayor of Riverton.

often had to put on high rubber boots before you could get to a patient. You knew that it was drainage, roads and more roads that we needed. Armed with this full realization of the whole situation, and with your winning smile, you soon won for us a host of friends who are

now helping this constituency to take its rightful place in the economy of Manitoba . . .

"So great have been your achievements in the art of human understanding that you have succeeded in welding together the people of many different creeds and racial origins, helping to build a better and stronger community . . . "

Mr. Sigurdson concluded his remarks with a wish that might have come from the heart of each one of the thousands who stood there humbly, yet proudly, in silent gratitude for the good doctor and his works:

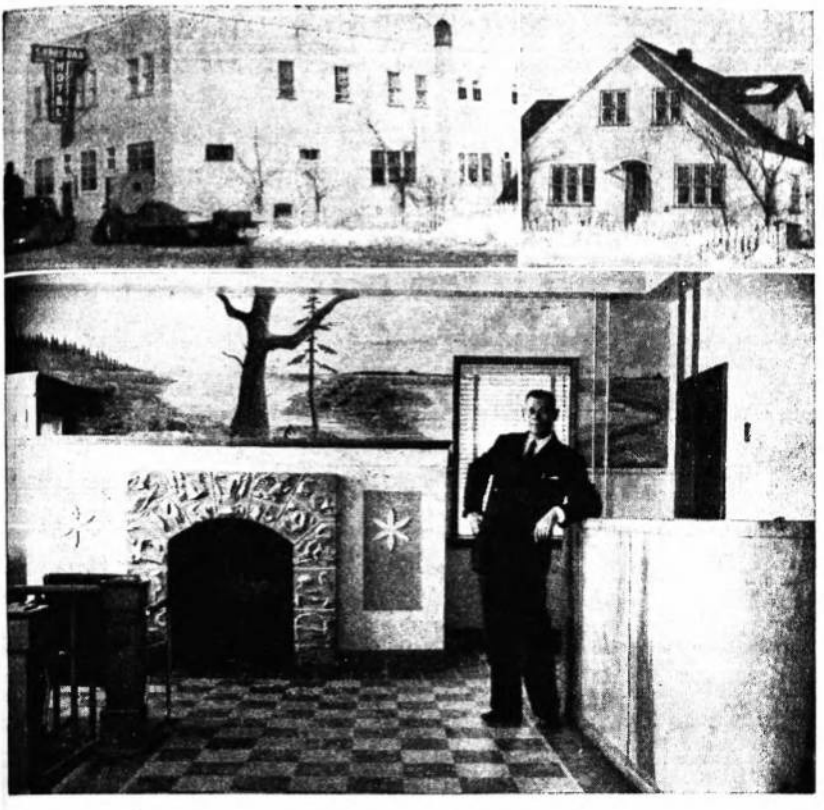
"Again we all join in wishing the Doctor and Mrs. Thompson good health and happiness for many, many years to come. God bless you both."

The enthusiastic crowd thundered an ovation that swelled in volume and spirit as the good doctor rose to acknowledge the moving tribute paid him and his family that day. When the clamor subsided and his voice could be heard, he said:

"From the bottom of our hearts we thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for the great honor you have paid us today. I thank you for myself and for Mrs. Thompson and the four other members of our family. When you speak of my achievements, I would like you to remember that they would never have been performed without my wife's assistance. She has always been my inspiration. Whenever I was weary or depressed, she always came to

my rescue with words of cheer. She is, so to say, my right arm.

"We are grateful, too, for the wonderful gifts you have presented us. But I would like you to know that when we start building a hospital at Riverton, I shall contribute to the building fund a sum of money equivalent to the price of this new Ford car. I shall think of you whenever I look up at the grandfather clock, and I am certain Mrs. Thompson will remember this day with gratitude whenever she puts something in the new refrigerator. Thank you again, my dear friends."



Gus at home in the lobby of his Sandy Bar Hotel.

CHAPTER XXXI

I Build a Hotel

It should be pointed out that the prosperity that followed marsh drainage and road construction was not limited to the farmers and businessmen of the Riverton district. Drainage at Hecla Island opened that land to farming, providing an additional source of income and sustenance for an area which had been exclusively dependent on fishing. The road to Big Bullhead opened new territory for logging and farming and gave a needed boost to the economy of that district.

The change made Riverton a busy little business centre, however. More and more people came to town for business or pleasure, or to stop over enroute to Hecla Island, Big Bullhead or other growing sections beyond. We were still just a little community of about one thousand persons, but a head count on any given day would show a greater population. Riverton was geographically a convenient stopover point.

Usually there were more visitors than our one hotel could accommodate. Often we had overnight guests in our home, as did other residents. Where else could these visitors stay? Because hospitality was second nature with us, we never turned down a request for overnight

lodging if we had the room. It cannot be denied that it was often an inconvenience, however, particularly for my wife, who thus had the task of caring for the extra rooms in addition to her regular household duties and helping me in the store.

More than one such overnight guest suggested: "Gus, why don't you build a hotel? Riverton is a booming town. One hotel can't handle the traffic. There should be more than enough business for two."

I couldn't deny the logic of this reasoning. But there was soundness too, in pointing out several stumbling blocks to such an undertaking.

"Where would I get enough money for a big enterprise like that?" I would conjecture. "Even if I could raise the money, it would probably be difficult to get a license for another hotel for a town as small as ours."

Several of my guests, people of influence, offered assurances on the latter score, however: "Don't worry about the license," they would say. "We'll help you get it."

Ever since the day I bought those horses from Mr. Reimer, I had never been one to turn down a business opportunity without at least giving the matter consideration. As I considered this proposition, however, I could see little reason for taking the big step. Why look for more troubles at this stage of the game, I would reason. We're just enjoying being out of debt. The store is prospering. We have some money in the bank. We have

security and no worries of any consequence. Why look for trouble?

My mental reservations went unheeded by the many people who continued to urge me into the venture, however. I think I was pushed to the brink when several of them told me of a rumor that someone had already applied for a permit to build another hotel in Riverton.

"Don't you worry, though, Gus," they assured me. "He won't get the license. But you can, with our help."

I suppose that the years of struggle to overcome the many obstacles with which we were faced conditioned us for more of the same. By contrast, the peaceful secure life of a small town storekeeper was humdrum and uneventful. I discussed the hotel matter with my wife and with our relatives. None of them indicated that they thought I had lost my mind. I talked it over with my attorney and friend of long standing, Sollie Thorvaldson, Sveinn's son. He could find nothing amiss with the plan. So we presented my license application to the hotel commission at Winnipeg. The application had the approval of the municipal council. Our postmaster Dori Eastman and justice of the peace Gisli Einarson forwarded their recommendation. Other friends supported the application before the commission. The license was approved in the spring of 1947.

But we weren't out of the woods, yet. I had the license, but money was another matter. I looked for some business partners. Three men showed interest in the

venture. I took one of them in. He contributed considerable capital to the venture, but I was still short of the needed total. I sold my car, my tractor and other articles to raise money. My parents gave me a few thousand dollars.

With the funds thus accumulated, construction got underway in June, 1947. I supervised the work while my partner traveled back and forth from Winnipeg for building supplies. Often, at the end of the day, I would spend another hour or two arranging necessary materials for the work the next morning. Before long, however, our capital was exhausted and the work was still far from complete. We borrowed $20,000 from a finance company in Winnipeg. This bought more materials and paid more wages, but it, too, was spent before the hotel was finished.

There seemed to be no end to this building's appetite for currency. I worried constantly, exhausting every possibility to raise funds to complete the project. I tried to sell my store, but found no immediate prospects. Finally, I asked my relatives for loans. Emily's brothers turned over every cent they had. It was almost enough. But, when the building was completed, we still lacked five hundred dollars for decorating costs. I again wrote one of my brothers-in-law, explaining my difficulty. I received no answer for quite some time. Then his letter arrived, with a cheque for the five hundred dollars and this explanation:

"Dear Gus: Sorry about the delay. I didn't have five hundred dollars until I collected my pay cheque at the end of the month . . . "

My conscience troubled me sorely at this sacrifice in my behalf. I thought what a blow it would be to him and to his family if something went wrong with my plans, if the hotel failed. To lose everything I had would be difficult enough, but to eat up the life savings of my relatives was too tragic to contemplate . . .

Not even in the dark days that followed the crash had I been so worried about money.

But the hotel was finished; a modern two-storey structure, with eighteen nicely decorated, tastefully furnished, clean, comfortable rooms, each with hot and cold running water.

When the chief building inspector had completed his examination of the premises he complimented me: "Mr. Romaniuk, you are to be congratulated. This is the nicest and most modern of the smaller hotels in Manitoba."

We named it the "Sandy Bar Hotel", after a suggestion by Guttormur Guttormson, the Icelandic poet. The name had an historical background, he explained. Pioneer settlers had planned a town by that name to be founded not far from Riverton. A section of Lake Winnipeg shoreline, about two and one-half miles east of town, is still known as "Sandy Bar". Guttormson's daughter, Mrs. Addi Eyolfson, and Dr. Thompson also

seemed to like the name. I was grateful to the poet for having suggested it.

We made elaborate plans for a grand opening. But three days before the scheduled event, Dr. Thompson and Mary Onysko, wife of our school principal, asked that we forego our plans. "A committee is already making arrangements to celebrate your hotel opening and your silver wedding anniversary the evening of January 28th," the doctor explained with a grin.

We were very pleased to learn that the community was so enthused over our new venture. The day before the festivities, the committee took over the hotel, decorated the main hall, installed a public address system and attended to other arrangements.

It was a gay party. There were more people in the hotel than the main hall would hold. It made me so happy to see so many good friends that I forgot all my financial worries for the time being. It was especially gratifying to see so many people whom I never expected would be present.

Emily, our three sons and I were escorted to seats of honor and our mayor, S. V. Sigurdson, opened the formal program of speeches and songs. During the banquet, he called on several guests to say a few words. Among those were Sollie Thorvaldson, my attorney; Sveinn Thorvaldson, his father and the town's most prominent merchant; justice of the peace Gisli Einarson, Dr. Thompson and

others. Each congratulated Emily and me on our silver wedding anniversary and on our new business venture.

Dr. Thompson recalled our early beginnings in Riverton; how we had rented our first store building from him, how we later built our own store, a larger home and, now, a new modern hotel. He praised us for this contribution to the growth of the community.

We were presented with an expensive dining room suite and a set of initialed silver dishes.

After the banquet the guests danced and made merry until dawn. It was a memorable occasion in our lives. Emily and I were exhausted by the time the party ended. But it was a relaxed, pleasant, warm and happy sort of weariness.

While the event celebrated both our anniversary and the building of our new hotel, the official opening ceremonies were an additional function held three days later, on January 31, 1948. Guests gathered in the lobby. S. V. Sigurdson and Peter Onysko stretched a ribbon across the entrance and Mr. Guttormson stood at the centre with scissors poised. After appropriate speeches were made, the poet cut the ribbon. People, who had been waiting outside, entered the hotel and we were officially open for business.

Within the next few hours every room was taken. There were guests in the dining room, in the main hall, everywhere. My new venture was appropiately launched; and from that day on, the hotel and store kept Emily

and me and the boys busier than ever before. It seemed every minute was occupied with some task of one business or the other.

Except for my financial worries, I enjoyed the hotel business. We never lacked for guests, because our modern facilities were always in demand. Salesmen, civil engineers, soil inspectors, tourists and others were among our guests. Each had something interesting to contribute to conversation. The business was never dull, monotonous, or lonesome.

The first autumn of our hotel business, hunters from Winnipeg and the midwestern section of the United States began to come to Sandy Bar Hotel. My many years in the northwoods gave me much in common with these sportsmen and I enjoyed their company. Their coming helped revive memories of the back country I loved so much and renewed my interest in the outdoors. Excellent shooting grounds for geese, ducks and deer are plentiful near Riverton and I took pleasure in briefing sportsmen on the region and directing them to the most productive spots. Sometimes I even accompanied parties into the woods.

During the hunting season of 1949, many more sportsmen showed up at the hotel. I found pleasure in hunting with many of them. Conversation was always more animated with the experienced hunters as we had more interesting hunting incidents to share. But the un-

That's why we like Riverton!

experienced often contributed more entertaining and amusing situations by their very newness to the sport.

I recall two young men in their early twenties, who came to the hotel for the goose shooting. They went out

early in the morning and were gone all day. When they returned just after sunset, however, they were long-faced and empty-handed. They dropped their gear and slid into lobby chairs where they sat just staring into space.

"C'mon, fellas," I went over. "It can't be as bad as all that."

"It's even worse," one groaned.

"Care to tell me about it?" I urged. "Maybe I can help you to have better luck tomorrow."

"We had luck all right," one gritted. "All bad! I'm ashamed to even mention it."

"I've been in some embarrassing spots myself," I consoled them. "You can trust me with your secret. I won't give you away."

"Well, we shot some geese out in a field," he admitted, but with no show of elation. "When we went to pick them up, an angry man ran toward us, waving a gun and cussing us out for hunting there."

"That so?" My interest mounted. "What claim did he have to that spot?"

"Seems we were hunting on his farm," the lad ruefully admitted.

"So what?" I sympathized. "That's not such a serious trespass. How could you know you were on private ground."

"That's not the half of it," he blurted. "The geese we shot were his. They were domestic geese."

They were so upset by the incident, I didn't have the

" . . . we were left on a little island surrounded by spring waters."

heart to laugh, though I had difficulty suppressing the impulse.

"We paid for the geese," the second young man explained. "So I guess he's not sore at us anymore. It's just the idea that we were so stupid that rankles."

"Don't take it so much to heart," I soothed. "Actually it's a very funny experience, if you can just see it in that light. Have a good laugh, and I'll take you out tomorrow. I'll show you how you made your mistake, and we'll bring home some genuine wild geese. I can practically guarantee it."

They felt a little better, and actually chuckled a bit when they saw the ridiculous side of the incident. They felt even better the next day when I took them to some good shooting and they brought down four dandies; three blue and a white-front.

I welcomed the opportunity the hotel business gave me to meet so many fine sportsmen; doctors, lawyers, artists, writers, businessmen, etc. Such prominent personalities as Judge and Mrs. Adamson, the Jerry Reids, attorney John Hunt and Mrs. Hunt, Minneapolis artist and illustrator Gordon Dale, Dr. Tom Leib, and many others were our guests. Now, I look forward to each hunting season; even more for the chance to renew acquaintances with so many fine people, than for the enjoyment I always find in the outdoors.

CHAPTER XXXII

Illness and a Record of Life

The hotel prospered. The store prospered. But we did not. All the profits were poured back to help pay off debts contracted in the construction of the Sandy Bar. I often wondered whether the goal was worth the effort. Tending to both businesses kept Emily, my sons and myself working long hours each day. Because so many of those near and dear to me had their savings tied up in the new venture, I worried about financial matters and our indebtedness as never before. I slept but fitfully, ate on the run, and tension mounted within me until my nerves were drawn taut as a bowstring.

Outwardly, I tried to be cheerful and congenial, but my closest friends saw through this veneer and often urged me to slow down, to take it easy. In the years 1947 to 1950 I no longer reckoned time by holidays and happy events on the calendar, but by dates for due instalment payments.

In the autumn of 1950 the cumulative effect of tension and overwork became more apparent. I felt weak, heavy, depressed, as though age had sapped my vitality. On a Sunday night, Emily and I returned home late from a celebration at the community hall. I was extremely

tired, and I slept a little later than usual Monday morning. When I awakened, I looked out the window and saw people already waiting for the store to open. So I gulped a cup of coffee, picked up my account books and scurried across to the store.

Before I got there, I began to cough, painfully. I spat blood. The coughing racked my lungs several times during the day; each time blood was present. I was worried, and I felt weak, but I hoped the feeling would pass. That night I worked at the hotel until late. The next day the coughing was more persistent, more pronounced and more painful. I felt very weak.

On the third day I couldn't get out of bed. Emily called Dr. Thompson.

"You'll have to go to the clinic in Winnipeg, Gus," he said, after examining me. I knew he was afraid I had T.B. The same thought had occurred to me. I put my hotel and store books in order, left instructions for both businesses with Emily and the boys and went to the clinic.

I was hospitalized for several days while being put through a thorough examination. Fearful of the results of these tests, I was in a constant state of anxiety. My days were brightened, however, by a steady stream of visitors who came to the clinical ward to cheer me up. Flowers, candy, books and a variety of gifts arrived in a steady stream. It was wonderful to be so well remembered. Winnipeg firms with which I did business kept

sending in everything from cases of soft drinks to radios. One man couldn't possibly use so many things. I shared the gifts with others in my ward and they, too, got much pleasure from the generosity of my friends.

Since our ward was occupied by patients like myself, in for tests and diagnoses, regulations were more lenient than in other hospital wards. It was like a picnic when the loads of food, soda pop and goodies rolled in. After our examinations were completed, each patient was to be reassigned according to the type and severity of his illness. "Where are they taking you, Gus?" the others wanted to know. Each one hoped to go with me, to share the bounty of my wonderful friends.

But, I was going home! X-rays and slides showed no evidence of tuberculosis. Neither did they reveal the nature of my illness!

"Go home and go to bed," the doctor ordered. "Stay there for two months. Then come back. We'll want to check you again. In the meantime, we'll give your case further study to see if we can't determine definitely where the trouble lies."

I did as he instructed. Two months later I went back and was put through some more tests. The findings were both good and bad. I definitely did not have T.B. I had a rare lung ailment, however, for which long rest and constant care were the only prescribed treatment.

"Go home and get to bed," the doctor instructed. "You'll have to stay there at least six months!"

I didn't know whether to jump for joy or beat my head into the floor. No T.B.! That was wonderful news. I might be entirely well in time. But six months in bed! For an active man a week of complete inactivity seems like a year. Six months would be a lifetime!

I followed orders, however. At least I tried to. Emily's younger brother, Jimmy and his wife Olive came to take charge of the hotel cafe and assist with management of the hotel. My sons, Harry and Jimmy, and my wife, ran both businesses. They worked hard and constantly reassured me everything was going well, so that I would not worry. My youngest son, Lawrence, waited on me hand and foot.

I don't know where she found the time, but Emily was a wonderful nurse. When she had to be away for a time, Olive would look after me. With such devoted care, it seemed it would be impossible not to get well. And I was recovering, but very slowly. As the weeks became months my strong consitution gradually asserted itself, overcoming the illness. But there were periods of relapse, too. The physical monotony of lying in bed for so long was harder to take than the illness. As I began to put on weight and some color came back to my cheeks, I ventured forth from time to time. Just to walk downstairs to the cellar and throw a few shovels of coal into the furnace. Even such feeble exertion, however, would leave me short of breath and very weak, and lengthen my stay abed by several days.

After about four months of such confinement I seemed to be making excellent progress, then dark days of delirium descended. At first I was just very nervous and high-strung; extremely sensitive. I was sick of everything. Even sick of life. My thinking became foggy, as a mist seemed to envelope my mind. Even my eyes clouded and my sight was blurred. Then, in this semi-darkness, I pictured myself imprisoned by a thick, spruce forest. A furious storm raged above me, carrying swift, dark clouds across the lowered sky. The treetops bent low, their branches murmuring and moaning continually.

It was as if the world was ending and I was the only man yet alive . . . Alone . . . So terribly lonesome . . . Slowly being buried in a pile of dead, dry leaves . . .

Then I felt the clouds roll on, disappearing behind a wall of trees. The sky grew clear and bright as if illumined by a strange light. In the brightness, the heavy feeling of depression disappeared. The delirium spun away whisking the fog from my brain and the mist from my eyes. And with almost supernatural clarity, scenes from my past moved across my mind's eye like pictures on a movie screen. I could see myself playing by the river Seret in the Ukraine . . . clutching a pillow and rolling from flames that devoured our first home in Canada . . . standing with Walter, grinning at Indians with 15-cent rings on their fingers . . . riding with my dogs over a snow-covered woodland trail toward the cabin of a trapper in the north . . .

The pictures were startingly clear. So vivid, I relived each scene. Then it was that I felt an insistent urge to record the events of my life; to leave for my children and their children the story of the struggle, the trials and the tribulations from whence came their heritage.

The impulse may have stemmed from an awareness of death; yet I never felt more alive. An account book, with fresh blank pages, lay on the bedside table. I reached it and began to write the record I would leave.

Writing an occasional letter, or making an entry in an account book, had been inadequate preparation for such a task. The words came reluctantly, even though early events remained vivid in my memory from the crisis I had just passed through. As I wrote, however, mind and pen teamed more closely and the recital became less difficult. I put my thoughts on paper in the language I knew best, in Ukrainian. I jotted them down as one does a memo, without regard for spelling or grammar. One day, someone might write an English translation.

I worked feverishly at this new task, but I worked in secret. Whenever I heard footsteps approaching my room, I hid the book under the quilt. It would look very queer for me to be caught writing a book, I thought. It might even give rise to the suspicion that illness had unhinged my mind.

But my secret was discovered. One day I was concentrating so hard that I didn't hear Olive enter the room. I was caught redhanded!

"Whatever are you doing, Gus?" she asked in surprise.

"Writing the story of my life," I brazened, blushing to the tips of my ears.

The effects of this confession was less startling than I had imagined. She didn't seem shocked. Just asked calmly: "May I read what you have written?"

I held out the book. I was about halfway through. Olive read it, and said she liked it. She even encouraged me to continue and offered to type it for me. I welcomed her interest, but despite this unexpected encouragement, the second half went haltingly. My initial fervor for writing was gone, and the more recent incidents from my life were less vivid than the earlier ones had been. My attention became diverted, too. For I now felt well enough to get up and slowly work myself back into the routine of the hotel and store.

I completed my story, however, and felt eased in heart and mind. I took renewed interest in business and community affairs; again found joy in the company of others. I began to attend and take part in civic meetings. And, when in 1951 Riverton separated from the Arborg-Bifrost municipality and organized its own unit of local government, I was asked to be a candidate for one of the town council offices. I accepted and was elected to our first council in January, 1952. I was re-elected in 1953.

Meanwhile, my manuscript lay gathering dust. In

the spring of 1953, Walter came from Vancouver to pay us a visit. My brother-in-law read the story and was so enthusiastic about it, he urged me to have it published. His enthusiasm revived my interest in the project, and we went to Winnipeg looking for someone to edit and rewrite the original Ukrainian and translate it into English.

We found such a man and I collaborated with him on the necessary reworking of my somewhat rough notes. I felt elated when the completed English translation covered more than 300 typewritten pages. The difficulties of language interchange, however, left this version somewhat awkward. Further editing and rewriting was necessary.

Like the horses, and the barber shop, and the store, and the meat business, and the fur trading and the farm, and the hotel, this, too, was becoming an uphill project. Editorial conferences, art conferences, sessions with the printer; there seemed to be no end. At last, in June 1954, it was done. The completed manuscript and art work were delivered to the printer.

It had begun so innocently, as an inspiration like that little red hat. Then it mushroomed into a full scale project like the hotel. I had thought that would surely be my last venture. Now, maybe this book is it . . . A man doesn't write a sequel to his autobiography.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Not Without Freedom

It was to secure for their children and their children's children the opportunity to learn, to think, to do, to reach out to the stars, that prompted my father and others like him to settle in Canada. It was this goal that gave them strength to endure untold hardship in the pioneering of a new land; strength to throw down strong young roots, even in frozen, unyielding soil.

That theirs is a dream unfolded is vividly evidenced in the many second generation Canadian-Ukrainians who have progressed to positions of prominence in varied professions; young people flowering in the freedom of opportunity. People like our own Dr. Margaret Owchar, who at 24 had earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree. Her father still tills by horse team a quarter-section north of Riverton. She has gone on to serve with distinction in the field of medical research.

Her father, my father and other pioneers faced the future in a new country with an optimism born of courage and a working capital of strong backs and willing hands. Their children and their grandchildren face a more receptive future, one of unlimited horizons, with the

optimism born of knowledge, strong minds and hands trained to excel in specialized skills.

For this, for the opportunity to learn and the right to earn, we are ever grateful to a community and to a country where freedom is cherished, yet lavished on strangers . . . on immigrants from another land!

The End