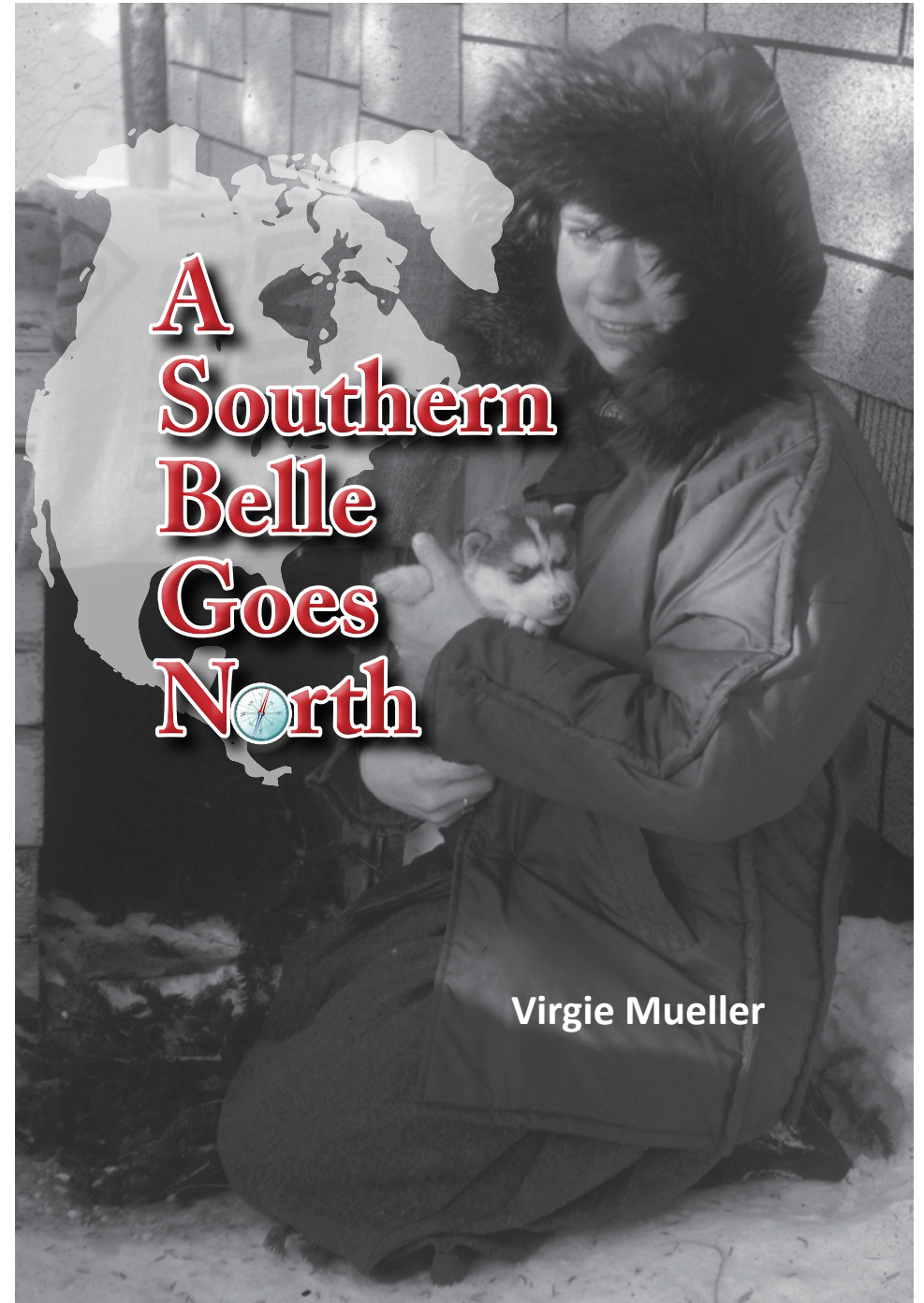


**A
Southern
Belle
Goes
North**

Virgie Mueller



**A
Southern
Belle
Goes
North**

Virgie Mueller

“Let each generation tell its children
Of your mighty acts;
Let them proclaim your power.
I will meditate on your majestic splendor
And your wonderful miracles
Your awe-inspiring deeds will be on every tongue;
I will proclaim your greatness.
Everyone will share the story
Of your wonderful goodness;
They will sing with joy about your righteousness.”

Psalm 145:4-7

A SOUTHERN BELLE GOES NORTH

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Dedication

To our children:

Steven Mueller, Glen Mueller, and Sheryl Mueller Giesbrecht,
who have journeyed with us on paths
not necessarily of their choosing,

I dedicate this book.

They say they have no regrets of being raised on the mission field.
God has blessed them and kept them and today
they are Godly parents and grandparents.

They have raised children who also love the Lord.

And

To our grandchildren:

Tyler Mueller, Rashel Giesbrecht Pilon, Stephanie Mueller Baerg,
Graeme Mueller, Joel Giesbrecht, Colton Mueller,
Hannah Mueller and Caleb Mueller

I dedicate this book.

*“The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His
face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord
turn His face toward you and give you peace.”*

Numbers 6:24-26

A Memoir:
The Story of
Our Life and Experiences
as Missionaries
in Northern Canada

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1962-1968**

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Part 1

The years in
PAINT HILLS,
QUEBEC

1962 - 1968



Chapter 1

The Unknown

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5, 6

“I’d like to call the airlines to book a flight to Paint Hills,” I told the man as I stepped toward a dingy counter in the Moosonee, Ontario train station. He pushed a square black rotary telephone toward me without saying a word.

The one room train depot was empty now except for me and my two year son, Steven. I had piled my ‘checked baggage’ of four or five cardboard boxes of various sizes in the middle of the room when I had entered.

The phone conversation was frustrating. The voice at the other end of the line said, “Tell us where you’re staying and we’ll pick you up in time for the next flight up the coast.”

“But I don’t know where I’ll be staying,” I replied. “Just tell me when the next flight is and I’ll come there,” I tried to explain.

“Well, Ma’am, there was a flight yesterday, but with this weather setting in, it could be a week before we have another.”

I felt a big lump forming in my throat. What should I do? Where should I go? Why hadn’t Russell told me what to do when I arrived here at the end of the rail line?

Steve and I had traveled by train for three days from Enid, Oklahoma to Moosonee, Ontario. The last 200 miles beyond the road was remote wilderness of stunted spruce, muskeg, and bush. The Polar Bear Express was the sole means of transportation, and stopped at frequent intervals to let people off and others onto the train. There wasn’t the sight of a town anywhere. There wasn’t even a house, trail or anything that resembled a



*Beginning the journey North,
September, 1962*

place for a train to stop. And then finally, at the end of the rail, there had been only the depot stating it was Moosonee. The community was buried away in the bush. And it was now supposedly another 200 miles by float plane up the coast of the James Bay before I’d be at Paint Hills, Quebec.

“May I leave these boxes here for the time being?” I gulped.

“Sure, just pile them in the corner. No one will bother them,” the station agent replied, trying to be cheerful as he saw the tears glistening in my eyes.

Stepping out onto the platform between the station and the rails, I noticed the platform was empty. Just minutes before there had been a group of Indians and a few whites

gathered to await the tri-weekly train arrive from North Bay, Ontario but they had left by now. All I could see was a muddy path leading into the heavy bush. Taking my son by the hand we started walking down the trail.

It was September, 1962. The weather was overcast with a light rain falling. We walked past a few houses, a Hudson’s Bay store, a Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce and a post office. The houses all looked alike as they were all covered with gray asphalt rolled-siding. As I walked, the tears ran down my cheeks. No one, absolutely no one, knew where I was.

My husband, Russell and two other missionary men plus a teenage missionary kid had traveled from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, by car and trailer; then train, six weeks earlier, enroute to the James Bay where the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission (NCEM) was planning to open two new mission stations, in addition to the three they already had, among the Cree Indians on the east coast of the James Bay. One of the men, Marshall Calverley, had formerly been a Hudson’s Bay Co. fur trader at Eastmain, Quebec on the coast. He had been burdened to reach these people for Christ.

Marshall knew of some abandoned Hudson Bay Co. trading post

buildings at Old Factory. The community of Old Factory was located on an island and was surrounded by sea water brought in by the tide every 12 hours. Indian Affairs had relocated the entire community up the coast another 40 miles north and inland on the Maquatua River in 1958, where fresh water was readily available. The new village was named Paint Hills.

NCEM could buy the Old Factory buildings for one dollar. However these buildings would have to be dismantled and the lumber they were able to salvage, moved up coast to build houses at Paint Hills (later named Wemindji) and at Fort George, Quebec for two missionary families. Someone had given NCEM an old 40 foot lobster fishing boat no longer in use. They shipped it on a 50 foot flatbed by rail from the state of Maine to Moosonee, Ontario at the southernmost tip of the James Bay. The lobster boat had a small cabin with two bunk beds and a small table between. It would be used to transport the lumber from Old Factory to Paint Hills and Fort George.

It was no small feat for these four prairie born men (John Penner, Marshall Calverley, his son Steve and Russell) as they struggled to get the boat down into the water, even with the aid of a caterpillar. The boat had set on dry land



Lobster boat used to transport lumber

for some time and some of the planks were rotten. A Native man had been hired to replace the rotten planks and seal the cracks. Parts of the eight cylinder Buick engine had been dismantled so the men had to put it back together, hoping it would run.

However once the old boat was down in the water, water seeped in through the cracks. The men took shifts pumping water every 15 minutes with a small gasoline powered water pump. It looked to be a hopeless endeavor. Marshall took the first night shift and when Russell came the next morning he found Marshall sitting and weeping. Marshall wondered whether he had made a mistake and that this whole plan had been only his idea, not God's? Perhaps God hadn't called? Russell knelt beside him and said, "We shouldn't doubt in the dark what God revealed in the light." They

prayed begging God to save the boat. For three days they baled water without stopping. Marshall considered renting a Canso plane to transport the lumber, but that would have cost thousands of dollars.

Eventually the planks started to swell and the water coming in was less and less. After loading their equipment and food, the men thought they were ready to go. With anticipation and excitement they headed out into the waters of the James Bay. Eventually land disappeared as they headed out to sea. The men fortunately had been able to hire a Native man, Jacob



Native pilot Jacob Kitchikappo

Kitchikappo, who was familiar with travel on the huge body of water they would have to travel.

Later that day the boat began leaking again as the planks shifted in the rough water. Now the pump, that was used to pump the water from the bot-

tom of the boat, was no longer pumping water. The water got so deep in the bilge they thought surely the boat would sink and they were far from land. They had to do whatever they could to right the situation. Upon inspection they found there were wood shavings, from the repairs the man had done, down in the bottom of the boat that were plugging the impeller.

Trying to find a tool that would work on the water pump proved to be another setback. Russ filed an Alan wrench down smaller so it would fit to remove the impeller in order to clean out the wood shavings. The other men continued to bail out the water with buckets. Russell was able to get the impeller off and remove the wood chips and get the pump working again.

Upon completing the repairs, the men traveled as far as Eastmain where our co-worker, Helen Hisey, was the missionary. The coastal weather was so unpredictable they were weather bound there for three days. While at Eastmain, they patched Helen's roof, picked blueberries, taught Bible stories to the children who came to visit, patched the roof at several more places and chopped firewood.

When the weather seemed feasible, they traveled on to Old Factory

where they began to take apart the buildings. But when the lumber was ready to load into the boat, the weather was so bad they couldn't leave for another three days. Storms such as this usually came for three days before they eased up. The men continued to take apart the buildings in the rain. At night John and Russell slept in the partially demolished store building, where the mice bothered them all night. The other men slept on the boat that was anchored about a mile away from the former village where the water was deeper. When the weather let up somewhat the men left for Paint Hills. They fought the wind and waves for five hours, before finally arriving at Paint Hills. There they anchored the lobster boat out in the mouth of the river.

During the night they were rudely awakened by a feeling of falling out of bed. Indeed the boat was lying on its side at a 45 degree angle as the tide had gone out leaving the boat lodged on a sand bar. When the tide came back in, they were able to get into the life boat and head for shore. As the tide came in and went out in twelve hour cycles, they could proceed with the unloading and begin the work of building the mission house. That afternoon they went ashore to see the 'lay of the land' and in particular to look at the future building site.

Russ had taken time briefly to jot me a letter from Moosonee before starting their treacherous trip up the coast. "The weather is turning cold. Come as quickly as you can." But there were no instructions as to where to go to make connections or who would meet me.

By this time my son and I had walked the muddy path from the train depot toward the water's edge. There were several small float planes bearing the name 'Austin Airways' tied to the dock. No one was around and the tiny office nearby was deserted. For a few moments I let my shoulders sag and the tears flow.

What do I do next? What am I even doing here?

* * * * *

I was twenty three years old. I had been born in the Southern USA, in the state of Oklahoma. My parents were farmers raising wheat, various grains, cotton, cattle, pigs, chickens and whatever else they could to make a living in the red dirt on the farm my Daddy had 'risked the shirt on his back' to buy. I had two older brothers: Milton, 11 years older, and L.D, 2 years older; a sister, Wilma, 7 years older and a sister, Donna, 5 years younger than I. Being short of stature, my Dad spared me from work around the machinery and I helped in the house and around the yard instead.

In the hot summer sun I chopped the weeds surrounding the tender

cotton plants with a hoe in the 100 degree sun, row after row across the field. Unsweetened iced tea carried in a burlap covered gallon jug relieved our thirst and gave relief from the heat when we were far from any shade. In the fall I pulled cotton balls from the dry plants and stuffed them into a six foot long canvas sack strung over my shoulder and dragged on the ground behind me. Even with gloves on, the barbs left my fingers raw. I couldn't imagine anything that could be harder than chopping weeds or picking cotton. (At least not for a young girl) When we got to the end of the row our sacks were weighed and the weight of each sack recorded. We were paid two cents a pound. Daddy would haul the full trailer to the cotton gin in Cordell where the seeds were removed, the cotton cleaned, baled and shipped to market.

When I was 10 years old revival services were held in our community in a large tent with Rev. Theodore Epp as the evangelist. Although raised in a Christian home, at the last service I knew if I should die, I would not go to heaven. I really wanted to go forward to be saved, yet I was afraid, as all the people would see me. After the service I asked my friend Phyllis to go with me and one of the older ladies explained the way of salvation to me. I prayed asking Jesus to come into my heart and cleanse me from all my sin. That day I signed a card saying I had become a Christian. It was August 13, 1949. I carried that card in my Bible for many years before eventually losing it. A couple of years later I was baptized as a public confession of my faith. I then began reading my Bible starting at the beginning, trying to read through it in one year. When I failed I began the next year starting at the beginning again. It was my desire to read it through in one year beginning to end. I've continued to attempt this for many years since and most of the time I make it through.

My parents put a lot of emphasis on Christian education. For the last three years of high school we children all attended a Christian High School, named the Oklahoma Bible Academy, which was begun by the Mennonites. Besides that our parents allowed us to attend Bible camp, for all the youth of the Oklahoma Mennonite Churches, at Hydro, Oklahoma, for one week each summer. It was there, when I was 15 years old, I met a 'tall, dark and handsome' fellow. When our eyes met, something clicked. He was the brother of a friend of mine. We managed to accidentally meet at the horseshoe pit and when our hands accidentally touched in the exchange of horseshoes, our hearts clicked as well. We barely had time to get acquainted but I learned that he would be attending the Bible Academy in the fall, as was I.

Thus began a friendship that not only blossomed, but grew into a deep and lasting love. That fall at school we spent as much time as possible together. By grade 12 we were 'going steady' and had exchanged class rings. I had bought my class ring with money I earned pulling cotton. Russell and I were promised 'to be promised'.

After my graduation from OBA, I enrolled in a three year nurses' training school in Enid, Oklahoma. I lived in a dorm with the other student nurses. It was across the street from the Enid General Hospital where we not only attended all our classes but took our meals as well. We were issued stiffly starched white cotton uniforms, wore white nylon stockings and nursing shoes with shoe laces, which we washed daily. We had to cut our hair short enough so it didn't touch our uniform collar. The teachers even ran a finger along our collars to measure just to be sure. We were taught how to sit without causing a wrinkle in our skirt; to stand up or to step aside when anyone more superior than ourselves entered a room.

After six months we started working on the units and we continued to work without pay for three years to reimburse the hospital for our training. We did this in addition to class work. In our last year we affiliated to three larger city hospitals for three months each, for specialized training in Obstetrics, Pediatrics and Mental Health.

Russell finished his last year of high school at OBA, as he was one year behind me; then he went to Grace Bible College in Omaha, Nebraska. Both of us felt the Lord had His hand on our lives to serve



Our wedding, June 7, 1959

Him. So we wrote letters to each other, daily, to keep in touch. I think postage was five cents a letter.

Just months before my graduation in 1959, we were married in my home church near Cordell, Oklahoma. Our wedding and honeymoon was only a four day weekend. We traveled to Cordell from Enid on Friday evening. On Saturday we made preparations for the wedding and Sunday evening we were married. We spent our honeymoon, which was really only our wedding night, at Lake Altus at the Quartz Mountain Lodge. The next day we went back home to my parents' home, loaded our wedding gifts into the car and traveled to Enid where we had rented a three room apartment above a garage.

That fall we borrowed money from our parents and bought a 28' x 8' trailer house. Russell's parents had to take a second mortgage on their house to loan us part of the money. We pulled the trailer house behind our 1954 Starchief Pontiac car to Omaha, Nebraska, where Russ finished his education receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in Christian Education. I began my first job working as a Registered Nurse in Omaha and one year later our first baby, Steven Wayne, was born.

The year 1960, however, was also a sad year for us as we lost both of our fathers within five months of each other; my dad to a heart attack, Russell's dad to cancer.

At a missionary conference in the spring of 1961, that last year at school, Russell committed his life to the Lord to be a career missionary. As his wife and the mother of his baby, I became his partner in that call and commitment. After hearing the call to serve as missionaries, we prayed about several mission organizations and contemplated where the Lord might want us to go.

Unbeknownst to me was that my Mother had wanted to be a missionary, but in her day that was unrealistic. So she married a farmer and prayed that instead one of her children might one day become a missionary.

A representative of the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission, named Marshall Calverley, was presenting the work of reaching the North American Indians for Christ. Of the pictures he showed, I remember clearly one picture of an old wooden door, with an ice covered nail, standing ajar. Somehow that picture etched itself on my memory and God drew me by showing the door in the cold north standing open waiting for us to enter.

We contacted the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission and requested more literature and began to pray in earnest about Canada. We talked to others who were excited about this prospect. We told our families,

our friends, and home churches of how God was leading us. We applied to NCEM and were accepted as missionary candidates.

Next we began the process of applying for Landed Immigrant status in Canada. We also needed to raise our support because NCEM was a faith mission. We had to quit our jobs to do deputation work to raise our support by faith. Even though we left all, it didn't occur to us that we were giving up everything.

My brother, Milton, took Russ to the slaughter house to teach him how to skin and butcher an animal. L.D. gave Russ a large Swede saw for sawing cord wood. The Ladies Mission Circle in the Herold Church gave us \$113.00 which was their project money, to buy the Wollansak tape recorder we would need for language study. Russell's home church held a commissioning service for us on the 17th of December, 1961.

In January, 1962, after we had sold our trailer house to clear our debts, left our car to be sold, and left our families, we headed to Canada traveling three days by train. We carried our lunches with us and sat and slept on the benches of the passenger car of the train. When we got to Winnipeg, Manitoba we had to change trains. We got off the train, had a long walk, almost the entire length of the train, and then crossed over two sets of tracks and walked the same distance back again to board our next train. The wind was strong and bit through our light clothing. No wonder they called it 'Windy Peg'. It was -30° F. in Winnipeg with wind. When we left Oklahoma the temperature was +70° F. That's a 100 degree difference.

We continued on to North Battleford, Saskatchewan, where we transferred to a Greyhound bus for the last 100 miles of gravel road to Meadow Lake. It



Russell, me and our son, Steven, at Meadow Lake in July, 1962.



NCEM headquarters at Meadow Lake, SK

was dark when the bus stopped on the main street of downtown Meadow Lake. Here we were met by some representatives of the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission, among them a classmate of mine from high school (Lorena Goossen

Wahl) who had joined the NCEM just months prior. The temperature was -40° F.

We had yet to meet the board for an interview and tell them why we thought the Lord was calling us to Canada. That was a frightening experience. We had to give scripture and verse as to our doctrine; although we had written that all in our application papers. The Lord upheld us through it all and put the words into our mouth when needed.

"The Lord is a sun and a shield; the Lord gives grace and favor and glory. No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. Happy, fortunate, to be envied is the person who leans on and believes in you, Lord. Committing all and confidently looking to you, I will be without fear!"
Psalm 84:11-12

went to the train depot to pick up my boxes while I sat down to relax with a cup of hot tea.

Supper that night was breaded tomatoes. I had never eaten anything quite like that, but it was just what the name said. It was torn up chunks of bread covered with a can of tomatoes and then baked. Percy's wife, Jean, showed us to a room in the attic. We were safe and dry, even warm; everything was being taken care of for us. Thank you, Lord.

The next day was a wet, gloomy day. "No planes today," Percy informed us as we all sat down to bowls of oatmeal. The next day, and the next were all alike. "No plane today" and we had porridge for breakfast and breaded tomatoes for supper. I tried to learn what I could expect when the planes would fly again, if they ever did.

The Tozers had only been missionaries for a few years but they seemed to know so much and seemed so comfortable in this uncultured lifestyle. They had come from the Maritimes with their family. A daughter of theirs was now a missionary with her husband in Rupert's House (later named Waskeganich) one of the other mission stations in the James Bay area.

This lifestyle was so new to me. At language school, held at our mission headquarters in Meadow Lake, I had to take turns cooking on the wood cook stove for the entire group of 20, (language students and their children.) Imagine kneading nine loaves of bread when I had never kneaded two. I had no experience cooking or baking using a wood stove and some

found my ineptness amusing, especially after the group watched me try to split kindling. Some thought I'd chop my thumb off. Others, like Bud Elford, wondered how a 'Southern belle' would be able to survive in the rigorous North. After that, Russ usually helped me by making kindling and getting the fire

Chapter 2

The Refining

"Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken." Psalms 55:22

Now here I was feeling sorry for myself because I didn't know what to do next. Hadn't the Lord had His hand on my life and been guiding me up until this time? Would He not also now take care of me and Steve and help us get to Paint Hills? The verse, "*Cast all your care upon the Lord, and He will sustain you,*" came to mind and that's what I did.

Steve was tired and no longer wanted to walk, so I lifted him onto my shoulders. We started back up the path away from the water, where we had come only minutes before. Walking along I noticed a small square building I hadn't seen before. It had siding of grey asphalt, as had all the other buildings in this settlement. But a big difference was a sign on the corner of the building. It read "GOSPEL MISSION" in big bold letters.

In desperation, I walked up the board walk and knocked on the door of the house beside the chapel. Two white picket fences on either side of the raised boardwalk separated the two buildings situated barely eight feet apart. A friendly middle aged man opened the door.

"I'm Virgie Mueller and I'm on my way to Paint Hills," I said.

"Come in. Come in. We've been expecting you," the missionary said. He explained he had helped the men get the boat into the water and started up the coast of James Bay. Russ had told him I would be coming through Moosonee with our young son later on.

Percy Tozer understood all about the flight schedules. There was nothing I needed to explain about my situation. He understood perfectly and found nothing unusual about all the things I had just experienced. He



Our living quarters in the dormitory

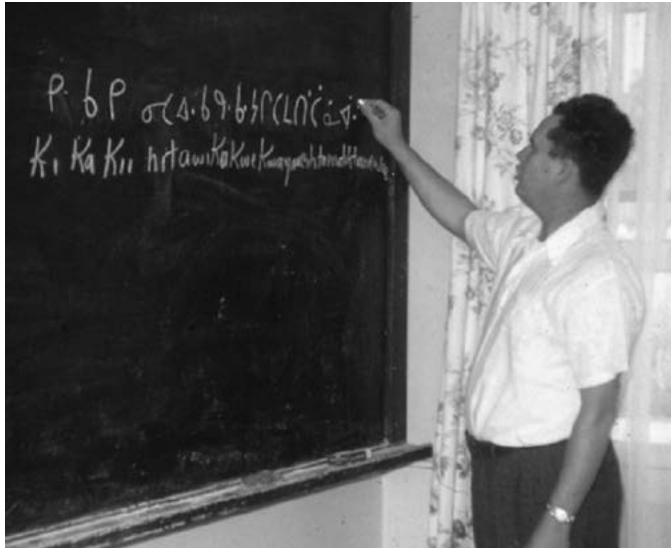
going. But trying to regulate the heat for baking was another challenge learned by trial and error.

Someone had accidentally dumped tea leaves into the coffee canister, so we missionary candidates drank a tea-coffee beverage for the remaining months of language school. We knew we should learn to be frugal. There was little variety to our meals. Usually we had one food item at each meal. If we had potatoes, we had only potatoes.

There at Meadow Lake, we three slept in a tiny room, with a sagging folding bed, Steve's crib, a table with two folding chairs, and two wooden crates. The building housed all the missionary candidates and one resident missionary family. The walls were much like cardboard and didn't muffle the sounds. In chapel one morning after our first week there, a fellow missionary candidate spoke about how we should raise our children. She, of course, didn't have any children at that time so had all the answers while we were still trying to figure out the questions.

In language school we spent 20 hours a week in class and 20 hours a week practicing saying the Cree words outside of class. Some fellow missionaries complained that I shouldn't be allowed credit for the time I spent repeating the words while listening to the cassette tape recording say them because I was ironing or folding diapers and not giving my entire attention to the language study. For some of us language study was hard, and we didn't do well. One couple, we had gone to Bible School with, had taken the course all the way through. They then started over a second time but eventually dropped out and took a pastorate down South.

Steve made noise while he played on the kitchen/classroom floor during the hours we sat in class. I couldn't keep him quiet when I had to



John Unger, our Cree language teacher

participate in class. I asked one of the resident missionary wives who was a full time homemaker, if she would keep our young son while I went to class each morning. She had a son the same age and it would only be for the morning hours. She said, "I take care of my children. You can take care of yours." I couldn't believe I had heard her correctly. It hadn't been easy before, but now for the first time, I wondered if I would make it as a missionary. I felt hurt and wondered if all missionaries were like that? I have since heard that missionaries are very independent and must be to survive in a foreign culture.

However when word got around that I was looking for a babysitter, one of the other mothers on campus offered to watch Steve and my heart was encouraged.

"Give your burden to the Lord and He will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall." Psalm 55:22 (NLT)

God had been so good to us. We were receiving full support, \$135.00 a month. Some other missionaries received less than we. In fact, when we had arrived at Meadow Lake one of the other new candidate couples had no pledged support. They had \$400.00 of savings to start and trusted the Lord to provide. One time we shared our last \$20.00 with a new missionary family heading out to Ontario in a station wagon with their five children. Their tires were so worn, we were sure they couldn't possibly make it all the way to Ontario. After giving the money to the Matthews family, it was to our surprise we received exactly \$20.00 from Russell's Uncle Edwin the next day. His son had been killed in a car accident and he was sending us the title of the insurance payment. We knew God would provide for us.

One hundred and thirty five dollars a month hardly compared to the nearly \$800.00 a month we were earning back home. I had been working as a Registered Nurse at my first paid job. Russell had worked at the Union Equity Grain Elevator during the past two summers. Not only that, but Russ had been offered a very appealing job with a former Sunday school teacher and personal friend of ours, Wesley Kroeker. Talk about being tempted with an offer! Satan tried anything to keep us from following the Lord wholeheartedly.

The Grace Mennonite Church immediately pledged \$65.00 a month from their general budget. The Herold Mennonite Church put a box in the foyer where those who wanted to give to my support could, and those who didn't want to, could be assured that their money would not go to me. As far as I know there was only one person who voiced his opinion that to support 'faith missions' was like supporting someone else's child instead of

your own. Each month the mission treasurer sent \$60.00 without fail. In fact, when another missionary from my home church was planning to go to Bolivia, there was the question if they should divide the money between the two of us missionary couples? Someone said, "We cannot cut the missionary's support while they are on the field." So they doubled their giving to provide enough to send \$60.00 to both of us. God honored that pledge. My brother pledged \$10.00 a month for Steve's support. And we had the total amount that the NCEM had suggested as a support level, if it came in. No salary would come from NCEM if the donations didn't come in.

Before we left Oklahoma a dear friend took Russell aside and said, "Aren't you are being irresponsible taking a wife and young child into an unknown place. Financially you cannot survive with that little amount of money. You are crazy." Russ didn't even tell me until years later, after the man had again taken him aside to apologize. He said to Russ, "I was wrong to try to dissuade you from following the Lord's call to missions. I see now that God has protected you and provided for you. He has blessed you. And to think that I, as a minister could have hindered you from following the Lord's call on your life."

"Well, God has called us to do this and we have to follow His call," Russell replied.

* * * *

Russell had been born into a Christian home. He was the middle child with sister Mayre, 18 months older and Sandra, 5½ years younger than he.

At age five years, he and Mayre contracted Infantile Paralysis, better known as poliomyelitis or polio. Mayre's case was mild in comparison to what Russell had. She had no lasting effects. Russell was sent to the Crippled Children's Hospital in Oklahoma City. His treatment there was hot packs applied to his right leg and hip and the muscles were massaged. He could not walk and got around in a wheelchair. For six months he was in the hospital away from his home and his family. His parents were allowed to visit once a month. The best part of his pain-filled life was when the nurses took the young patients down to watch a movie. When they put him to bed, Russell said the nurses kissed him goodnight. Thus began his love affair with nurses.

After six months Russ was allowed home and there his mother continued his treatments. His parents sought divine healing as well. They made a trip to Tulsa to a Healing Crusade, and waited in a long line to gain

entrance into the auditorium where the healing would take place. But when they finally arrived at the door, they were asked to pay \$25.00 which they didn't have. They were turned away without any prayer for healing.

About this time Russell's Dad left the farm in Meno, Oklahoma and the family moved into Enid, where his Dad worked in Union Equity Grain elevator. Russell began school walking with crutches and limping. Kids made fun of him to the point that on at least one occasion he 'ran away' from school and went home. At age 10, Russell returned to the Crippled Children's Hospital where he underwent ligament transplant surgery. He says he was told he would lie on one bed and a cat would lie on a bed beside him and they would remove the gut from the cat and use it as ligaments for him. He believed them. After the cast was removed from his foot and leg, he wore a brace for a time giving him some mobility. More massage and exercises followed. His father rigged up a small motor and pulley to keep his foot exercising when he lay in bed. Russ was determined he would do what everyone else did. Eventually he walked, he ran, he rode bicycle, and he played basketball. Nothing held him back. He graduated with the third highest grades in his high school class, and received a plaque saying he was the 'best all-around student' in the class. He was very involved in quartet and choir music. He sang solos with the most beautiful baritone voice I had ever heard.

When he was 13 years old, at a revival service he felt conviction of sin in his heart. As he stood resisting the Spirit talking to him, his pastor Rev. Albert Unruh placed his hand on Russell's shoulder, asking if he didn't want to surrender to the Lord. He struggled but resisted. Later at home when the family was having devotions he blurted out, "I want to be saved." His mother prayed the sinner's prayer with him. He never regretted it.

Between his freshman and sophomore years of high school, at age 15, he told his mother he had met the girl he would marry. She replied, "We'll pray about it and see how God leads." Russ was amazed that she didn't belittle his first 'crush'. We were married five years later.

Chapter 3

The Arrival

“Even there Thy hand will lead me, and Thy right hand will lay hold of me.” Psalms 139:10

To sit here now in this small living room with people I’d never met in a place where I’d never been, was beyond anything I had ever anticipated. Their kindness was overwhelming.

A week later the weather cleared. As Percy came in for breakfast he said, “The planes are flying today.” We were all happy. Steve clapped his hands. As soon as breakfast was over, Percy loaded our things into the truck and we headed to the dock.

The plane we would fly in that day was called a Canso. It sat with its belly in the water and was much larger than most of the planes I had seen at the dock. Steve and I climbed aboard through a large hatch door on the side of the plane. Freight going up the coast, six or seven goose hunters with all their gear, and a Roman Catholic nun in her habit with a young Native child beside her, comprised the other passengers. The nun spoke only French so we merely exchanged smiles and sat quietly on the narrow ledge on the side of the plane. The boisterous men occupied the seats. I couldn’t see out of the small windows of the plane so leaned back, closed my eyes, to rest and think. I was excited. We were on our way to Paint Hills.

“Our flight this morning will take us first to Fort George. We will be



Canso plane that took us to Paint Hills

there in two hours. We will be stopping at the smaller settlements on the way south,” the pilot announced. I wasn’t watching the time but suddenly I heard the pilot again announce, “Change of plans. We are now descending at Paint Hills.”



Aerial view of Paint Hills

My heart pounded. I had no warning. We didn’t even circle. I couldn’t see out of the window so I couldn’t see what was happening. The landing was so smooth. I hardly had time to adjust to the idea that we were now here. No one moved from their seats. As the hatch was opened, the crew began handing out canvas bags of mail and some boxes of fresh produce for the nursing station. Our boxes were unloaded with some other freight for the store. The pilot looked over at me, so I made my way to the open hatch. Looking out of the plane I could see nothing except a river, trees and a canoe with a Native man standing in the bow and a white man seated at the motor. Nowhere could a village be seen. Certainly Russell wasn’t there. However, I allowed the pilot to assist me as I climbed down into the canoe and then he handed Steve to me. We were the only passengers getting off there.

They covered the freight and us with a cold, wet, dirty tarpaulin to protect us from the spray of water. The engine on the 23 foot freighter canoe purred to life as we headed up the river. Our view from the tarp covered canoe wasn’t entirely blocked so we saw the scenery was beautiful with spruce trees on either side of the river.

About a mile up the river there was a sandy beach where there were Native people gathered along the shore. The men all looked alike with their drab jeans, parkas, baseball caps and boots. The women too, all looked alike dressed in their long skirts, often of blue and red Scottish plaid. Rubber boots peeked out from under their ankle length skirts. They wore parkas as well as multi-colored Russian design head scarves. Children ran here and there playing along the shore. Had the entire village come out to meet me?

My eyes searched the crowd for only one person: Russell.

“If I take the wings of the morning or dwell in the uttermost parts of the

sea, even there Your right hand shall hold me." Psalm 139:9-10. I knew God was holding me in His hand.

Russell stood there in the midst of the crowd of probably 100 or more people on the shoreline and as the canoe pulled up to the shore, made his way to meet us.

When Steve kissed his Dad, the people all cheered and clapped. Russell's face was so pale in a sea of dark brown-skinned faces, dark eyes and black hair. And you can be sure in this strange surrounding he was the most welcome sight on earth to me.



Villagers gathered at the shore to await plane

There was much talking in a strange language and laughter as the canoe was unloaded. I looked over to see if my boxes had been unloaded. They set on the ground nearby. Young men grabbed my boxes and we walked about three blocks on the sandy path to the mission house. The mission house didn't look as finished as the red government houses we passed all lined in a row. Probably half of the people lived in houses. The remainder lived in shacks made of split log boards half way up, and covered with canvas on the top half. These were scattered at random. There were a few teepees of canvas with smoke curling out of the top. The mission house was made of the used lumber, with two windows and a door on each side and a window on one end toward the village. The exterior was covered with black tar paper.

When Russell and the Mission men first arrived at Paint Hills, they met the Chief. He showed them property behind the village where he said they might build. Marshall thought of the property they had passed on their way up to this location and asked if maybe there would be a spot closer to the village we build on? It was our desire to live closer to the people. It would also be a long distance to carry water and wood. He agreed to let us build on the back edge of the village. Our house was situated between two shacks and three tents. We are still amazed that these



Our home



Chief and his wife

neighbors allowed us to build on 'their doorstep'. Maybe they had no choice, but they welcomed us and were friendly and always good neighbors.

Russell had been sick with strep throat. He had lost 40 pounds and felt weak and dizzy. The next day the nurse came and gave him an intramuscular shot of penicillin in the 'you know where'.

We had given only little thought to the warning the NCEM executive had given us to "be prepared to live a life of privation, of toil, of loneliness, of danger, to be looked upon by our own countrymen, and to be despised by the Natives, to live in isolated places far from the comforts, advantages and protection of society such as one has enjoyed at home." Nor were we to be overly concerned about our health and welfare, nor the safety of our children or their education. We were to count it all joy the spoiling of our goods. We were to give up all rights to ever owning our own home.

We were so naive. We didn't even know how to exist in this beautiful, but formidable land. There was so much to learn. We didn't know what lay ahead of us.

Rev. Richard Tschetter, my home church pastor, had committed himself to pray for us daily. It is essential for missionaries to have those who will serve as an Intercessor Prayer Shield for the missionary on the field. Rev. Tschetter realized more than we, how much we would need to depend on the Lord. Our Mothers were also a part of the prayer shield over us. This wasn't something we could do in our own strength. Paul and Verda May Thomas from the West New Hopedale Church near Meno, Oklahoma, also committed to pray for us regularly. Years later a fellow missionary told us that as he was growing up his parents had our picture on their refrigerator. They prayed for us every day even though they had never met us. We don't know to this day all who upheld us before the Throne. We don't know all their prayers accomplished to enable us to survive and to minister in the

North. But God knows and these faithful warriors will receive their reward accordingly. God bless them.

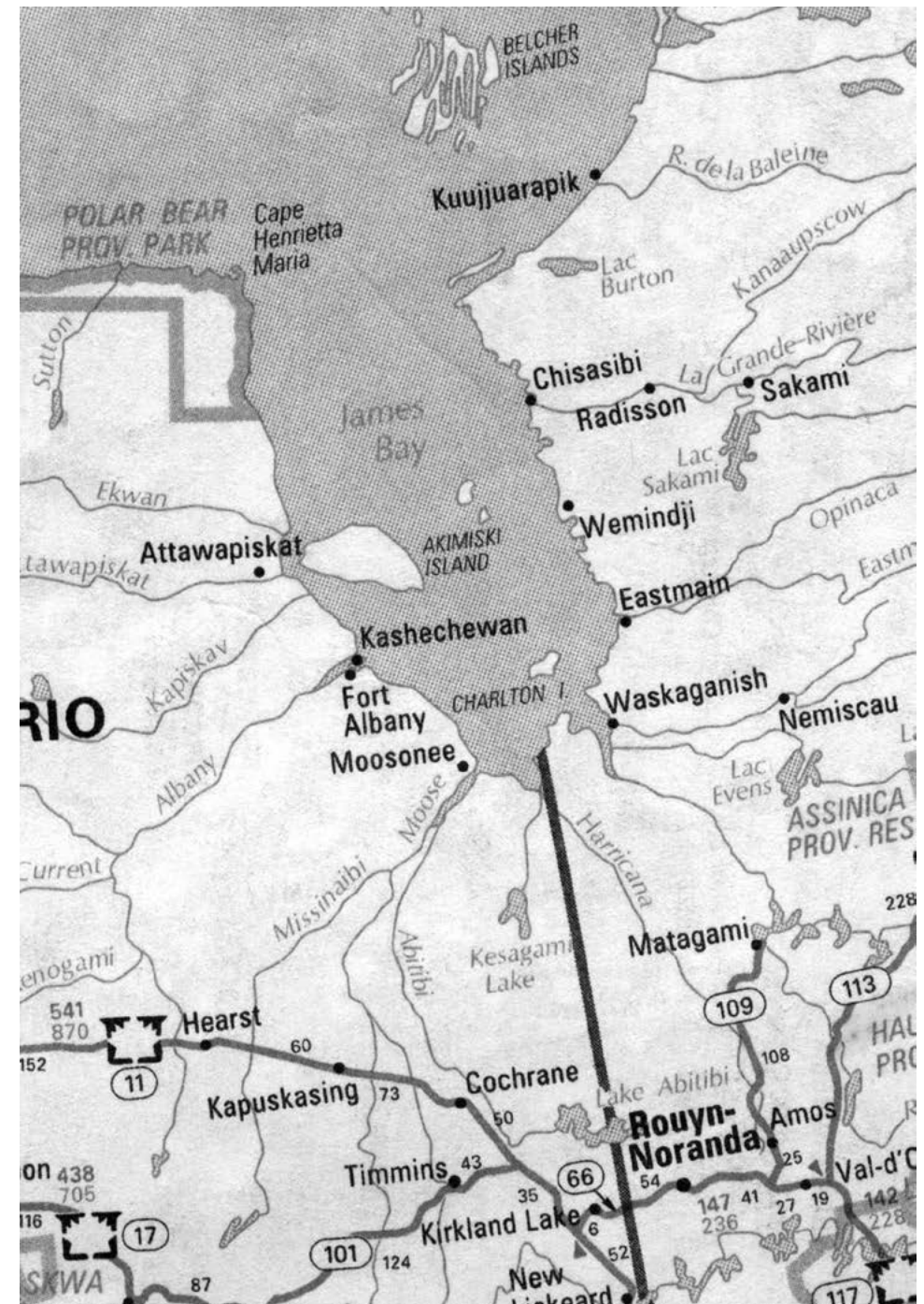
When the Mission men had earlier arrived at the deserted community of Old Factory, they began tearing down the Hudson Bay Store buildings. They hauled the lumber on the canoe, they had bought as a lifeboat, out to the lobster boat. Once they had a boat load, two of the men transported the material up to Paint Hills while the others continued to take down the buildings at Old Factory. Each trip took five hours one way from Old Factory to Paint Hills (Wimidji). Trip after trip was made and when enough lumber for the house at Paint Hills had been transported, two of the men proceeded to haul lumber up to Fort George (Chisasibi) where a similar mission house would be built. The others stayed at Paint Hills to begin building our 24' x 24' house.

The men were tired. The black flies were miserable. Everything seemed to go wrong. Marshall felt the project was his and John felt he had the more construction experience. The stress had built up for them both. When they wanted to move the kitchen range through the back door of the house, the wood crate surrounding the stove was too wide to get through the door. One suggested they remove the door casing so the stove and crate could pass through; but the other said, "why not remove the crate and then the stove will quite easily pass through the opening." Both men became angry and marched off in opposite directions into the bush. Russell didn't know what to think because of the behavior of these two more senior missionaries. He knew the Native men watching also saw the interaction and he was embarrassed.

After a while one of the men came out of the bush and headed to the tent. They exchanged apologies and prayed together briefly before they returned to the work at hand. In the mean time, Russell and a couple of men had removed the crate, as it had to come off anyway. And the stove went through the doorway quite easily.

The weather was rainy most of the time, thus delaying the work. The men visited around in the village. One evening some of the young fellows came over and played their violins and guitars. And the men held informal services with those who came.

When there was a shell of a house built by mid-August, the men left and Russell continued to work on his own. The house wasn't completed by the end of September when Steve and I arrived. In fact it looked rather crude.



James Bay, Quebec with villages

Chapter 4

The Settling In

*“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you,
all whose thoughts are fixed on Thee.”* Isaiah 26:3

It was so good to finally be ‘home’. The grey vinyl and chrome table and chairs were in one end of the house. Our bed and Steve’s crib set in the back area.

One year’s supply of groceries was piled in the middle of where someday would be our kitchen. It had arrived with all of our other things on the Hudson’s Bay ship earlier that summer. As our chimney had not yet arrived, the cook stove stood near the back door, with the stove pipe sticking out the opening hanging on a wire loop from the eaves. The door had to stand partially open, so Russ blocked the rest of the doorway with cardboard to keep out the cold. After Christmas, once the planes were flying again, the chimney was installed and the stoves were hooked up properly.

So this was Paint Hills. It was a community of approximately 400 Swampy Cree Indians, four Caucasian immigrants from Europe, and ourselves who were ‘Landed Immigrants’ from the United States.

A nursing station had been built with an emergency room and two bedrooms for in-patients with accommodations for staff to live in the opposite end. A Scottish nurse-midwife and her assistant lived at the nursing station 24/7. A Hudson’s Bay Co. (HBC) trading post along with a warehouse was built along the shore further up the river. The manager had a house set back behind the store among the trees. He lived alone. A Roman Catholic priest lived in a large two story house with an attached chapel back along the river and away from the village. No one knew what he did, as he kept pretty much to himself. A young Native woman went weekly to do his laundry and cleaning.



Houses provided by government



Indian shacks in Paint Hills

The Mission had assigned us here for our first posting after eight months of orientation and language school. Neither they, nor we, had realized that the Coastal language spoken here was different than the Plains Cree we had studied in Saskatchewan. The people here could not understand us and we certainly couldn’t understand them. A few were bold enough to

speak to us in their limited English, but most spoke no English. No one older than us had been out to residential school. The children spoke only their Native language until they started attending the local school. Their teacher was a Native man, from the West coast of the James Bay, who had married a local woman, so he was able to communicate with the people in their language. The children did learn English in their first years attending school and we were able to communicate with them in English on a limited basis. They were very shy and would hide their faces when we talked to them. Some teenagers went out to high school.

As I lay down on our bed that first evening, I was exhausted but happy. Looking up I saw fingers at several knot holes in the tar paper where children had poked holes. Russell said, "You go on home," to the kids.

The next day a young mother came by. She was pulling along a rather reluctant boy and in her hands she held several bent nails. We thought the mother was trying to tell us the boy had picked the nails up in our yard. We decided the nails had probably been discarded in haste, when the men were building our house. The mother showed such honesty to return the bent nails to us; but then maybe they had to save every nail, using and reusing it as long as possible. I hoped maybe she had just a little bit of a desire to be accepted by us, even as I wanted to be accepted by her.

As soon as Russell felt well enough, after his bout with strep throat, he continued the work on the interior of the house. He put used insulation between the joists and studding and nailed used Dona-Cona sheets on the ceiling and walls. It didn't matter if the 4' x 8' sheet had previously been painted or was marred by use was placed next to tar paper. It didn't matter if he used odd sized sheets to make use of all the material he had; just so there would be enough to cover the areas.

I had arrived justly barely in time. Within a few days freeze up began. We were as ready as we were going to get. Even though we'd been told what 'freeze up' meant, we still didn't fully comprehend until we had experienced it. The water began forming ice along the shore until overnight it became ice and each day it became thicker until it reached three feet or more. It took about six to seven weeks until the ice would be thick enough for the planes to safely land on the frozen river. There was no landing strip on the ground.

The village was cut off from the rest of civilization. The three times a week Austin Airways planes no longer came, as they couldn't land on the river. No plane meant there was no access to the outside world for medical

reasons, or other emergencies, and there was no mail. We would have to be totally dependent on the Lord to see us through this isolation period.

My Mother was very faithful in writing me a letter every week and I had just as faithfully written her a letter each week, but now the mail piled up at the post offices going nowhere. Both of our Mothers were widows and missed us so much.

My Mother and Mother-in-law were friends and although they lived 100 miles apart, they somehow shared information from the letters we wrote them and were not happy if I told one something I hadn't told the other.

So I got into the habit of copying my letters, only adding to each one in response to what she had written to us. Much of each Sunday afternoon I set aside time to write those letters. I wrote weekly during the fall freeze up and spring break up even though I wouldn't be able to mail the letters for at least six weeks.

It seemed that a lot of my time was taken up writing letters. Once, when we received an unexpected \$15.00 gift we used it to buy a gelatin duplicator to make duplicates of our letters to save time. It was messy and the lettering smeared and faded over time. Years later a minister, the father of some friends of ours, gave us his Gestetner duplicator. He didn't need it but he didn't want to throw it away either. He wanted it to be used in the Lord's work.

Another major part of our correspondence was to acknowledge the financial support our home churches and friends were investing in our lives and ministry. The Sunday school class #9 in my home church was a class of young married couples about our age, who had taken on the support of Glen after his birth. Even as some class members moved on to other classes and others were added to the group known as Class #9, the support continued for 20 years.

Various other people gave to our support as our needs increased. Russell's home church took on projects like a chain saw and a power plant and a kerosene refrigerator.

A verse in the Bible that became dear to me during those times of isolation and has become my favorite Bible verse is, "*You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind is stayed on You. Because he commits himself to You, leans on You, and hopes confidently in You.*" Isaiah 26:3

Chapter 5

The Message

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16

Just a short time after Russ had arrived at Paint Hills, even before the house was built and the men were still sleeping on the boat, some people asked, “When are you going to start services?”

Wow, we didn’t know it would be that easy. We thought we’d have to learn the language, win the confidence of the people, etc, etc.” Well, if they wanted services, we’d start right away.

“Sunday, at 7:00,” he told them.

Sunday came and our house was crowded. Word got around by ‘muskeg moccasingraph’ (or more commonly known as by word of mouth), that we would hold a service on Sunday. And the people came.

We sang songs in English, I told a children’s story with flash card pictures that everyone loved. I was glad for all the pictured song sheets I had made and the flannel graph and picture storybooks we had brought with us. Russell read scripture and made a few comments in english.



Ladies and children in our home for services



Children’s Classes in our front room



Young people playing games

“We’ll meet again next Sunday,” Russ said.

The weekdays were busy trying to get settled in, but we always reserved Sundays for the Lord. We even dressed in our best, which included a Sunday dress for me, white shirts and bow ties for Russell and Steve.

The weeks went by and the audience may have changed some, but

there was always a houseful of people. The audience consisted of mostly women, girls and children. The men and teenage boys were not present except for the occasional one.

Since so many were Cree speaking only, Russell worked at getting a few sentences written down in Cree that he would read to the group. What took eight hours to write, took five minutes to read. As he learned more, he wrote and read more until he could speak without a paper. The people said they understood, which made us happy. He led in the singing of Cree songs. The hymn book was printed in Cree syllabics, as spoken at the base of the James Bay.

The Coastal Cree was a bit different but the people as well as Russell could look at the syllabics and sing the Coastal Cree words.

As winter came on and the children hung around our house, we started a Good News Club for them during the week. These classes were taught in English. We put pictures and attendance sheets, visual aids, and whatever all else on the walls in our living room. Everyone looked at them and admired the papers of their children. Three girls accepted the Lord and came to study the Bible with us after school. They also attended the regular services.

On Friday evenings we invited the young people in for a young people's meeting. We played group games. They especially loved to pass a 'Ring on a String' around the circle trying to hide it from the person in the middle. They also liked Hot Potato, which was a knot tied in a sock and tossed around preventing the one in the center from catching it. They never seemed to tire of the games. We always had a devotional time and refreshments before they left.

We did notice though, when the nights got dark earlier attendance dropped. We asked why so many people had stopped coming and they told us the people believed there was a 'big man' who roamed in the dark and would attack the children and women, so they stayed in their houses after dark.

We enjoyed our ministry with the people. I must say though, when we'd get a room packed full of unwashed bodies, it did start to smell. But, we were there to reach these people for Christ, and unpleasant smells were not too great a price to pay.

We learned that in the North the days were exceptionally long in the summer. The children still played outside at 11:00 or 12:00 pm. Then there was early sunrise and the sun was high in the sky by the time we wanted to get up. So the nights were very short. Then in the winter the nights were exceptionally long with the days short.

We tried to visit each home in the village briefly each month, or at least every second month. We took 'The Cree Witness' and some gospel tracts that we left at each house. Sometimes our whole family went together. Other times Russ went alone, and other times I went usually taking Steve with me. Children have a way of 'opening doors'. Steve was welcome everywhere.

We had also gotten some cardboard record-players and some crude 45 rpm records in Cree from Gospel Recordings that they could play by turning the record with a pencil. These cardboard record-players could be



Visiting the Native homes with Cree literature



taken to trap lines for people to listen to when they were alone. We hoped the people would listen to the records and perhaps they would be able to understand the message in the privacy of their tent far from the village.

Nancy and Nellie often lingered behind the others after the service on Sunday night. In his faltering Cree, Russell asked if they had understood what he was saying. They nodded their heads "Yes," and Nellie wiped her eyes with a rag, a habit she had at the best of times.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, and have everlasting life."

— John 3:16

“WHAT CAN WASH AWAY MY SIN”

Kekwaay kaa pehkihiyoyaan, Nimacihtiwinihk ochi
 Kaskihtamaakaniyw, Jesus omihko piko
 Ah kihciyitaakwak kaa ayohcikawihk
 Niwaapiskihikon Jesus omihko poko

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
 What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
 Oh precious is the flow, That makes me white as snow.
 No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

We asked if they believed that Jesus had died for their sins. Did they understand what being a follower of Jesus meant? Did they want to accept Jesus into their lives? They nodded their heads, “Yes, Yes.” Nancy prayed in a quiet voice I could not hear, in a language I could not understand, but when she finished she smiled and they left.

After one Sunday evening service Nellie suffered what appeared to be a heart attack. Word was sent over to the nursing station and the government nurse came to check her. She was transferred to the nursing station for a few days. As we visited her there she said, “Yes, yes, I understand it all. I am ready to die.”

Another time a woman came to our house early for the service. She breast fed her baby with no modesty whatsoever which was rather different than I was accustomed to seeing. We spoke only a little with her to learn she had relatives down at Moose Factory, where there were a few Christians by now. Years later Russell said to me, “I wonder if the reason she came to our house alone that evening, was that she wanted to accept the Lord.” We hadn’t given her a chance. We only talked about insignificant, nonessential, material things and perhaps missed the opportunity for which we had come to this village. We later learned the lady’s sister at Moose Factory was a Christian, but we never asked this lady if she had become a Christian too. Russ did have many contacts with her husband going fishing and on hunting trips.

Over the coming weeks we saw a difference in Nancy’s countenance. She actually radiated when she smiled. We prayed that God would give the increase from the Seed planted in her heart. We weren’t the only ones who noticed a difference in the ladies, Nancy especially. Word got around and one Sunday night not long after,



Nancy
Mistachekesic

Nancy didn’t show up at our house for the service. Russ asked Nellie, “Where is Nancy?”

“She wasn’t allowed to come.” Nellie replied.

“Why not?” Russ asked.

“The shaman (witch doctor/medicine man) is keeping her in the house and won’t let her come. He beats her.”



Nancy’s home

Russell decided to check it out. It was getting dark as he came to their house. He ducked down to walk through the entryway stacked with firewood. As he opened the low door of the entrance, he saw the shaman in the doorway blocking him. Under

the Holy Spirit’s direction to “walk through him,” Russ walked forward and the shaman completely disappeared. Russell then found himself in the room on the other side of the door. It was as if he had walked right through the shaman. He turned around to see what had happened to the shaman. He was gone. Russ didn’t know what had happened. Even though we were unprepared to confront evil spirits, we can’t explain what had taken place ... there was no other explanation than that the Holy Spirit had removed the shaman.

Nancy was sitting on the bed with her face in her hands, crying. Russell prayed with her, trying to encourage her and left.

We didn’t hear anything further about the incidence, but we were sure it wasn’t forgotten. Nancy was afraid and for a while she didn’t come to our house, but eventually she came again.

We had chosen as our life verse: “*How thankful I am to Christ Jesus our Lord, for considering me trustworthy and appointing me to serve Him.*” 1 Timothy 1:12 (NLT)

jeans were pulled down around his ankles and the boys were turning him around to 'check him out'. I assumed they wondered if little white boys looked like little Indian boys. I went in and pulled up Steve's jeans and looking at the boys, pointed to the door. The boys got up and left without a word passing between us. It's surprising how much you can communicate without saying one audible word.

Chapter 6

The Adjustments

"Jesus said, Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house, or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age along with persecutions and in the age to come, eternal life." Mark 10:29, 30

The people stared at the little boy with 'yellow hair'. They laughed and pointed to the yellow flowers in the linoleum, then at Steve's hair. Most had never seen a white boy as they had never left the community except to go to the bush and they certainly wouldn't see white kids there. Never had a white family lived among them.

One day I noticed it was too quiet in the half of the house we had divided off from our living quarters with a wall. We had hung a curtain in the doorway. We were allowing the many children who came to play with Steve and his toys to use that space keeping them from getting underfoot as I worked or Russell studied in the kitchen. As I pulled the curtain aside to see what was going on in the front room, I saw with horror that Steve's



Steve, the little boy with 'yellow hair'



Children playing in our home

needed and wouldn't miss one or two. To me it seemed Steve had few toys compared to what other white children back home had. Most of the toys the local boys had were carved from wood by their fathers or perhaps a grandfather and pertained to their way of life: guns, birds, animals and sling shots.

As some boys were leaving our house one day, Russell noticed one boy show a second boy his trophy in the form of a rubber ball he had stuffed



Young fellows playing checkers

In the following days young boys of a variety of ages came to play with Steve and his toys. I'm sure the plastic and rubber toys seemed ever so beautiful with their bright colors and they must have thought Steve had more than he

needed and wouldn't miss one or two. To me it seemed Steve had few toys compared to what other white children back home had. Most of the toys the local boys had were carved from wood by their fathers or perhaps a grandfather and pertained to their way of life: guns, birds, animals and sling shots. As some boys were leaving our house one day, Russell noticed one boy show a second boy his trophy in the form of a rubber ball he had stuffed before leaving. Russell went out the back door and called to the boys, "Come here and let me see what you have in your pocket." Evidently honesty was not something they came by naturally. While Russell had only seen the ball

the culprit showed his friends, the boys also unloaded several more toys from their pockets that Russ wasn't even aware of.

Not having many toys or games, the older boys and men made checker boards painting a piece of plywood with black and white squares. They then used small black and white rocks to play checkers. Sitting on the ground they played for hours on end.

Sometimes children, even women pressed their faces against the window looking in at us. Steve looked out and pressed his face against theirs. Then they all laughed. Children usually knocked. Women made enough noise coming in that I was aware that they were there.

Russell devoted a lot of time to cutting firewood. But the available wood he could cut with a Swede saw was green and didn't burn well. He didn't have a canoe at that time. And he had no way to haul fire wood home. Dry wood was lighter to carry but could only be found farther away from the village.

The village was located on sandy soil surrounded by muskeg. The 'streets' were sand throughout the main portion of the village with trails leading off towards the 'bush' that surrounded the village. We decided to buy enough firewood to last the first winter. We paid \$10.00 a cord and the men had to work two days to cut a cord. Each cord was logs stacked four feet high, four feet wide and eight feet long. So they weren't making much money. After buying the firewood, Russ had to saw it into stove lengths with his Swede saw, split and stack it so we would be able to find it when the snow was deep. Russ said one load of wood warmed a person five times. First cutting the tree down, second hauling the firewood home, splitting the wood and stacking it and lastly, carrying it into the house to be burned for our warmth. Eventually we tried to keep a year's supply of firewood stacked outside our back door, but it was difficult to get that much wood ahead the first couple of years.

A daily task for Russell involved starting a fire in the Favorite box #28 cast iron heater to warm the house. He got up first and got the fire going from the smoldering coals in the box heater. The house was near freezing when he got up, so Steve and I stayed in bed till the fire was roaring. When a fire got really hot in the box heater, the stove pipe turned red from the heat. We had to be on the alert lest the creosote that built up in the stovepipe cause a chimney fire.

The kitchen stove also needed to be lit each morning. When the fire in the cook stove was hot, it was time for me to get up and cook breakfast. We had to boil the water for coffee, and to cook the oatmeal. We didn't eat

only oatmeal. We rotated between Cream of Wheat, Red River, and cornmeal as well as the oatmeal. And occasionally we had pancakes but that was more of a meal at suppertime. We had also acquired an antique cast iron waffle maker to set over an open fire and waffles were a special treat, served with my mother's famous white sauce.

The women gathered sticks and small pieces of firewood, carrying it



Lady splitting firewood



Lady bringing home firewood

home tied together on their backs with a strap across their foreheads. In the winter it was easier when they could pull a toboggan with fire wood and even then they pulled with the strap across their foreheads. When snow had fallen and the river was frozen the men used dog teams and sleds to haul heavy loads of wood to their homes.

Russell carried the water we used from the river. In the summer he sometimes carried

water from a stream up the hill from where we lived, as it was cleaner; although harder to get to our house. The local people dumped garbage of all sorts into the river. Russ asked a Native man to carve a yoke that fit over his shoulders like the Natives used. There were ropes through holes at either end. At the ends of the ropes were heavy metal hooks to carry the water buckets. That way he could carry the water, balancing the buckets without splashing water over the edges.

In winter, when the river was frozen over, the people chopped a hole in the ice. The water came to the surface in the hole, and the people were able to dip river water into their buckets. The water in the hole froze over in

a short time. Everyone used the same hole, thus it meant less thickness of ice to chop through when they went for water.

Russell spoiled me, in that I didn't have to go cut and haul firewood home and I didn't have to carry in the water like the village women had to do. Two three gallon pails of water were quite heavy to carry the several blocks to our



Russell carrying water from river

house. We had a 45 gallon drum in the kitchen, so we never ran out. I kept a kitchen towel over the barrel to keep it clean, but once I caught a girl take her bubble gum from her mouth and stick it into the water barrel. Russell then built a wooden lid hinged at the middle to cover the water barrel and that kept kids from sticking their fingers into the water.

I'm sure the Native people were amazed at our strange and frivolous to them, ways of living. I tried hard to adapt myself to their way of life; but there were just some things I found hard to adapt to. Finally I decided I would try to compromise. I would be comfortable in their homes, even if it meant sitting on their beds or on the floor, and while in my home, I would offer them a chair. Some ladies started out sitting on a chair, but when they became uncomfortable they slipped to the floor which was more to their liking.

Nellie Visitor and her daughter, Nancy Mistachekesic and her two daughters Dinah and Maude, came to visit often. Shortly after we were settled in, Nellie roamed around the house looking into each of our three separate 'rooms'. We had divided the house into half to be less space to heat. The half we would use included the kitchen, our bedroom and by now a small bathroom. The unused half was blocked off with a curtain over the doorway. This room was used for our services. Russell built backless benches to be used for services.

The bathroom contained a 'honey bucket' which is a chemical toilet, actually a five gallon bucket in which we poured a small amount of chemical solution to control odor. It had a formed toilet seat and lid. Russ would carry the bucket to the outhouse when necessary, and that first winter the

'honey bucket' was vented into the attic. Russ climbed up into the attic to sniff if the vent was drawing! The next summer he was able to vent it outside which was much more satisfactory.

Russ also built a stand cutting a hole large enough to hold a wash basin, which served as a sink. We would pour our used water into a five gallon bucket leaving it for Russell to empty with his other chores. Steve took his baths in our square laundry tub; we others took sponge baths. Eventually we bought a full size portable aluminum bathtub. We had shelves to hold our towels, toiletries, and such.

Nellie now lifted the curtain I had hung in front of the shelves Russell had built in the bedroom for our clothes. Nellie, as did all the people, hung their clothes over ropes or put them into cardboard boxes and stored them under the square wooden frame that looked like a shallow box with legs they had for a bed. Often extra clothing was left hanging on the clothes line until it was needed.

Most of the homes next to our house were very small, about 10 x 15 feet. The houses were very low. They were made of thin split logs covering



Our neighbors' houses

the lower half. The upper half was a frame of poles covered with canvas, spruce boughs, and snow. When the snow was adequate, they shoveled snow around the bottom half to help insulate the house. In addition to their one room house was an entryway where they stored firewood so it was in



Our neighbors' houses

easy reach when needed. They never had a big supply on hand. Inside their homes they had a round airtight drum heater with a lid they used for a cooking stove as well as for heating their houses. Living in each house were parents, children, grandparents, as well as any unmarried aunts or uncles; even newly married couples. Where they each slept remains a mystery to me because most of the floor space was taken up by usually one or two beds, a stove, and a table.

During the daytime they rolled up bedding and stacked it in a corner. Each person had their own bedroll. And often these were hung on the clothes line outside during the day.

When it got really cold some families moved out of the government houses they had been issued into teepees. These were made of poles arranged in a circle, then covered with canvas forming the teepee. The smoke from the open pit fire was able to escape through an opening at the peak. I was told that in the teepees they lay side by side on the spruce boughs with their feet toward the center.

The floors were spruce boughs laid overlapping one another to fit snugly. When the floor became soiled they added new boughs on top of the original layer. At the end of the season, or when they were badly worn, the spruce boughs were removed and replaced with fresh ones. The people explained to us that they found it foolish to heat 'such big cold houses' and they preferred the cozy teepee which used so much less firewood. This made more sense to them.

Women came to visit us when their seemingly endless chores were finished. Their boots left black marks on the linoleum floors. They tracked in sand or mud, then later snow. It always required a 'clean up' after I'd had visitors and a major clean up after a church service but the people were why we were there. Ladies mostly came to visit and would sit for long periods of time not saying a word. With an average of three to four women a day, plus children, I often had to continue my housework or it would never have



Clothes hanging in homes over ropes

gotten done. They enjoyed watching me. I would have a cup of tea with my visitors and then would return to my work. On Sundays we would have many more visitors. One month we had a total of 144 visitors.

When children grew restless or were disobedient, mothers would threaten their children in Cree saying, "The white woman will cut your legs off." The kids would fearfully look at me, and I not knowing what had been said, would smile. Later I learned they were scaring the children as a form of discipline, by saying I would "cut their legs off."

It was interesting when the people, especially the men, had something important to say or to request, they sat without talking until we served some hot tea with lots of sugar and canned milk. If we had something to offer for refreshments, they always ate till there was no more. After having had their tea, they would push back and tell us why they had come. I eventually learned if I wanted to get them on their way quickly, I should serve tea immediately when they came.

Nellie came huffing and puffing in the midst of a snowstorm one day. She said something about money and about Nancy's daughters at Fort George. I couldn't understand what she was saying, but I assumed she was asking for money to bring Nancy's girls home from school for the Christmas



Nellie Visitor visiting

break. Before she left, Nancy came to walk her home. Nellie tried to get Nancy to ask us whatever it was that she wanted, but Nancy said "No." We didn't make a habit of loaning money. To loan money created enemies. If they couldn't or didn't want to pay us back, they would avoid us. We knew if the people did need money they could get credit at the store based on the amount of furs they had trapped the winter before. So we knew they were okay. We freely gave a meal if they were hungry or traded food for something they had for something they wanted from us.

A large Hudson Bay Company supply ship called the Fort Severn and a tug boat pulling two

large barges, came from Montreal, Quebec, down the St. Lawrence River, into the Atlantic Ocean past Newfoundland and Labrador, through the Hudson's Strait and into the Hudson Bay, down into the James Bay and finally up the Maquatua River to the village. They stopped at each community along the coast with supplies for the stores once or twice each summer. It was on one of these, our supplies came in each year. At each community, the HBC borrowed several large canoes which could travel up the river to the village to off-load the supplies. Both the ship and barges wintered at the mouth of the river, with a man living on the ship all winter and going daily to break the ice around ship and barges.

Among the household goods we had shipped in that summer before we arrived, was a gasoline powered washing machine. Russell heated water in a copper boiler on top of the kitchen stove. Then he poured the hot water into the washing machine and filled the wash tubs we had hanging in the back porch. One time, my then four year old helper, Steve, accidentally got his arm into the wringer. When the wringer reached his elbow it released. No damage was done, except for a scare to both of us.

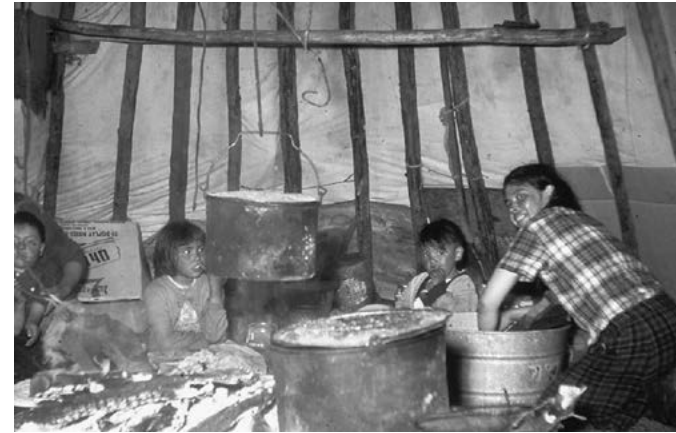


Steve helping do the laundry

The gasoline engine purred loudly in a village with so few sounds, other than hungry dogs howling. Everyone in the settlement knew when I was doing the washing. I hung my laundry out on the clothesline as did everyone else.

The women scrubbed their clothes on a scrub board and hung them on the clothesline outside until they were either dry or were needed. That's one reason they didn't need as much space for storage of clothing as I did.

The clothesline required a tall pole to lift the center of the line high into the air. It was lowered when a person wanted to remove the clothes.



Woman washing her laundry on scrub board



Virgie wearing snowshoes while hanging laundry out

There were times I used snowshoes to walk on top of the snowdrifts to reach my clothesline. But our laundry was brought in sooner than just when we needed an item. That was especially true when I had diapers to hang out. Sometimes I hung a

few clothes on the line over the cook stove allowing the heat to dry the clothes. Russell also put six large metal hooks into the walls of the living room so we could lace ropes from end to end across the room. We'd hang sheets and large clothing items on the ropes. It takes ingenuity to make do in a different climate than which we were accustomed. The ladies remarked how many clothes we had in the laundry each week. Their apparel was done similar to the spruce boughs on the teepee floors. When it became soiled they added a layer on top until they couldn't add anymore. Sometimes they wore their clothes backwards and sometimes they turned their clothes inside out

and continued wearing it till it was stiff and had to be laundered.

The ladies sewed moccasins for their families. Some were sewn with seal skin when they needed them to be waterproof. However, they made tanned moose hide moccasins to wear when it was very cold. We wore these all winter as well. All the men, including Russell, wore moccasins with duffle lining that fit smoothly on the foot with an attached piece of canvas

wrapped around the lower leg and tied tightly with leather thongs. I bought mukluks made with moose hide that were beautifully beaded and trimmed with rabbit fur. These were tied on top with a braided cord of yarn and had round balls of yarn or rabbit fur that bobbed as I walked. Underneath was a duffle lining with beautiful embroidery. We felt sorry indeed for those who had to wear rubber boots from the store to keep their feet dry or warm in the cold winter months.

Although there were some moose and deer further into the interior, and caribou farther north; there were none along the coastal area where we lived. The store stocked a supply of the tanned split cow hide for the people to purchase for sewing moccasins and mitts if they had not gotten moose inland.

Mitts were beaded and trimmed with beaver fur. Each strand of beaver fur was hollow which trapped warm air and thus was the best fur to keep the hands warm. The women did beautiful bead work, usually imaginary floral designs. We asked one lady to sew a pair of moose hide mitts for Russell. They were lined and trimmed with beaver fur. They cost \$25.00. They were wonderful and kept his hands warm in the cold weather as he worked outside. I also bought a pair of moose hide mitts for myself, but they weren't done nearly as beautifully as Russell's were.

The snow fell deep in Paint Hills. Often there were complete white-out blizzards lasting three days, which we called a '3-day blow'. The snow swirled around the houses and visibility was zero. That was occasion to stay home and catch up on other duties in the house. We remember the thermometer reading -60° F between Christmas and New Years that first winter. The frosty air came in puffs when the door was opened. Burr!! I think it was so cold because the wind blew across miles and miles of frozen water in the Bay. Also we couldn't decipher the wind chill factor.

The ice formed an inch thick at the bottom of the glass windows in our house. When the room heated up, the ice would melt and water would run



Russell digging for firewood

down the walls. At night the bedding would freeze to the wall. We knew it was at least -40° F when the smoke from the chimneys went down from the roof toward the ground, instead of up toward the sky.

Now as I read the letters I wrote to my mother, I notice that nearly every week one or the other or all of us was sick with colds, probably due to poor nutrition and a rundown physical condition. Everything we ate came from a bag, box or can. We had no fresh foods.

When there was occasion to celebrate, the Indian men played their guitars and violins. Some danced a jig. Others stomped their feet. We could hear, and maybe feel, the beat of their music all the way to our house. We were never invited to their dances. Russell had an old violin he had played as a child. He tried to play gospel songs on it in our home, but the people said "No, that instrument cannot play such music. The fiddle is only for dance music." Russ put his violin back in the case and never played it again. Maybe it would have been better to show them that the violin could be used in worship to God? We didn't know.

On one occasion when the bishop came into the village, there were three weddings. A number of 'out of town guests' came into the village for the weddings as well. There was dancing all night for three nights in a row. One of the ladies asked us, "Is it okay to dance?" as if she had doubt about some of their activities. Others just assumed we didn't participate in dancing even though we never told them.

For our first Christmas, we cut a live spruce tree and set it in our living room. Steve made colored construction paper chains and strung strings of popcorn. Then we as a family decorated the tree. We put gifts for



Steve on his new tricycle

Steve and ourselves under the tree on Christmas Eve. I asked my Mother to send us tree ornaments which arrived just before Christmas once the planes were flying again.

On Christmas morning, before we were dressed or even out of bed, children came knocking on our door. They looked at the gifts under the tree but we had no gifts for them. Some mothers had sewn new clothes, mitts or moccasins for their families, while men carved toys or made new snowshoes. We

gave the children candy we had bought at the store. We also gave them cookies. We didn't know what else to do or what we were expected to do. That day people streamed in and out of our house shaking hands and wishing us a "Merry Christmas." If they lingered, we gave them tea. The next year we would be prepared.

The following year we requested toys to be shipped to us so we could distribute them to the children. A church in Toronto shipped several large boxes of toys. We distributed the gifts to the children on December 24. Later we went around to the homes in the village to see how they had decorated their homes. Many had streamers from corner to corner, crisscrossing in the middle. None had put decorated trees up.

In coming years we served tea and cake to as many as 300 people who came to our house on the 25th. Finally it got to be so busy we had ladies serving cake and tea while we greeted the people and passed out candies. We were too busy to be lonely till the day was over. Then we wondered how our families at home had celebrated and whether they had missed us.

We were told that the people hung around the store until almost midnight on Christmas Eve. As the priest had a mass at midnight, the people rushed to the RC mission to see the 'show,' as they called it. The priest wore long robes and chanted in Latin and burned incense for two hours. We wondered if the people would have sat through two hours of preaching. Rather doubtful. One year the Anglican lay reader handed out used ice skates to each child. Steve asked if he could go get some skates too. We told him he might not get any, but he could ask. They gave him a pair too. He was loved by all the people.

A lot of people left the village after Christmas for their trap lines. Most of the men trapped in the winter. Families went along. The ladies skinned the moose and scraped fur off the hides and stretched them on frames to dry. Later they worked oatmeal and moose brains into the hides



Our guests were served tea and cake



Woman preparing beaver skin



Beaver skins drying in the outdoors

to make them pliable. Then the skins were smoked over an open fire to get that wonderful woodsy smell. Other furs were stretched on frames and dried and traded to the Hudson Bay Co. Many were shipped to Montreal or to England to be made into coats or men's fur hats.

One lady brought over a red fox fur that she wanted to sell us. We asked, "How much?" They knew it was usually in their favor if they let us set the price. Eventually they asked for \$1 so we bought it. The lady then sewed it onto Russell's parka hood and there was enough left for me to sew onto Steve's parka hood. Christmas had been a special time, and now the village was quiet.

Chapter 7

The Learning

“You are from God, little children and have overcome them; because greater is He that is in you than He who is in the world.” 1 John 4:4

Learning to communicate was most urgent. We had studied the Plains Cree language in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan for eight months, but it was a different dialect than the people on the James Bay spoke. This was Swampy Cree. Here the people used ‘sh’ sounds instead of ‘k’ sounds. It sounded like you had mush in your mouth and couldn’t speak clearly. Besides this, many words were totally different. I didn’t do well in language learning. Blame that on my hearing or having to take care of a toddler and do housework or probably just an inability to learn a foreign language.

Russell first hired Mrs. Swallow to come twice a week to help him with language study. Later when she was going to have a baby and didn’t want to work anymore, he hired the Chief’s son James, to come two hours



Language informant, James Visitor with his family

KEY TO THE CREE SYLLABIC SYSTEM.					
VOWELS.					
as in hate, ā	as i in pin, e	as in no, o	as in pun, u	as in pan, a	Final Con- sonants.
▽	△	▷	◁	◁	
W wā ▽	we △	wo ▷	wu ◁	wa ◁	
P pā ∨	pe ^	po >	pu <	pa <	·
T tā ∪	te ∩	to ∪	tu ∩	ta ∩	·
K kā 9	ke ρ	ko d	ku t	ka l	·
Ch chā 7	che f	cho J	chu l	cha l	-
M mā 7	me 7	mo J	mu L	ma l	·
N nā 0	ne σ	no 0	nu a	na a	·
S sā 6	se 6	so 6	su 6	sa 6	·
Y yā 4	ye 4	yo 4	yu 4	ya 4	·
Final oo . . .					o
„ i . . .					·
Aspirated final k					x
Extra signs— X = Christ, z = r, ξ = l, : = wi, " = h before a vowel. " = a soft guttural h when before a consonant.					

Cree syllabic chart

Cree. Russell wrote the translated words using syllabics. James may not have been aware that as he and Russell read and studied the Bible, it was being sown into his heart. Russell paid James with food staples like tea, sugar, canned milk or whatever we thought we could spare and that they would use; the equivalent value of 50 cents an hour.

Russ had memorized the syllabics chart and was able to write the syllabics and put them together to form words. Thus he was able to write out a short message and read it. On Sunday he could sing the hymns and read the message, both

done with syllabic symbols or in phonetics. The people seemed pleased with his efforts and said they understood him. They were very polite. Russell wanted to order hymnbooks and Bibles in the Cree syllabics from an Anglican printing house; but they said they couldn’t do that. Later we found out they were ordering their supplies from our mission press.

Language learning and communication became a way of life for Russell. I communicated in English with the younger folks and children and smiled and used gestures to communicate with the women.

Steve had turned two years old in August before he and I arrived at Paint Hills. He was learning to speak in our mother tongue of English, but he heard his playmates and the people around him talking a different language. He began to repeat the words he heard, and even when lying in his crib, he repeated the Cree words over and over and thus he learned to speak two languages at the same time. Men said to Russell, "You talk Cree like a white man, Steve talks like one of us."

There was a village school for children up to grade six taught by a Métis man from the West coast of the Bay. After that if parents wanted their children to continue on to school, the children had to leave the village to attend residential school for 10 months of the year. A few even went out to high school. We were never told of any of the children being abused at the residential schools. It didn't even occur to us to ask.

Parents knew times were changing and that those who knew how to speak the English language would be given what few jobs there were to be had. It was a big sacrifice on both parents and children to send their children out to school after they completed the sixth grade. It was necessary to know English well if one wanted to get along in the outside world of that day. Today, those children who are now adults have learned to speak Cree, English and French.

It was interesting that when the first state church religions made their way into the James Bay, their guides got confused at the lower end of the Bay and went up the wrong coasts. The French Roman Catholic priests went up the west coast of the Bay, and the Anglican priests went up the east coast. Thus the west coast people in Ontario were converted to Roman Catholicism and the east coast people in Quebec became Anglicans. Really the people adopted the new religions without leaving their former animistic religion. This is called syncretism, the combining of different, often contrary beliefs, while melding the practices of these several discrete traditions.

All the villages along the coast adhered to the same religion, whatever had been presented to them. We didn't realize the family and cultural bondage the people had as well as spiritual bondage. The Chief made the decision what religion would be accepted and no one dared to decide for themselves. One man said, "I was born an Anglican, I was baptized an Anglican, I take communion as an Anglican and I will die an Anglican."

Although the Native people practiced their witchcraft and animism;

outsiders, especially the white people, didn't even know it existed as it was practiced in private. We had heard that in a neighboring village a teepee would actually shake and noises of the bear, wolf and other animals could be heard. The shaman had gone into the teepee to communicate with the animal spirits. After several years, when we saw their witchcraft at work, we didn't know what to do except we knew that, "*He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world.*" None of our missionary leaders had taught us how to do spiritual warfare. We went into enemy territory woefully unprepared. We prayed and the Holy Spirit instructed us, but it was a slow process to learn as we had so many other things going on in our lives. It was not until years later that we would receive training on spiritual warfare.

One of our first experiences with witchcraft was one night while lying in our bed; we felt an evil presence in the room. It was coming toward us. We pled the blood of Jesus Christ over ourselves, our young son, and our home. We called aloud repeating the name, "Jesus." Even as I wrote this, the cold chills again covered my body until I called out to Jesus Christ and slowly the chills left me and warmth returned.

When we moved into the settlement, we wanted to live close to the people, and we did. There were several shacks and tents and the mission house was built in between them.

After we moved in, we noticed the bear skull and bones of animals hanging in the tree nearest to our house where our neighbors hung their snowshoes, traps and other paraphernalia. We found



*Bear skull between
our house and
neighbor's house*



Our back yard with our neighbors' storage

our neighbors to be good neighbors so we didn't say anything about the bones. Maybe the bones didn't really matter?

In early winter a young man started to fall through the ice on the river, but was able to crawl to safety. He proudly said, "If I had not had this bear tooth in my pocket I would have gone under."

Later when the people killed a black bear, which to them was a sacred animal, they distributed the meat to the entire village, us included. Afterward, they collected the bones. I don't know what they did with all the bones from every bear, but we didn't dare throw them away. They came to collect them.

Thomas told us that when hunting, if a man came upon a bear, the hunter would talk to the bear spirit and explain why he must kill the bear for food. And the bear spirit would consent.

A couple of months later, Russell wanted to hunt a bear for our meat supply because we got really tired of eating canned hamburger balls, Klik (Spam), corned beef and tuna. Russell had brought with him a .303 Army rifle that had been given to him by Don Froese. Russell went to the Hudson's Bay store to buy shells. Thomas, the clerk and interpreter, asked, "What are you going to use these shells for?"

"I'm going to go hunting for bear so we have some meat."

"You know what you have to do if you kill a bear?" Thomas asked.

Yeah, Russ knew somewhat how to gut out a bear and skin it, before cutting it up into pieces.

"No, that's not what I mean," Thomas continued. "You have to call for the elders and they will offer tobacco to the spirit of the bear, or else our hunting won't be good afterwards."

Well, Russ wouldn't have any part in that so he pushed the shells back across the counter saying, "I guess I won't go hunting bear then."

We told the people we didn't have meat to eat. One day a man brought a plate covered with a piece of a paper sugar bag on top. As I lifted the paper I saw a skinned and gutted rabbit but with its eyes, teeth and stubs of



Man carrying home black bear he killed

ears still intact. It was early in my new pregnancy and I wanted to throw up. Never had I seen a dead animal look me in the eye.

We bought Speckled Trout for 25 cents a fish, all cleaned. Later Roderick showed Russ how to set out a fish net and we could get all the white fish and trout we needed for ourselves and our sled dogs. The people used nets and fished year round. We had noticed some of our fish were disappearing from the storage box we had outside our house. We didn't think the people would steal as they had enough fish of their own. One day Russ caught the thief in the act. It was a black dog.

Gull, whose nickname was 'Wapakil' meaning 'Snow Owl' in Cree, brought us a snow owl. He was the only one who trapped the owl, thus the nickname. He stuck a post far from the shore into the lake ice, as it was freezing. On top of the post he set a trap which was chained to the post; and the owl when flying across the lake would land on the post only to meet his doom. Snow Owls were a protected bird; however the Indian people could hunt them for food.

A complete owl looked so huge when we had no fresh meat for weeks. Russ sawed it in half and we froze the other half for later. On our first (American) Thanksgiving, I made bread stuffing and we had grateful hearts for our food (especially that shared by our new friends), our home, family and all God's provision.



Seal Russell shot

Russ had asked the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Officer about needing a hunting license, and he said it was up to the Chief. The Chief said since we lived there we could also shoot wild game in season or out.

Once when Russ went hunting for seal with some of Indian men, he shot a spotted seal. The Native people fed the meat of the seal to their dogs and used the skin for waterproof footwear or to sell. Russ skinned his seal and fed the meat to our dogs and planned to keep the seal skin. Later he heard James say that some people weren't happy that he had kept the skin of

the seal because the seal hide was valuable to the Natives and this was cutting into their livelihood. So to avoid any bad feelings he gave the seal skin to James in payment for language study. Many times thereafter though, we wished for that sealskin as a memento of his hunt.



Couple with seal skin on frame to dry

Later we bought a different seal skin, that had been prepared and stretched on a frame and dried, from one of the families and had a lady sew it into a shopping-tote bag for us. We used it to carry songbooks and the Bible when we went to visit in Indian homes. We even used it to carry diapers and food when we travelled on the train. It was just a very handy, durable, waterproof tote, which we still have.

Chapter 8

The Shortages and Abundance

“I know how to get along with humble means and I also know how to live in prosperity in any and every circumstance...both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Philippians 4: 12, 13

Before we left language school we had ordered our first year’s supply of groceries to arrive on the Hudson’s Bay ship when it brought in supplies for the village store. Because we used items of food that the Native people didn’t use (like margarine, powdered milk, various cereals, brown sugar, cocoa, spices, canned meats, fruits and vegetables) we had to place our own order to a wholesaler. The Native people ate mostly wild game, like the beaver and fish, which we didn’t have. They made bannock from flour, baking powder, lard and water. These staples plus tea, sugar and canned milk were available at the trading post.

Marge Elford, one of the senior missionaries who had lived in isolation many years, helped me make out a grocery list. She listed things like two cases of peas, two cases of green beans, two of corn, two of tomatoes,



One year’s supplies of our groceries

tomato soup, canned potatoes, canned meatballs, and tuna. However, the total cost was over \$800.00 so we went back through the list and marked each ‘two’ down to ‘one’ case. Everything we ordered came either in a tin can, a bag or a box. Even 50 pounds of powdered milk came in a paper bag. We ordered instant mashed

potatoes, but also dehydrated cabbage and other vegetables and powdered eggs. We ate a lot of instant mashed potatoes because they tasted so much better than canned potatoes

As spring came our food supply was dwindling down. Variety was a thing of the past. We had macaroni with Cheez Whiz one day, macaroni with tomato soup the next. Finally, there was only milk and margarine left to add to the macaroni. By now the margarine was moldy and tasted rancid. I scraped off what I could and we ate the rest anyway.

One time Russ went out with his 22 gauge rifle, which was handed down to him from his Dad, and shot seven red squirrels. I skinned and gutted them. We threw all seven into one skillet to fry and we three ate them all at one meal; they were so small.

Russell also took his 22 gauge rifle and on a good day would bring home six or seven ptarmigan. The ptarmigan are a northern bird about the size of a grouse. The ptarmigan feathers change to white in the winter as a camouflage. They also have large feathered feet enabling them to walk on top of the snow. The Native people had an ingenious method of harvesting the ptarmigan for food. They would find where the ptarmigan were feeding in the snow. A short distance away they would set up a frame of small poles and covered the frame with fish net. It was set on an angle. They scattered sand under the net and herded the flock along the shoreline. The ptarmigan would fly a short distance, then land. This was repeated as the men herded them and eventually the birds were directed under the net. The ptarmigan needed sand to assist in the digestion of their food so they sought out sand. Quickly someone would pull the rope with one quick jerk, dropping the net on top of the 50-60 ptarmigan. The ptarmigan were an important source of meat to the people and to us as well. We boiled them and mixed them with rice and dehydrated vegetables as a pilaf frequently as well as making soup.

We froze pudding and tried to convince ourselves it was ice cream. In the winter we mixed vanilla, sugar and a little powdered milk into snow and made a snow ice cream that was a good substitute. The sugar in the 100 lbs. paper bag had developed a hard crust around the edge due to moisture. I could still use it in cooking. The icing sugar was completely hard and what can you use rock hard icing sugar for?

I had gotten so hungry for fresh salad during that first winter, so we ordered a head of cabbage from the Hudson's Bay store in Moosonee. The cabbage cost five cents a pound to buy; however the air freight to fly the cabbage in cost 22 cents a pound. But we enjoyed salads for a number of days. Occasionally we also ordered some small amounts of fresh meat from

the grocery store in Moosonee that had to be flown in. We just couldn't do without fresh meat indefinitely.

One time Russell's Mother sent us \$5.00 saying we should buy something lavish. So we did! We bought five lbs. of roast beef. We cut little steaks and ground the rest as hamburger to stretch it as far as possible.

When the ship came in, we got our new shipment of groceries plus some fresh foods like a 100 pound bag of potatoes, 25 pounds of onions and a case of eggs. Last year our case of 15 dozen eggs was mostly all rotten by the time we got it. We also made our way to the local store to shop. There we bought three fresh pears, one for each of us. They cost 35 cents each, but they were so good. I learned later that Russell didn't even like pears, but ate one because it was such a treat.

We tried planting a garden. We ordered seeds from the catalog and should have had an abundance of fresh foods, but nothing grew in the sandy soil, except a few leaves of lettuce. In fact, we'd have done better to eat the seed potatoes than to put them in the ground.

The women had to go down river by canoe, out toward the rocky islands at the mouth of the river to pick berries, so they made a good haul of berries on each trip to make it worth their while. I told the women I would like to buy some wild blueberries and cranberries. One by one they brought large basins of berries to me. I paid them with food stuffs I had replenished my pantry with. Each one I told, "That will be enough berries." But others kept bringing berries and I hadn't told them personally to stop, so I kept buying. I canned blueberry jam, and cranberries enough to last many years.

Although we didn't have electricity, we told our supporters we would like to have a refrigerator. Don Froese from Enid found an old one, no longer being used, that operated on kerosene. Russ' home church made arrangements to ship it to us via the rail and ship. We turned it up high when we



Russell & Steve with catch of fish

wanted to keep meat frozen. Can you imagine how thankful we were to have fresh meat year round? We stored frozen geese mostly. And of course we had to order in extra kerosene.

Russell put out a fish net to catch Whitefish, Northern Pike and Rainbow Trout. He even caught 'dog fish' which were the ugliest fish we had ever seen. The dog fish were only used to mix in with the oatmeal cooked for the sled dogs to eat. I canned the extra Whitefish, Jackfish and Trout that we got. Life was getting better with a better variety of foods. The Natives dried their extra fish on poles over open fires and that was delicious.

What a life! Our only source of light was a kerosene lamp and a Coleman gasoline lantern. And our only source of heat and cooking was wood. By now the green firewood Russell had cut and hauled home on a toboggan was neatly stacked and drying for next winter's use. We had learned some lessons regarding buying firewood from the people. Some people tried to cheat us by giving us less than the full cord. Joe* wanted to sell us two cords, but as time went by he didn't bring any wood. When Russell asked if he would bring it soon, he replied, "maybe." When Joe was going to go to the bush to trap, he wanted to borrow \$20 from us. Russ said, "If you bring the two cords of firewood, I'll pay you the \$20 you want." Within days Joe brought over two partial loads and Russ paid him \$13.

One day a lady came to the house. I knew she wanted something, but I couldn't make out what it was she wanted. The next day her husband came with her. They wanted to borrow \$1.00 to buy rabbit snare wire. Russell said he didn't loan money, but he would give the \$1.00 in exchange for some beaver meat when the man came out from the trap line. The man was happy for the arrangement and left. Soon he came back saying the store had no rabbit snare wire, so Russell gave him the snare wire that we had. Later we received a box of an entire beaver carcass in payment for the snare wire. That was a rather generous exchange, as far as we were concerned. We ate beaver, as well as other wild animals like rabbits, squirrels, etc.

Russell had bought a 23 foot freighter canoe from a canoe factory at Rupert's House and ordered an 18 hp engine from Eaton's after our first year in Paint Hills. He didn't loan his canoe or motor out, but he didn't hesitate to take his canoe and go out with the men when they wanted to go hunting or fishing.



Steve by our canoe

Once however, he rented it to the RCMP when they searched for the body of a hunter from the South who was lost and presumed to be dead. This was an unusual request, but to loan the canoe for routine hunting would have put a daily demand on the canoe and motor and caused chaos.

The people had smaller canoes made at the same factory our canoe was made. They were small enough so two people could paddle the canoe. Some also had small motors. The canoes were made with cedar ribs covered with canvas. The men could repair their canoes with additional pieces of canvas as needed.

Russell's canoe was also used by the Hudson's Bay Co. to unload the supplies as the ship was too large to come up river as far as the store. Several times the waves crashing onto shore were so high that his canoe filled with water. Since it was anchored at shore, it wasn't lost, but it required a lot of work to dip the water out.

During a storm, one time, a barge broke loose from its anchor and the waves fortunately drove the barge to shore instead of out to sea. Even in high tide the barge would not move from the shore. Russ was able to rig a pulley system tied to a tree across the river using large ropes and used the fork-lift to 'walk' the barge away from shore. The HBC paid him \$50.00.

Russ worked for the Hudson's Bay Company driving the propane operated fork-lift to transfer boxes from the barges onto canoes that were used to haul the goods to the shore and eventually to the warehouse. Men carried the supplies up to the storeroom from the canoe. One time a box of crackers accidentally was dropped and the men didn't bother to pick it up. Someone saw a dog take the crackers and run away. The next day the dog was found dead, bloated from drinking water after eating a boxful of salty crackers.

On the summer cargo ship at the end of our first winter in Paint Hills, we had ordered a couch (chesterfield) to double as a second bed. We were expecting a baby that summer and Steve would need to move out of the crib. When the couch arrived Steve was pleased. He moved all his toys onto the couch to sleep with him. The crib was now the baby's bed. He claimed the family room as his bedroom and was very happy.

Chapter 9

The Note

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach and it will be given to him.” James 1:5

Nancy Mistacheksic stood at the door, smiling shyly as she handed me a note. The note, written with pencil in English on a small piece of paper said, “Would you like for me to name your baby? If it is a girl, her name should be Phyllis, and if a boy it should be John Glenn.” What do I do now? I thought as surprise and shock hit me. It had never occurred to me that anyone other than Russell or me would name our baby. When I first knew I was pregnant, I had gone to the nursing station asking if I could deliver my baby in the nursing station there in Paint Hills. I figured if the Indian women could have their babies in the village, so could I. Using a Feta scope the nurse told me she could not hear a heartbeat and that she didn’t think the baby was alive. Maybe I wasn’t pregnant, nor ever had been. This was in the days before ultrasound was available, at least in remote areas. Russell suggested I fly out to Moose Factory, where the nearest hospital was located, and consult with a doctor. But the nurse’s assessment of my condition left me afraid and my emotions fragile. I thought I’d rather face whatever the situation would be with my loving supportive husband at my side, than to be 200 miles away with people I didn’t really know.

John 14:27 says, *“Peace I leave with you: Peace I give to you: I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage.”*

Time passed and I was now three weeks overdue. Then, this note asking me about naming the baby! Leaving Nancy standing in the kitchen, I ran out the front door towards the shed where Russell was building dog

houses to accommodate the three Siberian husky puppies we had ordered to be used as a dog team the next winter. I showed him the note Nancy had brought. “What will I tell her? She’s waiting in the house for an answer.” Just as soon as I’d said that, a thought came to me. “I’ll tell her we’ll wait until the baby comes.” That would buy us a little extra time. And with that I ran back to the house, where I jotted down my answer. She took the note and left, smiling.

My mother had come from Oklahoma to help with my care and that of the family during the time of my confinement. My sister, Wilma, later told me that Mom had always feared I would die in childbirth as Mom’s own sister had a generation earlier. Now Mom wondered, as well, if something might not be well with the baby I carried because it appeared so small.

That night as we went to bed, sleep eluded me. Was the discomfort I felt the beginning of labor? The house was quiet and the rest of my family was asleep. I tossed and turned as the pain increased. I bit my knuckles until I could stand the pain no longer. Towards morning I woke Russell and he woke Mom and Steve and we began the walk down the sandy trail through the village to the opposite end of the settlement. The contractions gripped me and I doubled over every few minutes as we walked to the nursing station. What should have taken 10 minutes seemed more like an eternity.

Arriving at the nursing station, Russell knocked to awaken the nurse. She appeared in her bathrobe. “I’m surprised to see you. Come in. Get into the shower,” she said as she pointed me to the bathroom.

“I washed up before going to bed,” I said. A shower wasn’t what I thought I needed or wanted at that moment.

“I told you if you decide to deliver here, I would treat you like I do the Native women. I know what terrible patients nurses make. Do as I say and if you as much as let out a peep, I will hit you over the head with a 2 x 4.”

I was frightened, but still I was glad to see her when she returned from getting a coffee and a cigarette and allowed me to get out of the shower and into bed.

“I’ll examine you now,” she said; but ever so quickly she began to swear. With a cigarette dangling from her mouth and no gloves on her hands, she proceeded with an imminent delivery.

Russell, sensing the tension in the room, tried to joke with the nurse. I thought him heartless of my agony. And with a groan and a big push a beautiful dark haired baby boy made his appearance into our lives. Now there was no question about whether he was alive or not. He weighed an

even seven pounds. I thanked God for this happy ending to a nightmare that had haunted me for several months.

Later as I tried to sleep, my thoughts went back to the note from Nancy. We could no longer avoid the issue. We would have to make a decision now. We didn't want to offend her. Nancy was our closest friend. We had wanted to name the baby Keith, so we decided to compromise. I wrote a note to Nancy telling her the baby had been born that morning and we were taking her suggestion of Glen and we were giving him our choice of a name, Keith, as his second name. Russell sent the note over to Nancy. She seemed happy enough and gave our son a pink flannelette gown she had sewn. It had a cross stitched in darker pink embroidery on one sleeve. She also gave him a baby rattle of babiche (dried rabbit skin) which had been stretched over a curved frame with buckshot pellets inside. Some women just used a cereal box with gravel in it as a rattle for their babies, so this was much nicer. Nancy laid special claim to our baby boy.

Having a newborn white baby was an exciting event in the village. Everyone came to see the baby and kissed him on each cheek. They didn't neglect big brother Steve, either. He too got a kiss on each cheek and sometimes a third kiss, accompanied with much laughter.



Steve holding baby Glen



Nancy hugging Glen



Ladies admiring the white baby

But I didn't feel very good in the weeks that followed. The baby was colicky and I wasn't getting my rest. One after another several ugly boils formed as my body attempted to fight infection. I showed the boils to the nurse and she instructed me to apply hot compresses to them. She even applied the first compress, but I jerked and cried out "It's too hot."

"It'll cool quickly enough," she replied as she held the compress in place. The next morning the skin was red and blistered, further adding to my misery. I wondered if they didn't have antibiotics available in this nursing station. Surely something else could be done.

Helen Hisey, our fellow missionary from Eastmain, said it was probably because my body was run down, that I wasn't able to fight off infection. She was a lay dispenser of medications and sent me some bottles of vitamins. She said if our nurse were more congenial, she could have given me the vitamins as well. There was no place available to buy vitamins in



Steve at the graveyard

Paint Hills. There was no market for vitamins. I was miserable and I became depressed. Steve's friend and playmate Samuel had a sister living across the road from us. She had a baby just the next day after Glen was born. We were in the nursing station at the same

time. But only a few days later her baby lay dead. I never did learn why the baby had not lived. I felt guilty that I should have a live baby and she didn't, so I never asked her or anyone else why the baby had died.

When anyone died, the body was buried the same day. The graveyard was up on the hill behind the village. A white picket fence was built around each grave to 'keep the evil spirits' out. They didn't want the evil spirits to indwell the body of their loved ones. They believed that Windigo (an evil monster) roamed among the graves; although we couldn't see him.

They left an offering of tobacco and food on top of the grave as a peace offering and when this disappeared, it further added to their superstition that Windigo was real. A wooden cross also marked each grave with the name of the deceased carved with a knife. Burials were solemn occasions as the people were without hope in Christ. This involved much fear of the evil spirits that roamed the graveyard. They believed the spirits of the dead came out at night to form the stars. There were no funeral services except for a scripture reading and prayer from the Common Book of Prayers at the graveside. People did not talk about the dead.

Chapter 10

The Ridiculous

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” Colossians 3:17

Our fellow missionary, Helen Hisey, was teaching hygiene to the girls in Eastmain, the village about 60 miles south of us. How convenient when I arrived with Glen that winter for a visit and she was able to demonstrate a bath on a real live baby. Everything about my baby added to the curiosity of the village people.

I held my young son on my lap. He bounced and laughed at anyone who would look his way. When we weren't holding him, we put him in a walker and he pushed himself around the room. The women shook their heads and murmured that I was a careless mother. Surely my baby's legs were not strong enough for him to stand and would become bowed. But I saw how spindly and bowed their babies' legs were from not having been allowed to exercise. I know they considered me irresponsible, but I felt I had superior knowledge. After all, I was a nurse.

I scraped my baby's diapers and scrubbed them before putting them in the laundry. I prided myself on the soft, white gauze diapers I used on my son.

Their babies were bound tightly in a beautiful tikinagan (cradleboard). They were carried on the mother's back with a strap across the forehead, or stood in a corner when the mother was busy. Twice a day the baby's diapers, lined with dried moss, were changed and clean moss inserted. The moss was gathered in the summer and dried on the evergreen branches before storing it in boxes for the winter's use. How ingenious. They were using disposable diapers even though I had not even thought of using disposable diapers on

my baby. I did use diaper liners which could be disposed of when soiled or laundered when only wet.

When their babies turned one year old they were taken out of the tik-inagan and trained to walk. They were also potty trained. They didn't wear a diaper during potty training. They ran around naked from their waist down and soon were potty



Moss drying on trees

trained, probably before my son was. Although I did not know it at the time, I have since learned that at age two, a 'walking out' ceremony was held. If it was a girl she would carry an axe and on her back a small load of firewood. If a boy he would carry items that reflected his future occupation of hunting or cutting firewood. This was then followed by a feast.

One day two young fellows came to our house and said in English, "They want you to come to the feast." Now if they had spoken in Cree, Russell would have known whether you was singular or plural, but in English the word doesn't distinguish who 'you' includes such as 'ya'll' does. Since in our culture we thought we were both being invited, I went to the feast with Russell. The kitchen was filled with large basins of boiled geese and pots of instant mashed potatoes. The hostess ushered us into the front room where a large table was set with glass dishes. As others came, they were shown where to sit. I noticed only men were coming to the table. They were the Chief, the Elders and the important men of the tribe. I looked up at the doorway and saw the women crowded around the doorway looking. Were they



Boiled geese for feast

laughing at me? I must certainly have looked ridiculous to them, seated with the men. I smiled and ate what was set before me, hiding my embarrassment as best I could.

At that feast there were not only geese and mashed potatoes, but there were canned peas, and fruit cocktail. Then the cakes were brought out. There were thirteen different cakes at that particular feast. After having taken three pieces, Russ and I began to say, "No, thank you." That was as much as we thought we could eat.

At the end of the meal the Native school teacher said, "You were very rude to refuse food offered to you." Yeah, and why didn't he tell us that at the time we were refusing it instead of waiting until it was time to go home? I had noticed that he had taken a piece of each of the thirteen cakes. Then he took a piece of brown paper from his pocket. He said, "To be forewarned is to come prepared." He wrapped the extra pieces of cake that he hadn't eaten and took them home. Others did as well. The hostesses even gave some men paper to wrap their left-over cake to take home. I loved their steamed cakes. I would have enjoyed so much to have taken a piece or two home to be toasted the next day.

You know, about that food they served at the feast: I thought one bowl was mashed potatoes. I took a spoonful, but as I put it to my mouth, I realized it was rendered bear fat intended to be spread on bannock like butter. Yuck! Eating bear fat was about the only Native food I didn't like. Usually we liked the wild food cooked by the Native ladies better than if I had to cook it myself. Their bannock was so good. Warm, it was wonderful. It was like a big biscuit that didn't rise much and was fried in a skillet with little or much lard, or was baked in an oven, whichever way you wanted to eat it on that day. Russell said the delicious flavor was from the 'natural oil' on their hands. Sometimes they deep fat fried a runny version of the dough (like a funnel cake) and it was good too. We didn't worry about transfats then.

After that episode of eating at the feast, I waited until I was given a specific invitation to come to the next feast. The important women ate after several seating of men. When it was time for the next group to sit down, the plates were scraped and set back in place, the flatware rearranged and additional tea added to the tea cup without emptying the left over tea from the previous guest. I ate like everyone else, ignoring the pea stuck between the tongs of my fork. No one got sick, and neither did I.

Sometime later, one of the ladies in our village asked me to bake a birthday cake for Abilene. After some time we learned her name was

actually Evelyn, but what they said sounded like Abilene and that's what we called her. I was happy to make a cake. I felt honored and since I made animal cakes for Steve's birthdays, I decided to make a butterfly cake for Abilene. I was excited to make something I thought she would never forget. I arranged the cut pieces to form a butterfly and covered it with yellow icing topped with coconut; then used licorice strings for antennas and other candies to decorate the head and wings. Russell carried the cake to the house where the party was to be held. Abilene's mother received it and placed the cake in the center of the table. The important men ate the feast, and when it was time for the cake, Abilene was called into the room to blow out the candles.

After that she ran back out to play while the 'old men' ate the cake with the yellow icing. Had I only known the kids would not be eating the cake, I wouldn't have bothered to make a butterfly cake.

I was also asked to make a wedding cake once. The lady requested I mix one dollar in coins into the batter, which I did (after washing them thoroughly). I made a three tier white cake covered with white icing. I tried making red flowers but just couldn't get them right so I sprinkled coconut all over the cake. What strange ways the 'white woman' had! I didn't know that most Canadians served fruit cake for weddings, which would have been easier to stack in layers. I thought everyone had white cake because that's what we had at our



Evelyn's birthday celebration



The Wedding Feast

wedding. There were actually three wedding cakes because three couples got married at the same ceremony.

The men had an interesting way of pointing at something. They puckered their lips, jutting their chin out. It saved having to make the effort of pointing with their hand or fingers.

One night as it was getting dark, Russell saw men walking past our house to the shack up the hill. Thinking someone must be sick, or was dying, Russell went to see what the problem was. As he entered the home it took a bit for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. There was only one kerosene lamp burning. The men were sitting in an oblong circle on the floor. They motioned for Russ to sit down as they made room for him. He noticed a roaster with meat in it. One after another each man would take the knife, cut off a chunk of meat, eat it, and then leave. Then the next man took the knife, and likewise cut off a chunk of meat and passed the roaster and knife to the next man. When it came to Russ they handed the knife to him indicating he should eat as well.

No words were spoken, but after Russ had eaten a piece of meat, he too got up and left. He had no idea what animal he had eaten or what was going on.

The next day in the store Thomas, the store clerk and interpreter, said to Russell, "How do you rate?"

"What do you mean?" Russell asked.

"You ate at a feast that even I have never been invited to?"

"No one invited me either," Russ replied, telling why he had gone to the house and that when he got there, the men had indicated he should eat.

"But they gave you meat, didn't they?" Thomas said.

"Yes, but I had no idea I wasn't supposed to be there."

Thomas explained that the section of meat near the bear's back bone and just below the ribs was a special piece of meat. It was eaten by only the elders at an annual feast to honor the spirit of the bears and to ensure there would be good bear hunting that year. They believed that humans and animals were on the same level. At one time they spoke the same language; now they communicated with the bear spirit through sacrifices.

First Corinthians 8:4, *"As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one."* Verse 7-9 says, *"How be it there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; nor*

if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak.”

We had not intentionally wanted to offend anyone, nor did we want to compromise our belief. We prayed asking God to forgive us for our ignorance in partaking of food offered to evil spirits. We never heard any repercussions of that feast; neither were we ever invited to such a feast.

Chapter 11

The Unusual

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day and having done everything, to stand firm.” Ephesians 6:10-13

When the Bishop came into town, babies born since his last visit were baptized. Godparents promised if the child should die before they were confirmed, they would bear that child’s sins forever. We tried to explain that only Jesus could bear the sins of anyone. The people nodded their heads in agreement but proceeded with the baptisms. They wouldn’t dare neglect such an important (to them) ritual. Confirmations took place when the children reached the age of around 13 years. The girls wore dresses as beautiful as a wedding dress, (they could well have been someone’s wedding dress) then they became members of the established Church.

Weddings also took place. Brides sometimes wore light blue dresses with lots of lace. They had large colorful, usually red, artificial flower bouquets. The men in the wedding party had large doily boutonnieres as well. Sometimes the couple already had a baby or was expecting a baby before the wedding. When the Bishop came, all irregularities were supposedly made right. Each child was born into a family, and loved.

At the first wedding we were surprised at how lovely the bridal party was dressed. The bride had a satin dress with a net veil. Peeking out from



A Wedding Party

under her dress were red and black rubber gumbo boots. In later years we saw brides wear runners.

However, one spring there was a pregnant girl and no wedding. In fact, there were seven pregnant girls and no wedding for any of them. All named Peter* as the father of their baby. He had been out to high school and was sought after by all the girls when he returned. Certainly he couldn't marry all of them, and as I recall, he didn't marry any of them. Our friend Nancy's daughters, was among them. That was the first of the unwed mothers in the settlement. The people loved and cared for their young and their old. Everyone belonged in the family, but now the family unit was different.

As a general practice, there was no alcohol in the village. Only when

the Indian agent or other government officials came in was alcohol served. Mark was asked to interpret. One night after Mark had spent the evening with the government men; he fell drunk on the path and needed help getting up. Why did white men bring their evil habits into the village? These people were so isolated; the ways of the world hadn't affected them before. Still without Christ, they were lost. They had a void that could only be filled by the Spirit of the living God.

One summer a plane came in and took a plane load of young people out to pick blueberries in Maine. After a couple of weeks Georgekish (the shaman or medicine man) spread word around that one of the teenage girls had been killed. Everyone was upset, even crying. They demanded something be done.

The lay reader phoned out to inquire and was told, "No. No one had died. Things were going well." Imagine our surprise the next day when word arrived that one of the girls had been killed in a car accident the night before. How did the shaman know before it happened? Were there powers at work we knew nothing about?

Thunder rumbled in the distant sky. Being from the south, we enjoyed hearing the thunder, but the people were afraid. They had heard thunder only once or twice before. They said, "The world is coming to an end." One summer, I think it was in July, 1963, there was an eclipse of the sun. Our transistor radio warned not to look directly into the sun without protective sun glasses. The sky had become dark and had an eerie feeling. The sun was extremely bright before disappearing for a short time. The people were afraid and ran to hide. They thought it was the 'end of the world'. We used the opportunity to tell them again how they needed to accept the Lord so that when He did come back they would be ready to go to heaven with Him. When the sky became normal again and everything was as it had been, the need for God left them as well.

That spring on his way home from his winter trap line, a hunter shot a mother black bear. He brought the two cubs into the village to raise until they were large enough for the people to eat. At that time the village would make a feast. The cubs were playful and everyone petted them and watched them romp around. The ladies picked berries to feed them throughout the summer so they would grow fat.

When winter came, the people moved out of their split log frame and canvas house and moved into their teepees to conserve firewood. The two bear cubs and a small dog, which was used to sniff out beaver lodges under the snow, were left in the shack the family had vacated. The bears were to

hibernate there. The people left a kerosene lamp on the table. It was burning to give the animals light.

After supper the night sky, just across the path from our house, lit up with bright flames reaching high into the sky. The entire village ran to the house and began throwing snow on the burning house, but to no avail. There were loud, terrifying cries coming from the fire. We wondered if someone were still in the house, but the people assured us there were no people inside, only the bear cubs and the dog.

After the shack was consumed and everything lay in ashes, the remains of the bear cubs were gathered and the meat was distributed to the people to eat. The people were sad. End of story, or was it?

The following summer the Department of Indian Affairs officials came in and oversaw the building of frame houses along that trail. They assigned houses to people depending on need. If there was a large family, they got a large house. If it was a small family, they got a small house. Everyone paid \$25.00. Some complained that they only got a small



Black bear cubs being raised in community



The remains of a burnt house

house, yet had paid as much as those getting a large house. We thought their \$25.00 didn't even pay for one door. They should be satisfied, but it didn't make sense to them.

The next spring one of the older ladies named Alma*, living in one of the new houses at the location of the previous year's fire, developed lumps on her face and neck. She was sent out on the plane to the hospital in Moose Factory. At the hospital the doctors could find no cause for the lumps; they removed the worst and she was sent home. A second time she was sent out to the hospital. Even though she kept getting worse there was nothing more they could do for her and she died. Autopsy reports indicated nothing unusual; at least nothing that should have caused death. She died a 'natural death' according to medical reports. Months later, her daughter-in-law, who was also living in the same house, became ill. She had given birth to her first baby only months before. Now the new mother was going into shock, but there was no external evidence of bleeding. She was taken to the nursing station in the middle of the night. She mumbled, "My mother-in-law is calling me." She was referring to Alma, the woman who had died three months earlier.

The nurse called for Russell and me to come, hoping there was something we could do to help. We went into her room and prayed. While I stayed inside to help the nurse decide what we could do to keep her alive, Russell went outside to stand with the interpreter for the nurse.

Billy* the interpreter said to Russell, "I wouldn't tell this to other white people, but I know you will understand. Remember when those two bear cubs died last winter?"

"Yes," Russell replied.

"Well, when those bears died a violent death and no sacrifice had been made, the spirit of the bear was offended. Now someone had to pay for each bear's death. For the first bear the mother-in-law died; now this girl for the second bear. There's nothing we can do about it," Billy said sadly.

Inside we had started IV's and were pumping the solution into the patient as fast as possible, but her blood pressure continued to drop.

"We can't get a plane in until daybreak," the nurse said to me. "She won't make it until then."

"Oh Lord, please help us know what to do," I prayed over and over. We watched her breath become shallower and her pulse weaker. Just a half hour before the plane arrived, she stopped breathing.

"Why wasn't there more we could have done?" we asked each other.

My heart hurt to think another person had gone into eternity and probably without Christ.

We prepared the body and sent it out on the charter plane. Some days later the autopsy report came back with the body: "No obvious cause of death." And they were buried side by side, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, leaving behind a newborn babe, a young husband and a middle aged father.

That winter we heard rumors that the people were starving. We were concerned and when anyone came to our house, we fed them whatever we were eating. We offered a family of five homemade vegetable soup and bread which we were having for our supper, but the man only picked the meat out of the soup and pushed the vegetables aside.

The lay reader phoned to Indian affairs saying, "The people are starving." The Indian agent came on the next plane. He went from house to house to check on the people. There he found flour, lard, tea, and some canned foods. He said, "I was told by Ed* that you are starving. Is that true?"

"Yes," they replied.

"But I see flour and lard and tea. Even some canned foods. What more do you need?"

"We don't have our Indian foods: our rabbit, and beaver, so we will starve," they replied.

The Indian agent shook his head and left. He didn't understand their logic because all he could do was to give them more flour, lard, and tea and that wasn't what they wanted. It was at times like this we realized how inadequate our understanding of these people was. When a neighbor's daughter, who did housework for the priest, had a second baby and was still unmarried, her father went berserk. He set their shack on fire and then used a shovel to beat his daughter and his wife as they tried to escape the burning house. As the village people gathered around to help the women, the man



HBC Trading Post

ran away into the darkness. The men looked around the village, but couldn't find him. Some thought he had probably gone to the graveyard, but no one would dare to go up there in the dark. They were afraid he would kill himself, and then Windigo (the devil) would come to get them. They asked Russell if he would go search for the man, as they knew Russell would not be afraid. Maybe a little afraid, but he would go anyway. He had a great God.

Armed with a flashlight Russell walked alone up the hill to the graveyard behind the village in the dark. There he found the man among the graves, and with only a little persuasion, the man came back to the village with Russell. He was taken out to a mental hospital the next day and after that we never saw him again.

All during these years of living among the people we tried to tell them about their need to accept Christ. We went from house to house and when they came to our house we tried to explain the way to be saved.

Chapter 12

The Fear

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

It was dark already, and Russell wasn't home. He and a number of Indian men had gone goose hunting. Russell's canoe was a large 23 foot freighter, made at a HBC factory down south by the Natives themselves. It was five feet across in the center and could usually handle traveling the waters of the James Bay where the men had planned to hunt. They traveled in groups of about six or seven canoes. Because Russell had a large canoe, about 10 men with their gear could ride with him. They were going about 10 miles from the village to the mouth of the river. He needed them to tell him where to go and how to conduct the hunt.

When his father died in 1960, Russ inherited a double barrel 12 gauge shot gun. It was an antique gun and had been used by his great uncle to hunt with Statesman Will Rogers in Oklahoma. Russ brought it with us in our move into this isolated land, where we intended to live with the Indian people in their life style as much as possible.

Each barrel had a hammer to cock in preparation for when the geese came within range. Toward evening as Russ crouched down behind a large rock to wait for the geese to fly over, both hammers of the gun accidentally fired at once. The gun had no safety latch and probably he had bumped it on the rock causing it to fire. Fortunately it shot into the air. Russell was taken by surprise and was indeed alarmed. The Native men looked with suspicion at him and one of the men then loaned him a different gun to finish the hunt. After that trip Russ never shot that gun again, but ordered a new one from Eaton's catalog.



*Blinds where hunters wait
for geese to fly over*

When the men left to go hunting, they took tea pails and bannock as they had planned to stay for several days. Russ had taken along a large canvas tent we had used to store our lumber under before the house was built. I'd expected them home by now. I was growing restless as I fed my young sons and put them to bed.

We prayed asking for Jesus to bring Daddy home safely and soon.

A knock at the back door startled me. But I went to answer. We never failed to answer a knock, and we never locked our house. Stepping inside the house were two young men. They were wet and dirty.

They told me they had been out goose hunting with a group of men and Russell was with them when a storm had come up. The water was rough with 20 foot swells. When one canoe was riding on top of the swell the other canoe was in the trough. After darkness fell, they could no longer see the other canoes that they were traveling with. Several canoes had managed to get home by staying close to the shore.

However, they said solemnly, they had lost track of Russell's canoe and they feared it had been swamped and the men lost.

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. The Indian men were familiar with the weather. Russell would be safe with them. It wasn't possible that they would be lost. But a fellow missionary, his son and a school teacher at Round Lake, Ontario had been drowned when a storm came up as they were out on a lake. The open water of the James Bay was even more treacherous than a lake.

I questioned the men, "How many were in Russell's canoe? Where were they when they could no longer see his canoe? Was there any possibility that Russell and the men could still make it home?" For the first time, I felt real fear. When the fellows left, I sat down and cried. What would I do? I couldn't stay here without Russ. We had planned to spend our entire lives serving the Lord among the Native people. We loved Paint Hills and the people here. We'd even thought we'd like to stay in this village 'forever'.

“You are my servant; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen

you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”
Isaiah 41:9, 10

I didn't get much sleep that night, but as morning began to break there was another loud knock at the door. I grabbed a robe and went to answer, wondering what further bad news I would receive.

Freddie said the weather had cleared and they planned to go in search of Russell's canoe. 'Could I pack a lunch for them?' Of course I would.

Several hours later Russell arrived home, safe and sound but wet and dirty and tired.

When the storm had become so severe, he had managed to steer his canoe to a sheltered side of one of the islands. There were only small shrubs for protection as they set up camp for the night. Some of the men built a shelter with poles and the canvas to protect against the wind and rain while other men built a fire and started the tea pails to boil.

Several men gutted out a goose. They pulled the entrails out and squeezed the intestines between their fingers to clean the contents out, then threw the gut into the tea pail along with the head, feet and neck. While these were cooking the men cut the carcass open and roasted it on sticks close to the fire.



Tea time while on the hunt

After a while, Gull (Snow Owl), cut a piece of gut with his knife and withdrew it from the boiling water and put it into his mouth. He handed Russ a piece of the boiled intestine on the tip of his knife blade. Russ tried to chew the gut, but it was gritty and he had a hard time getting it down so he decided he'd do without.

Watching the men eat, Russ noticed they simply swallowed the gut without chewing it. Gull again indicated he should eat so he reached into the pail with a stick and took out a piece of intestine. Putting it into his mouth he swallowed it without chewing and it went down much easier. Gull cracked the skull of a goose and using the tip of his knife dug out the

brain. He gave some to Russell to eat. Some of the men cut pieces of meat from the goose as it cooked. Russell thought of his few geese and wanted to save them to bring home for his family to enjoy.

The night was dark; and scary. The rain had turned to sleet and the wind continued to blow. The men hardly slept that night, and were eager to pack up and head for home in the morning. With daylight they could see the water was somewhat calmer and the rain had slowed, so it wasn't as difficult traveling. On their way home they met the search party, who then turned around and they all came home together.

Russell was thankful for the Lord's protection and for the big canoe that had brought them safely through the storm. A smaller canoe would not have survived. The Lord had definitely had His hand of protection on them.

“The Lord your God is with you; the mighty One will save you. He will rejoice over you. You will rest in His love; He will sing and be joyful about you.”
Zephaniah 3:17

Chapter 13

The Spoiling of Your Goods

“And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so should you.” Colossians 3:12, 13

When we joined the NCEM, we were naive. We signed on the dotted line that we would ‘forsake family and home. We would count it all joy, the spoiling of our goods. We would not permit the health of ourselves or our children, or their education deter us. We would never own our own home.’

I can’t remember what else was written there. That should have been enough to stop an insincere person, but we wouldn’t turn back. God had called us and He would see us through.

Nellie had come to visit one afternoon and had sat on the couch hour after hour. She and I could not talk each other’s language but she didn’t need to talk in order to ‘visit’ with me; just sitting together was visiting. But for me time dragged. After a while I got up to get back to my household duties. When Nellie finally left after that eight hour visit, I walked to the door behind her. As she left, I turned and saw the wet spot on my couch. She had peed on my couch! I dabbed the spot with soapy water and a cloth, but to me, it forever smelled of the urine deposited there by my friend.

“You must really be rich,” the man said to Russell. “You have a big boat motor. It must burn lots of gas.”

The Native people mostly paddled their small canoes. A few had larger canoes with small motors but not as large as ours.

“No,” Russell said. “I don’t have a lot of money. It’s just in how I spend my money. I can help you to buy a boat motor if you’d like.”



Bringing home firewood in our canoe

“Sure. What would I have to do?”

“Well,” Russ said, “You are spending money on cigarettes. How many cigarettes do you smoke in a week?”

“About two packs a day.”

“That’s fourteen packs a week at 60 cents a pack

which is \$8.40 each week. Russ figured that would cost \$436.80 a year.

“Now, I know how I can help you buy a boat motor in one year. You bring me all the money you would ordinarily spend on cigarettes and I will save it for you. At the end of the year I will give you back the money so you can buy a boat motor like mine and have money enough for gas. As it is, you are burning up hundreds of dollars in smokes.”

After a moment of thinking it over, the man said as he walked away, “You are burning up money in gas and that goes up in smoke too.”

Russ thought yeah, but it gets me somewhere. The young fellows who came to visit often tipped our chrome chairs back on the back two legs when sitting in our house. As a result the chair legs became weak and some broke. Then they laughed especially if it caused them to fall to the floor. They always laughed when they were embarrassed. Native people laughed about anything and everything. It was no big deal for something of theirs to break. We white people were much more protective of our things, be that good or bad. Maybe we, and they, all needed to be more in the middle of the road.

Chapter 14

The Depression

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:24, 25

It had now been two and half years and we had only had one visit from any of the Mission executive. I longed for companionship with another non-Native woman. I could only communicate through notes and a translator or through gestures with the women in the village. We didn't often mingle with the other non-Native people on a social basis as we thought that would separate us from the Native people. Besides they weren't believers. So I had no one to talk too. I complained to Helen by mail that even the kitchen walls were depressing me. Parts were painted turquoise and some had no paint as the used materials had been nailed in where they fit not considering what it looked like. No room had all one color wallboard much less even one wall. The blackness was closing in on me.

Russell had built kitchen cabinets from the used lumber. He attached doors with chrome handles but some of those boards were painted and some were not. The painted parts seemed to glare at me, mocking me.

I strapped my young son, Glen, in a little seat setting it on the cabinet so he would be at my eye level. I attached it to the cabinet doorknob so it couldn't move and fall off the cabinet when he kicked. It was helpful to have him near me. Even though he couldn't talk, I talked to him. At least I had someone with me all the time.

Isolation was getting to me. I felt cut off from people, women, believers especially. It wasn't normal. I was caving in to the isolation. To encourage me one day Russell decided I should take a trip on the mail



Glen keeping me company

plane down to Eastmain to visit Helen and the school teacher, Mary, who shared the house with her.

Taking my boys I made the short flight. Helen had always been a vivacious person, full of joy and enthusiasm so I knew I would be encouraged being there. But all was not well there either.

Helen and Mary had been seeking a deeper walk with the Lord and they were convicted that they were jesting and talking too much unnecessarily. They felt they were speaking words they would have to someday give account for.

As we sat down to supper, Helen made a casual remark, and immediately prayed asking the Lord for forgiveness. The rest of the meal was eaten in silence.

The companionship I longed for with women with whom I could communicate just wasn't there. They tried to explain how God was working in their lives and they wanted me to experience this. I wanted the Lord to be Lord of my life. I wanted all He had for me.

“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:22, 23

If I wasn't experiencing all that the Lord had for me, how could I get it?

I sent a message on the Hudson's Bay two way radio to Russell that he should come to Eastmain as soon as possible, not telling him why due to lack of privacy. He came on the next south bound plane because he thought it must be an emergency.

Now Russell sensed a problem as soon as he met us at the plane. He felt the tension of us women as one would say something and then burst into tears, praying for God's forgiveness. Gone was the joy of the Lord they had once exhibited.

Helen had moved into the village of Eastmain as a missionary less than a year before we had moved into Paint Hills. She was older and I looked up to her. She spoke the language of the people quite well as she had previously been a nurse in a northern settlement so life in isolation was no longer new to her. I assumed isolation was not a problem to her.

We talked with them about what was happening, but their conversation was guarded.

There was no liberty and freedom in the Lord. There was no fellowship. We felt perplexed. There was confusion on every side.

Russell and I went apart and sought the Lord's direction. We wanted His will, His joy, and His best for us and the ministry. After praying and surrendering again to God's will, and praying with them, we decided to return home on the next flight. The visit seemed to have been a failure.

Russell wrote a letter to one of our Mission leaders and explained what we perceived was happening to all of the missionaries along the coast. We realized we were in a spiritual battle and Satan was using whatever tactics he could to defeat us, whether by taking away our joy or by causing us to feel isolated. We were like an ember removed from the fire that slowly burns out when separated from the rest.

We are all parts of the body of Christ and each part is necessary for the body to work as one. Even though our gifts may differ, the Holy Spirit gives to whomever He chooses. We needed to accept and be in unity with each other. We needed each other.

I'm glad to say that the NCEM has begun placing missionaries in teams and they require annual attendance at mission conferences. The field directors more often bring their wives or other women missionaries when they visit, thus encouraging the missionary women on the field.

Chapter 15

The Visit

“Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him and He will do it.” Psalm 37:5

The Mission plane flew over our village with a swoop down to buzz us as it circled to land. We ran to the river to greet the mission men who had come: the pilot, Ed Hickey; field director, Cliff McComb; and Cree evangelist, Tommy Francis.

I prepared my best supper but was disappointed that I could not hear all the conversation of the missionary men as they visited in the other room. Ed carried a notebook in his shirt pocket and shared the jokes he had written down. They encouraged our hearts with reports of God's work among the Native people in other places.

Indian people were being saved. When we had joined the NCEM, not even three years earlier, there were only a few dozen believers that we knew of. We had met three or four at the first missionary conference we attended. Now we heard of how the entire village of Round Lake, Ontario had turned to the Lord and the Hudson's Bay Co. store had to ship back a plane load of cigarettes because the people had become Christians and given up tobacco.

Sometime that evening we mentioned that we were playing Bingo with the school aged children. No one knew about Bingo in Paint Hills, so it wasn't associated with gambling. To us it was a family game and we thought it helped the children learn letters and numbers. The missionary men were horrified because in Canada, Christians just didn't play Bingo, due to the gambling that was associated with it. They insisted that we must discard the game at once.

As I opened the lid on my cook stove to drop the cards in, I said, “I'm

doing this because you told me too, not because I see anything wrong with the game.” We weren’t being rebellious, maybe just a little reluctant. But certainly we didn’t want to offend our fellow workers, nor did we want to be a hindrance to the gospel so we could do without playing this particular game.

That night the people came to our house. Anytime there were visitors from the outside, the people wanted to see them, to hear what they had to say. Tommy preached, but they could not understand his Plains Cree from the Prairie Provinces. Russell tried to interpret and some nodded and said they understood. It was rather funny to hear a white man interpreting a message from one Indian to other Indians.

The visit was short and again there had been no woman to provide the fellowship I craved.

Then one day Helen came to visit us. She brought her chain saw so Russell could cut firewood. Helen was doing well at learning the language and could speak to the ladies.

In private we shared with her that we had asked the nurse if we could have their food scraps for our dogs. They said, “Of course,” so several times a week, Russell would go pick up the pail of food scraps. To our surprise, there were pork chops and other cuts of meat still half frozen in the pail. The nursing station received fresh meat from the hospital down in Moose Factory and there were times they weren’t able to use all the meat in a package, so they threw it away instead of using it another day.

We hadn’t seen meat from a grocery store for so long and we couldn’t bear the thought of feeding it to our dogs. So we took it out and washed it and cooked it. We never got sick and we enjoyed every bite. It was a treat. Helen confided that she had done a similar thing. One day her Husky dog had come home with a beef roast in his mouth. She immediately took it away from him. She cut off the area he had in his mouth and put the remainder on her cabinet.

Later that afternoon, one of the men who was working in Eastmain on a hydro dam project in the area, dropped by Helen’s house. Seeing the roast on her cabinet, he remarked, “I wondered what happened to the roast I had.”



Helen Hisey came to visit us

Now embarrassed, she said, “My dog brought it home and I thought it was too much for him to eat at one time, so I put the rest here on the cupboard.” She made no mention to him that she was planning to cook the rest for Mary and herself to eat. This is how the Lord provided for us, sort of like the ravens brought food to Elijah.

As the end of Helen’s two day stay came, she looked at the discolored wall board and said to me, “you know that wall really should be painted. I wouldn’t be able to stand looking at it every day either. No wonder you are depressed.”

As soon as it warmed up a bit, Russell painted the walls all turquoise and I ordered frilly yellow curtains from the Eaton’s catalog and my kitchen



Our Paint Hills house after the finish work

was transformed into a more cheerful place to live. Why we left the interior unfinished so long, is beyond me. After we had lived in Paint Hills a year, Russ had nailed wood siding onto the exterior of the house and we painted it white. It was warmer and it made the house look like new. But why did we leave the inside so dreary for so long?

Russell also built a shed to store some of our year’s supply of food and extra things in. When we left on furlough we failed to lock the shed as we didn’t usually keep it locked. On our return we couldn’t tell that anything had been disturbed or taken. We knew God had protected our things. The people had not disappointed us.

doors and we weren't really prepared for such an adventure. We might also be stranded for days.

The pilot brought out some of his emergency food stuffs. We ate hard



Stranded by bad weather

tack (like dried pita bread) and brewed tea. The men gathered twigs and small branches to keep the fire burning as my sons and I hovered near the fire.

In answer to our prayers it wasn't all that long before the sky started to clear and we were able to put out the

fire and head back to the plane and continue our trip out. Later as we settled into our hotel room in Cochrane, Ontario, Steve and Glen stood at the window thrilled with the activity of 'city life'. They had never seen such sights. "Look, Glen, there's a truck," Steve cried excitedly. They had toy trucks but this was the first time they had seen a real truck. They were so excited.



Our sons enjoy the sights of life outside the village

Our supper that night was a hamburger in the restaurant. At our home I had ground up rabbit, made patties and pretended it was

hamburger. Now a real hamburger was set before me. Only problem though, was that it was served with sweet relish instead of the dill pickle, onion and mustard I was accustomed to and so hungry for. The next day we caught the train for southern Canada and the USA. Everywhere there were signs in both English and French, as French is the second official language in Canada. We didn't have a berth on the train. We had two double seats and

Chapter 16

The Furlough

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:33, 34

We had spent nearly three years in isolation. Now it was time to enjoy a three month furlough. Instead of waiting for the larger mail plane, we caught a ride with a small chartered plane going south that had room for our family.

The weather began closing in. Snow began falling. The pilot followed the shoreline as it was the only landmark he could see but the trees didn't allow us to fly very low. The pilot became concerned and frantically began searching for a lake to land on. Visibility was so poor we wouldn't be able to fly much longer. We prayed as was our first instinct. We were relieved when he spotted a lake that would



Glen gets a haircut

be large enough for the plane to make a landing on the water. After landing we made our way from the plane onto the floats and to the shore.

The terrain was covered with spruce trees and shrubby bush. The men built a small fire. Even though we were dressed in winter clothing, I feared for my sons and ourselves. We prayed asking God to clear the skies before darkness set in or we would be forced to spend the night in the out-of-

the boys curled up to sleep on one bench seat, while Russell and I made do sitting up in the other. Our money was limited.

We had written to various friends and supporters asking if we might hold a service in their church to present our missionary work with the Native people. The purpose was twofold; we wanted their prayers, but we also needed their financial support.

We had written to Ron Hiebner, a pastor with whom Russ had gone to Bible College, asking if we might come to his church in Butterfield, Minnesota. He replied that yes we could come. He would meet our train in Minneapolis, but we had written we would be coming to St. Paul. The twin cities were separated by only a river. We each thought our letter was the final word. However we didn't realize our letters had crossed in the mail. We arrived at the St. Paul train station. Ron and his wife went to the Minneapolis station to wait for our arrival. They had driven two and a half hours to pick us up. Now they had to drive two and a half hours back home without us. It was late at night and they weren't very happy.

It was nearing midnight. Our boys were fussy. We realized Ron and his wife were not coming. We left the St. Paul train depot and started walking down the street to find a hotel. Finally we couldn't go any further, and I couldn't continue to carry Glen and a suitcase, besides being pregnant myself. The boys and I sat down on our suitcases on a dark street corner to wait while Russell walked away into the night to find a hotel we could afford.

I wondered what I would do if he never came back. Thankfully he did come back. The hotel clerk most graciously gave us a folding cot for the boys and we lay our weary selves down to sleep on the bed.

The next morning we used all but a few cents getting bus tickets to Butterfield. After spending the remainder of the day with our hosts, we went to the church for the program. Since it was our first deputation service and we were tired, it didn't feel very effective. An offering was taken and that was encouraging because we were flat broke. We had no debit or credit card in those days.

Before we headed to bed, Ron mentioned, "Oh, by the way. You will be receiving an honorarium; however we have found over the years that when missionaries come through they can drain our budget. A good speaker may bring in a good offering while a poorer speaker not as much. We have decided as a church to give everyone a set amount, regardless of what the offering is."

"That's fine," Russ said.

"However our treasurer wasn't at the service tonight, so we will have him mail your honorarium to your head office and it'll be there for you, when you get home."

Well, now, that wasn't fine when we were next to penniless. The bus fare to Butterfield had taken all the cash we had and we needed to get to Omaha, Nebraska the next day.

"We'll just pray and trust God to provide for us," Russ said, trying to reassure me.

The next morning we had breakfast and loaded the suitcases in the car to go to the bus station.

"You have to tell him that we need to borrow some money," I said to Russ.

Russ just said, "No. We'll trust God." I thought he was being stubborn. I was embarrassed to think that Ron would drive us to the bus station and then we would tell him we didn't have the money to buy tickets. I'd rather tell him before we left the house.

We all got into the car, but before it pulled away from the house, Ron's mother waved us to stop. She ran out to the car and handed some money through the car window from her pocket to Russ. Russ thanked her and put the money in his pocket as the car pulled away from the parsonage.

"How much?" I whispered to Russ. He only shook his head. After unloading us and our baggage at the bus depot, Ron drove away and we walked to the ticket office.

"We need tickets for two adults and two children to Omaha," Russ said as he opened his hand and laid the money down on the counter. The agent counted the money and pushed back a dime along with our tickets. It was enough to buy two cups of coffee. God had provided the exact amount needed, when we needed it, and not before. We only had to have faith in Him. After these years in Paint Hills this furlough was much needed. Over the next months we were able to see many of our friends, family and supporters. Years later Steve said he felt like a monkey, when we had the kids get up and sing in Cree for the people and then they took up an offering for us.

It was also during a furlough in 1966 that Russell was ordained by the General Conference Mennonite Conference in his home church, the Grace Mennonite Church, in Enid, Oklahoma.

that meant 400 dogs. And 400 dogs can make quite a lot of noise, especially when hungry.

Once there was a threat of rabies outbreak. The government sent in vials of vaccine and Russell was asked to vaccinate the dogs. Men held their dogs as Russ injected the vaccine into each dog and the two cats in the village. Russ said he felt the needle hit the bone on the last cat. As he pulled the needle out, he felt it hook on the cat's flesh and did the cat ever let out a cry as it clawed its way from the owner's hands running for all it was worth.

Chapter 17

The Northern Way

"I will lead the blind by ways they had not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do. I will not forsake them." Psalms 42:16

After we had lived in the North for one winter, Russell knew he needed a dog team to haul firewood home on ice and snow. He ordered three purebred Siberian puppies from a breeder in Ontario for \$45.00 each. They arrived the summer of 1963. They were beautiful with their black, grey and white coats. Even their names were beautiful: North Star was the one female, and Suggen and Lobo were males. Suggen had blue eyes that almost looked scary, but which was characteristic of the Siberian husky breed; while Lobo had one blue eye and one dark eye.

Russ chained the dogs each to one of the houses he had built earlier. However they didn't want to sleep in the houses. They lay on the roof of their houses. Even when the snows began, they curled up tucking their noses into their fluffy tails and stayed warm all night.

Whenever a Native family had a new baby, they'd add another dog to their team - one dog for each person. For a village of 400 people



Our Siberian huskies



Fish drying on racks



Smoked fish was wonderful

The Indian people fed their dogs fish. They bought long nets made of nylon cord which were strung through two holes in the ice during the winter. Hopefully as the fish swam past, they would be caught in the net by their gills. With a pole and rope the Indians were able to string the net with floats and weights under the ice while it was still thin. When retrieving the net, they carved out a hollow in the ice next to the hole and as they would pull the net out of the hole they released the fish and tossed them to the side. They had to wrap the net into a circle in the hollow to keep it under the water thus keeping it from freezing instantly. They also had to keep their hands in the water or they would freeze as well.

The people were very good at fishing. In addition to eating fresh fish they fed fish to their dogs. In the summer they gutted the fish and strung them up on poles to smoke over a fire to preserve them. Smoked fish was wonderful. Although I never learned to smoke fish myself, we were thrilled when we got some to eat. It was usually eaten cold.

Russell bought a net at the store and Roderick taught him how to put out a fish net. Every two days he would go out by skidoo in winter and canoe in summer and lift the net taking home the catch of fish. The fish were then cooked in water with oatmeal and fed to the dogs once a day.

Russ took his extra fish to Nancy and she gutted and smoked them until they were dehydrated and could be stored in cardboard boxes to feed to the dogs in winter. In the summer when their dogs weren't working, the Natives took them to an island and allowed the dogs to fend for themselves. Most of the Native people had what they called Eskimo dogs because they were a mixed breed of dog. They became scruffy, malnourished and weak while our dogs were healthy and energetic. This was because Russell kept our dogs at home in the village and continued to feed them year round. The men often admired Russ' dogs saying how strong and fast they were.

Russell purchased webbing to sew harnesses for each dog. He trained his dogs by first putting some weight on a toboggan and eventually they progressed up to the sled. He trained his dogs to obey the commands that the Indian people used. These were "hoit," meaning to go, "pree" meaning to turn right and "prush" meaning to turn left. The dogs loved to work and were eager to get on the trail once they saw evidence of their musher preparing the sled.



Russ stringing net with floats



Our dogs hauling home firewood

The dogs were each hooked to varying lengths of rope in a fan pattern. The people said this was Eskimo style. When the musher would notice one dog not pulling his share, he could pull that dog back and beat him. This arrangement also was necessary when crossing large ice heaves on the Bay. North Star became the lead dog in Russell's team and our other dogs followed her.

The Native men took delight in teaching Russ their ways with fishing and preparing the sled. Russ needed their wisdom to best manage life in the North. He built a sled 12 feet long. On the bottom of the 2" x 10" planks he attached steel runners. During the coldest months, steel does not slide freely. The men would get compost matter from the muskeg that had turned



Mud melting off sleigh runners

back to dirt. It had no sand or gravel in it. That mud was packed on the runners and planed smooth with a wood plane. Warm water was used to form an ice glaze over the mud. The water had to be warm. If it were too cold you wouldn't be able to apply it to the runner. This glaze helped the sled to slide easily in the snow. At night the men buried the runners of their sleds in the snow so they wouldn't freeze

dry. The next day they had to plane off the roughness and apply water again. In the spring it was necessary to make a flour-water paste to cover the mud as black would attract too much sun and cause the mud to melt and fall off.

One time Russ had been out cutting firewood and was getting ready to go home; he loaded his chain saw and axe on the sled. Then he attached each dog to the sled and as he was getting on, his dogs got anxious to go and took off. This caused Russ to drop his mitt. By the time he got the team stopped his mitt was some 30 feet back on the trail. He anchored the sled in the snow beside the trail and told the dogs to "stay." He walked back to get the mitt and when he leaned down to pick up the mitt, they immediately started running for home. Although he ran after them calling for them to stop, he never did catch the team. When Russ arrived home, very tired from the long walk through the snow, the dogs were there lying by their houses.

Another time Russ saw a team of about 10 dogs coming down the trail without a musher. He took his dogs off the trail about 20 feet and turned his sled over telling the dogs to "stay." When Freddie's team came

past him, Russ caught the dogs by grabbling one of the lead ropes and stopped them. Russ' dogs were so excited they dragged their sled toward the trail. The two teams got to fighting and tangled their ropes. When Freddie arrived he and Russ untangled the dogs one by one and took the dogs to the shore line where they tied them to different bushes. When they finished Freddie then let his dogs loose to head home on their own. Russell didn't understand. Freddie said he let his dogs go ahead as the main harness on his sled was broken. He would come back for his sled the next day. And with that he walked on down the trail. Russ turned back to hook his dogs onto his sled. It was at least an hour wasted and he had thought he was being helpful by catching Freddie's dogs. We were told about the death of Mark's little girl some years earlier. She had walked into the area where the HBC dogs were chained and they had killed her. Mark was so angry that he took a gun and went out and in addition to shooting all the dogs that had killed his daughter, he also started shooting other dogs in the village. To save their dogs, people began untying them and taking them out in canoes to the islands by canoes. One could never be too careful around dogs.

One time a Native family's 'beaver dog' (which was used to sniff out beaver lodges) was loose in the village. Russ wasn't aware that one of our dogs had gotten loose and killed the dog bringing it home to our other dogs. Russ apologized to the family and offered to locate another 'beaver dog' to replace it. The man said "No." These little dogs were plentiful and could easily be replaced.

However the next year when North Star produced her first litter, the man remembered that he did in fact need to replace the 'beaver dog' and he came to ask for the replacement. The man didn't want just any dog. He asked for one of our Siberian pups. Russ had said he would give him a replacement, but he had not promised to give him one of our purebred pups. Russ knew the dog would be mistreated. He again offered he would find a 'beaver dog' to replace the dead dog, but the man refused. In the end Russ didn't give the man a replacement since he only wanted one of the purebred puppies.

At the time he didn't know how white people might treat one of his dogs either. That winter Russ sold one of the pups to a nurse traveling through on the plane. She didn't have money with her but promised to send it as soon as she got home to Moose Factory. Russ figured he could trust her. But we didn't receive any payment. Russ asked various people who

knew the nurse why she did not send the money as agreed upon. "The dog died," we were told.

Russ inquired of another nurse from the hospital, "Why did the dog die? It seemed perfectly healthy when she took it with her." This nurse told the sad story that 'the other nurse had given the dog a bath because he smelled bad, and had put it outside to dry.' It had frozen to death, and that is why she didn't pay for it. No dog, no payment. Her loss became our loss.



Spring thaw

During the spring thaw the river was unsafe for people to walk on. It was also unsafe to drink. There was a lot of run off that made its way to the river so the water available at the river's edge was contaminated and not safe for drinking. Russell decided to dig a well for our family. He planned to dig it just outside our kitchen. When summer came, he began digging by hand with a shovel. It was difficult work; the soil was so sandy it kept caving in. He had to build cribbing out of 2" x 8" lumber. The men stood around and looked at the perfectly good lumber being put down into the ground. They couldn't understand such waste. After a while, he had to put a second cribbing inside the first to slide down inside and eventually at 12' he hit water. He dug as deep as possible having a man pull up the buckets, first of sand, then later water and sand until they couldn't go any deeper. He finished it by putting a framed box above ground with a lid secured so no child could fall into the well.

We enjoyed the fresh water and not having to carry water from the river was a treat. We put a pipe into the house and pumped with a hand

pump over the sink. In the winter, as the water level dropped, the supply of water ran out. Russell got down into the well and dug again down to the water level, and as deep as possible into the water. When the spring breakup came, the same people that had scoffed at the digging of the well now came for fresh water and we gave them as much as they needed, and it never ran dry again. Though there weren't any other wells dug in the village, even for years after we left, the well gave an abundance of water. The nursing station wanted to hook onto our well instead of piping their water from the river, but that wasn't feasible.

The people usually cooked their geese over an open fire pit in their tepees. Sometimes they had more than they could eat.

Several years later a community freezer was built and the people could



Cooking geese over open pit fire



Plucking the geese

box up their geese and store them in the freezer. Then once a week the freezer was opened and all the boxes taken out. As the names were called, each family would take home one or two boxes of geese, as they needed. The remaining boxes

were stowed back in the freezer until the next week. We used it as well. However one time when we were away, the freezer broke down and we lost about 10 geese and some hamburger meat to spoilage. On our return the men asked Russ to repair the freezer. They had a standby gas engine which Russ installed. Everyone was happy to again have the freezer to store their meat supply.

The French had begun to travel through the area hoping to eventually take control of the communities along the coast now under the jurisdiction of Ontario.

Once some French men hired Native men to put up a flag pole to fly the Quebec flag in the village. The Native men cooperated and when the flag was flying, the French men paid them and left. After the French were gone, the Natives cut the flag pole down and threw away the flag. They said they didn't want the French to claim the village. Later, the French men returned and again hired Native men to put up a flag pole and fly the flag of Quebec. The Native men again put up the pole with the flag until the French men had gone. Then the flagpole came down.

French nurses came on the scheduled air flights. Among them was Denise. She spoke no English and we didn't get acquainted with her at first. But obviously Andy, the Hudson's Bay store manager was more hospitable. He gave the French people room and board.

Within three months there was a wedding announced between Denise and Andy. The RC priest officiated in French with Denise responding in French, while Andy made his vows in English. We weren't invited for the ceremony, but when the couple came out of the RC Mission we stood outside waiting. They drove away on a Skidoo while we all cheered.

Later we became good friends with Andy and Denise. We went on picnics with them and had opportunity to speak openly about Christ.

Some families spent all winter in the bush. They trapped beaver mostly, but also marten, muskrat, fox and lynx. The boys snared rabbits by tying a wire loop over the trail the rabbits hopped and they were easily caught.

Occasionally the people ran out of supplies like flour, and tea, and would come into the village to sell their furs and to shop for more supplies. Perhaps the women got a little bushed and wanted to come into the village for a visit.

In the spring-time as the ice grew weak, the families would load their supplies into a canoe fastened on top of a sled. In the event that the sled broke through the ice, they were safe and could pull their dogs into the canoe. Then when they got to stronger ice they could continue traveling on their sled.



Family going hunting riding in canoe on top of sled

We always used powdered ingredients to bake with: powdered eggs, powdered milk, etc. One spring when Russ shot a goose, there were several immature eggs inside the goose. The blood vessels were visible and didn't look very appetizing. However, fresh eggs were so special we couldn't throw them away. I used the eggs to bake a cake. Steve remembers to this day how good this cake tasted as compared to cakes made with powdered eggs. He even thinks he remembers the cake was pink from the blood vessels (which I rather doubt); but to his young mind, it was so!

The lady at our door said her children were sick and the nurse was busy. Could I come to see her children? My sons also had fever and they lay on their beds hardly moving. I went to see first one family after another and because of the rash on their bodies and high fever it soon became evident the children had the measles. I gave them aspirin and instructed the mothers how to care for the children. Our boys didn't have a rash; only flushed feverish bodies. Living in isolation, our children hadn't been exposed

to the childhood diseases most children in the South had. Steve had chicken pox when he turned two just prior to our going to Quebec and the boys both had a light case of mumps later.

It was early in my pregnancy and suddenly it occurred to me that I wasn't even sure I had had the Measles. I knew it was hazardous to my unborn child if I were to contract Measles. It wasn't possible for me to make a quick phone call to ask my Mother. There were no phones. Raising my children in the North was entirely in the Lord's hands. Again all I could do was pray and ask God to protect the little life growing inside me.

One Sunday after washing my hair, I cleaned my ears with a Q tip. Without thinking, I left the Q tip sticking in my ear and proceeded to roll my hair on rollers. While raising my arm I accidentally pushed the Q tip deeper into the ear. Excruciating pain shot through my ear and I was unable to remove the Q tip. When Russell removed it, blood came from my ear and I felt faint.

The next morning we put a two way call in to a doctor at the Moose Factory Hospital. This was during breakup and there was no way a plane could come in and land on the river and there was no landing strip. The doctor told us that the damage was done and that even if we hired a helicopter for \$500.00 to fly me out to Moose Factory, there was nothing more that could be done until the swelling went down. Thus he assured us it would be okay to wait till the planes were flying again.

Later, on examination, the doctor said the eardrum had healed over with a scar, but nothing further needed to be done.

Caribbean. We enjoyed his visit and felt it a privilege to meet people from various parts of the world.

The teacher's tenure however, was short lived. Because there was only one residence for the teachers at Paint Hills, it meant that the second teacher had to share the residence with the first teacher and family. The two teachers found sharing the teachers' residence unsatisfactory.

A short while later another teacher came to replace the man from Montserrat. But it was a similar story as the new lady teacher couldn't live in the teachers' residence either when the only space she could occupy was her bedroom. It was too confining. She was already living in an isolated community. Sadly she too left the village shortly. Isolation was especially hard for women.

This was a bad situation for the school as three teachers, one after another, had left within a few months. Finally in desperation, the school superintendent flew in on the scheduled plane and asked Russell if he would teach for the remainder of the school term.

Russell explained that although he had a Bachelor of Arts degree it was in Christian Education and he didn't have a teacher's certificate to teach public school. The superintendent said that was good enough and if Russell could follow the outlines for classes and put in his time, he was hired. The superintendent was desperate. He needed a teacher who had his own housing. After consulting with our Mission Executive it was agreed that Russell would accept the job teaching at the school.

Thus Russell became a school teacher to 53 school children in grades three to six. He even taught French by playing a tape recording of French

words and the students and he repeated the words as spoken on the recording.

The school curriculum listed that each school day would begin with singing, "God Save The Queen" followed by a Bible lesson and prayer. This was a wonderful

Chapter 18

The Opportunities

"I am come that they might have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10

One day word had gotten around that a new school teacher was coming in on the next plane. We, as well as everyone else, hurried to the river's edge to greet the plane and see the new school teacher. The nurse, who was single, and I joked wondering if the new teacher would be 'tea material?' When the plane pulled up to shore the tallest, blackest man we had ever seen, got off the plane. He was the new teacher.

Our children loved the Skidoo (snowmobile) and on a sunshiny Sunday afternoon we sometimes took the family for a ride on the sled behind the skidoo. Far behind the village we came upon the new teacher walking. We offered him a ride on the sled and he accepted. He had nothing covering his ears. We wondered how he could tolerate the -30° F. temperature. When we got to our house we invited him in for 'tea' and to warm up and he accepted. He told us he had come from Montserrat, a tiny island in the



Virgie on skidoo with our sons



Classroom in the school

opportunity to share the gospel with these school age children. When they came into the classroom they went directly to their seats and put their hands on their desks awaiting further instruction. The children were cooperative and teaching them was a pleasure.

That summer a teacher with his family came in to teach summer school to make up for the missed days of school the previous school term. The teacher's children came to our house to play with our children. We taught Sunday school to our children each Sunday so they came as well. One of the daughters accepted Christ that summer. We told her she should go home and tell her parents about the decision she had made. She did tell them and they were happy with her decision. When they left we gave her a Bible and some literature to help her grow in her Christian life.

At one time there was a former monk filling in at the school. Ferd* enjoyed socializing and frequently came to our house to visit. As opportunity arose, Russell would talk to him about the Lord. One Sunday we invited Ferd to come for lunch.

He told us of his experiences in a monastery where it was believed that they were obeying God by not speaking. He said it was a 'silent order.' They whipped themselves in an effort to purge themselves of their sins. He told us some of the monks really entered into the sufferings of Christ as he had heard their cries. Ferd said he would hit the walls and cry aloud to give the impression that he was also beating himself when he really wasn't. Russell asked him "Did it ever occur to you that the other monks might also be faking the whipping?"

Ferd said, "Do you really think so?"

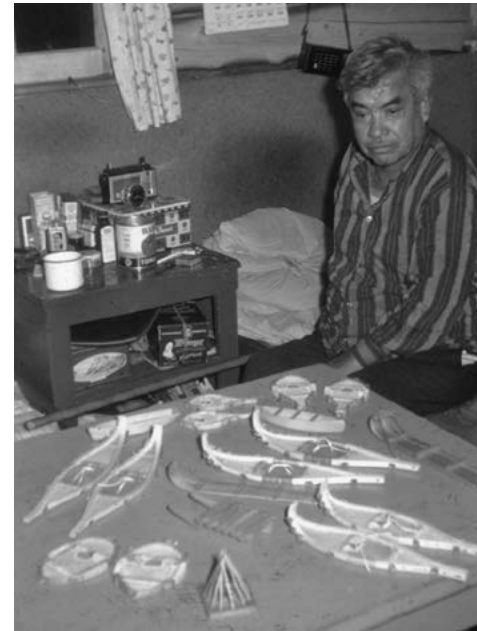
We tried to tell Ferd that he didn't need to try to earn God's forgiveness by beating himself. Jesus had paid the penalty for our sins and He said, "It is finished" when He hung on the cross.

Ferd listened; then thoughtfully said, "You know, if I were dying I'd rather have you with me than any priest I know."

A special blessing we had was a Zenith short wave transistor radio. Using nine 'C' batteries, we could receive HCJB, Quito, Ecuador. Coverage was good because of the open air space over the James Bay.

Also each week we received a cassette tape recording of the message from the Metropolitan Baptist Church in Oklahoma City. The church had added us to their list of missionaries and for two years we had been blessed with these tapes. To make Sunday as normal for our children and us, we would play these tapes on Sunday.

One Sunday just as we were starting the tape, two young fellows came



Willie with handicrafts he made to sell

over and asked if we would buy some handicrafts from them. They had small carvings and little snowshoes that non-Native people bought for souvenirs. Out of curiosity they asked if they could come in to listen to the tape. We had prayed for these two for several years. After the tape was finished we sang hymns as we waited for the coffee to boil.

While we were singing a young couple came over. We had prayed specifically for this couple for six or seven months and had asked them to come over but they hadn't responded to our invitation. Now they stood at the door. They became special friends and later we

occasionally asked Queenie to babysit our children when we went out for a ride with friends on the skidoo. Russell had bought a used skidoo, that wasn't working, from a teacher when he moved out of the community. Russ cleaned the feathers and other junk out of the carburetor and the fuel tank and it worked, serving us for the remainder of our time at Paint Hills.

After our company had left that Sunday, Steve and Glen were begging for a 'walk'. A walk usually consisted of walking through the village stopping to observe 'whatever' or chat with 'whoever' happened to be available with no schedule in mind and no time frame.



Meeting Nellie on the path

We watched a couple of young men having fun throwing tin syrup lids trying to make them collide in mid-air. They laughed with their numerous attempts. We stopped at 'smoke tents' to admire some little babies in their swings. We gave layettes and baby powder to all new babies.

Arriving back home after our

walk the children played with our five chubby puppies. They were so cute and the boys each had their favorite. Later two ladies came over to visit. We couldn't understand each other's language but they asked to see the mail order catalog. They then pointed to items in the catalog



Visiting in the people's homes

and said the Cree word and I said the words in English. Thus I learned the Cree names and they learned the English names of items we both used.

It had been a good day. We had opportunity to talk to some of our friends and neighbors about the Lord. We had shown ourselves friendly when inviting people into our house and when visiting the people in their smoke tents. We felt content.

Chapter 19

The Children

"The Lord has done great things for us, and we are full of joy." Psalm 126:3

It was an exciting event, when the mail plane came in on its three times a week flights. Everyone ran to the shore to see who had come in or what was going on. The plane usually had to land a short distance away and taxi up to the shore. Everyone was laughing and talking as it really was a highlight of the week. As I stood with the others watching the plane, I wasn't watching my young son very carefully. Then when I turned to check on Glen, I saw him floating in the water away from shore. Only his parka puffed above the water.

Horrified I let out a scream and even though I couldn't swim, and even though I didn't know how deep the water was, I ran throwing myself into the river towards him. I grabbed the back of his parka and lifted him from a watery grave. As I headed for shore others helped rescue both of us. I felt weak and shaky. But Glen was okay. God had seen fit to preserve his life. "Thank you, Jesus."

Steve played in the village with the children. At first when he was only two, I had put him in a harness with a leash attached to the clothes line, and he could play as far as the rope would reach. As he got older we allowed him to run and play with the other children. We knew the people would keep an eye out for him and didn't feel any concern. They loved him and watched out for him as if he were one of their own.

When Steve got older he would run in the bush or play along the river. The boys were practicing that they were hunters like their fathers and they shot little birds with sling shots and roasted them over a fire. They then proceeded to eat the little birds.

One spring during break up as Steve was skating on river ice that was rotting he fell through the top layer of thin ice into the icy water below. He was able to pull himself up onto some solid ice and crawl toward the HBC manager's house. He lay there unable to go any further and soon his clothes were frozen solid. A man, maybe it was the Hudson Bay store manager (or maybe it was an angel; we don't know), came by and saw him lying there with his clothes frozen stiff. He grabbed Steve by his skates and dragged him to our house, his head and upper body bouncing all the way. We didn't see who had brought him back to the house. But God spared Steve's life for which we will always be grateful.



My sons and I watch the break-up

During the break-up the ice continued to melt, break up and pile huge sheets of ice in the river and along the shore. Eventually the current would carry it further out and it would crash with a loud force before the ice floes would eventually sink beneath the surface of the water as it headed out to the James Bay. It was actually very interesting to watch. My sons and I would sit along the shore and watch it each spring. The people made bets as to which day the ice would be totally gone around the bend of the river in front of the HBC house. It was no wonder the boys would choose to play there.

One time Steve was in a smoke teepee where some of the women were roasting geese over the fire of an open pit. He watched with fascination

as the geese turned round and round. He came home and asked if he could roast one of our geese for us. We gave him a goose and the ladies hooked it above the edge of a fire. He poked it with a stick to turn it first one way, and then allowed it to unwind before he gave it another push, thus it was a rotisserie of sorts. The blood and grease dripped into a cast iron skillet below. The ladies laughed at his eagerness and perseverance.

Hours later, when the goose was fully roasted, he proudly brought it home for us to eat. Steve cut off chunks of meat and dipped the meat into a cup containing the blood and grease that had accumulated in the skillet beside the fire and then put the meat into his mouth as he had seen the Natives do. It tasted good, but he didn't know when to stop. He actually ate a whole cupful of the grease and blood. By that time, he was one sick boy.

The people made a steamed pudding which was served at all their feasts. It was actually a Scottish recipe including molasses and currants. This was introduced into their culture when Scottish fur traders intermarried with the Native women. They poured this mixture into a clean cloth and boiled it in a pot of water. Sometimes they baked it in an oven. We loved it.

When Steve turned five, we decided to have a birthday celebration for him. I asked eight women to bake him a steamed pudding cake while I



Steve's birthday cakes on his 5th birthday

baked 20 cakes, half chocolate and half white. After adding the icing, we cut the cakes so there would be enough cake for each person in each house to have a piece of one or the other of his birthday cakes. There were 400 people in the village.

Steve proudly carried the plates of cake to the houses as we instructed him. The people eagerly took the cake and put small coins in his plate. He came home so excited. We gave him the next plate and told him to which house he should take that plate. We used the money, a total of \$6.00, to have a pair of snowshoes made especially for him. The crippled man we hired to make the snowshoes, took green wood and bent it to shape before letting it dry until it had the just the right curve. Then his daughter, Juliette,

strung raw babiche, forming a crisscross web. Webbing straps held them attached to his feet. Steve proudly wore the snowshoes to walk on the snow. He still has them as a souvenir of his life in the Native village.

We decided we wouldn't do that for Glen's birthday. It was just too much work. But we invited Nancy and her daughters for supper. They came bearing gifts. He received a small stuffed red and white cat toy. Nancy had also beaded a small round crest with his initials that I sewed onto the back of his parka. She did however bead a J for John even though we had told her we were giving him the name Keith as his second name. Nancy hugged and kissed Glen. She was so happy. She must have been so pleased about the invitation to our house for Glen's birthday cake that she told everyone, as by 9:00 that evening, lots of ladies from the village had come for cake and tea.

Since we were expecting our third child, I wondered how I would ever get all the laundry dry, so my Mother offered to buy us an electric clothes dryer. It was a 220 watt, but Russ could wire it to run on 110 kilowatt. But now we would need a larger power plant. We had only a small 1000 watts gasoline generator to run the lights and occasionally small appliances and the small electric organ Mom had given us.

When we were out on furlough we learned of an Army Surplus generator the size of a small tractor engine that would put out enough power to run the generator to run the dryer as well as the other appliances and give us lights as well. We ordered it from a Missionary Supply distributing store in Minnesota and planned to take it back with us when we returned home after furlough.

It just so happened that the trains were on strike. Who ever heard of a train being on strike? My brother, Milton and his wife, Marie, from Oklahoma, agreed to drive us to the end of the road at Cochrane, Ontario. By pulling a trailer we could take the generator and the clothes dryer, boxes of Sunday school materials, and some used clothing besides our suitcases and a lunch box with us.

We got to the Canada/USA border. The customs agents must have needed some cash and they saw us coming. They insisted we pay duty on



*Glen's 1st birthday celebration
with Nancy and daughters*

everything, even the used clothing. We tried to explain that we were willing to pay duty on the new items, but certainly shouldn't have to pay on the Sunday school papers and used clothing. When they wouldn't bend their rule about what customs were due, we asked to see a customs broker.

However, before letting us out of their sight they asked us to fill out declaration sheets on the items we had purchased for our personal use while in the USA. We were each allowed a personal exemption of \$10.00 worth of clothing, duty free. We had to wake Steve to sign his name to a declaration stating he had \$10.00 worth of clothing we had purchased for him. Steve was only six years old. All he could do was to print and he printed a big STEVE across the bottom of the declaration. When they insisted on his surname he didn't know how to print it, so we printed it on another paper and had him copy it onto the declaration. Can you imagine how happy he was to do that after being awakened from sleep?

As for Glen, at three years, he was too young to print his name so we had to pay duty on his \$10.00 worth of clothing. Our home church had given me a baby shower for the new baby, so we had to pay duty on those items as well.

Now it just so happened that the nearest customs broker was hundreds of miles away. So the border agents closed up the trailer putting their seal on it. They wouldn't even allow us to take out our lunch box with sandwiches and fresh milk for our children.

We drove the rest of the night until finally reaching the nearest customs broker the next morning. We explained our predicament telling him that we would be more than willing to pay duty on the new clothes dryer and generator, but that the other things were for our ministry.

"Will the generator and dryer help you in your ministry?" the broker asked as he looked into the trailer.

"Yes, but they are for our personal use."

"Well, if they will make it easier for your wife to do her ministry, I will clear them all, duty free." It was too good to be true. Again, God's wonderful provision beyond what we could have imagined.

When we got to Cochrane we shipped the generator and clothes dryer and other items and proceeded home with our suitcases to Paint Hills.

When we got home we remembered a previous time that this same customs broker had cleared a shipment for us, when we hadn't asked him too; therefore we didn't pay the \$5.00 brokerage fee at that time. We now sent \$5.00 back to him in back payment for the earlier shipment.

learn to speak Cree. In fact, he said God had called him to Moose Factory and when a church was established there he would leave.

I thought how wonderful it would be when there were both Native and non-Native Christians in our village. The fellowship was so precious. We longed for the day it would be like that in our village.

Glen and I often walked the village streets on the island with Carolyn Oades (a nurse) and Dorothy Krahn (a school teacher), who were Caucasian Christians working in Moose Factory. We joked about drinking castor oil or going for a ride in the back of a truck to bring on labor. By now my baby was overdue as had been my last baby. I had already spent six weeks here at Moose Factory waiting for my baby to be born and I was getting restless.

One night I knew my labor was starting. I asked Doug to take me (by canoe, no less) over to the island and drop me off. I would walk up to hospital and he wouldn't need to wait. Hopefully Anne would care for Glen for a few days, which she did.

As I rang the bell at the hospital, I felt frightened. Again I had that alone feeling that no one anywhere knew where I was or what was happening to me. Certainly Russell didn't know and he wouldn't be with me for this delivery. Yet I knew in my innermost being that God was with me. *“Neither death or life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

The nurse opened the hospital entrance door and shocked at seeing a white woman on the step after midnight asked, “Where have you come from?”

“I'm from Paint Hills,” I said. “I have been waiting here in Moose Factory to deliver my baby.” She escorted me up the elevator to another floor where she showed me into a room with two beds. She told me, “It'll be a while yet. You might as well go to sleep.” She walked out closing the door behind her. I was in the dark, alone again. I prayed for God to help me. I clinched my hands and bit my knuckles as the pains grew stronger and came faster.

A couple hours later the nurse returned and said she would examine me and do the necessary preparations for delivery. With a frantic exclamation which I won't repeat, she left returning with a stretcher. She told me to get onto it, which I did as fast as I could move as she tried to steer the stretcher down the hallway toward the delivery room.

It was just a few minutes and with one big push a beautiful black haired baby girl was delivered at 3:00 a.m. A doctor I had never seen before

Chapter 20

The Growing Family

“Choose today whom you will serve.....But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

The government had given strict instruction that no white women should again deliver a baby in the isolated nursing stations, so on our return trip after furlough, Glen and I stayed with Doug and Anne Taylor, NCEM missionaries at Moose Factory, Ontario, which was where the nearest hospital was located. Russell and Steve went on home as Russ needed to be back to teach school and Steve to attend grade one. Our baby was due in about three weeks.

The days dragged as I tried to help as I could. The missionary family lived simply. Anne baked and cooked simply and she didn't bother much with housework. She had other priorities. Each evening the Native Christians came over and visited or played games. There was a lot of laughter and teasing. It was such a blessing to mingle with the three young fellows, who had recently become Christians, two brothers, Joe and Roy Cheechoo and one other young fellow, James Moses. Sometimes a sister in law, Beatrice Cheechoo, and other women and girls came as well. They had to come by canoe as the missionaries lived on Sawpit Island, an island separate from Moose Factory Island, situated along the waters of the Moosonee River. Moosonee was on the mainland not far from these islands. The missionaries' house was surrounded by bush.

As the village of Moose Factory was also on an island the missionaries had to go by canoe for shopping, for visiting, or for church services. Most of their church services were held in Native homes in the village. More of the people there spoke English than in our village and Doug made no effort to

came in looking sleepy eyed with messed up hair. He put on a gown and gloves and examined me and the baby; asked a few questions, and left. I couldn't sleep. Excitement overwhelmed me. A daughter! How wonderful to have a daughter, and two precious sons. It couldn't be more perfect.

I wrote out a very brief message and by 9:00 a.m. the next morning I was at the phone to place a call to the Hudson's Bay Store to send a telegram via two way radio to Russell at Paint Hills. "It's a girl. Sheryl Ruth. October 1 at 3:00 a.m. 6 lbs. 13 oz. All is well."

At Paint Hills when the message came through on the two way radio, the store manager went home and woke his wife to deliver the telegram to Russ. There were no telephones. Denise, the French nurse who had married the store manager, ran to our house and burst through the door, into the bedroom and with much excitement delivered the news to Russell while he was still in bed. She herself was due to deliver her first baby in three months. She was so excited Russ could hardly understand her.

Carolyn who later married Joe Jespersen and became a co-worker of ours, Dorothy who married Roy Cheechoo and later became financial supporters of ours, and the women from the Native Fellowship brought gifts for our beautiful baby daughter. Even ladies I didn't know. They were a generous people and because we were missionaries to their people they honored us.

When the baby and I were ready to go home, the missionaries took Glen, Sheryl and me to the airport with our things and we began our flight north. We stopped over at Eastmain because Russell was there for a linguistics meeting with Helen Hisey from Eastmain and Ted Leschied from Fort George. By stopping over till the next flight Russell could see his daughter.

When the next mail plane came two days later all three of the children and I got on the plane to go home. Russell stayed behind to fulfill his missionary responsibilities. (I'm not sure what was so important that he couldn't leave to escort me home. I didn't question. It was part of being a missionary's wife).



Sheryl held by her big brothers

It was cold arriving home early October. The house had been closed for approximately a week. The store manager had started the fire shortly before I arrived, but it was still cold in the house. I had to carry in rain water from a tub outside, and look after three children ages six and three years and a newborn. It wasn't easy as I was only one week postpartum. Russell came home after a few days and life became easier.

Our daughter was so charming. By nine months she was tottering around the house. I sewed slacks from clothes that had come in the missionary box. No Native lady would wear a straight skirt such as were sent, but I could cut and sew little slacks for Sheryl from the used clothing boxes. I made a little velvet dress with a gathered skirt for her first Christmas. I tended to dress the boys alike on Sundays because I liked the

Buster Brown clothes. We always dressed in our Sunday best on Sundays to meet with the King. And we held services even if with just our family.

During the spring goose hunt, our family packed a lunch and went on the sled with our dog team to visit a goose camp. The Native family welcomed our visit and when Sheryl fussed and wouldn't settle down for a nap, the lady put her into a hammock and rocked her gently. It settled her right down to sleep. The people had similar hammocks in their



Visiting a family on a goose hunt



Sheryl in a hammock

homes in the village. These hammocks were over their bed or hung over the area where they worked. It was easy to keep the hammock swinging. Only a tug at the rope and it'd swing again. In their homes when their babies cried they merely gave the hammock a push and their babies settled right down. It was a very creative and space saving way to rock their babies.

Later at home one of the ladies made a hammock for us in our house using a blanket draped over the ropes and we put Sheryl in it when she was fussy.

Russ took Steve along once when going to cut firewood along the shore of the river about three miles away in a little bay. Steve took his skates and was skating on the ice when Russ saw some ptarmigan. He shot two and as the ptarmigan flew a little ways further. He got on the skidoo and drove closer to them. When he decided he wouldn't get anymore, he drove back to where he had left Steve, but Steve wasn't there. Russ panicked wondering if Steve had come searching for him. Russ started driving down the shore line looking one direction and then the other for Steve and eventually he went back to the trail they had come on through the bush. Russ was so relieved to find Steve there; although he was crying. He had started walking home as he thought he had been left behind.

One Christmas the gifts we had ordered for our family from the Eaton's catalog hadn't arrived due to freeze up and the back log of mail. December 25 was approaching so quickly, Russell had to be creative. For me he built a barn out of willow twigs to go with the white ceramic nativity set my cousin Beth Hardy had sent me when her husband was stationed in Okinawa. For Sheryl, Russell removed the hinged seat on the potty chair and attached a plain seat so it could be used for a little chair to sit on as she played on the floor. For the boys he carved and assembled wood gun racks. As Steve recalls today, they didn't even have guns to put on the racks, but Russ says he carved wood guns for the boys. Later when the mail was again coming, they got their BB guns to hang on the racks; but they haven't forgotten having no guns when they were given gun racks. It wasn't our fault; the mail played tricks on us.

Steve started grade one with Barb* as his teacher. She especially enjoyed teaching Steve because he was the only student that could speak English. Furthermore Steve was eager to learn.

He came home from school one day saying the boys were picking on him. Russell remembered when he was a kid he had picked on another boy and the boy turned around and slapped him. That was such a surprise to

Russell that he quit bullying the boy. So Russ told Steve, "Next time they pick on you, hit them back and they'll stop."

Now Barb stood at our door. We invited her in and offered her a chair. She wouldn't sit down. Russell asked, "Is there a problem?"

"For sure there is," Barb said. "Steve hit Phillip with a hockey stick and broke his nose."

Never did we imagine Steve would use a hockey stick to hit back with. We were horrified. We said we'd take care of it. All of our family went to Phillip's house. Phillip's Mother called out "Come In." She'd have known it was white people there because none of the local people knocked at her door. She remained standing in the middle of the room. Phillip hid behind his Mother but we saw his nose was swollen and bloody and his eyes were red from crying.



Sheryl with her friends who came to play



Sheryl with Chilawe, who outgrew her

We told them how sorry we were about Steve hitting Phillip, and explained that Russ had told him to hit back when the boys picked on him, but we certainly did not mean for him to use a hockey stick to hit with. We told Steve to apologize to

Phillip. He walked over to Phillip and put his arm around him and said, "I'm sorry, Phillip." Both boys hugged each other and cried. We shook hands with Phillip's Mother and patted Phillip on the back. The boys remained good friends even after that.

Sheryl claimed one of our dogs, Chilawe, as a favorite friend, but children came to play with her too.

The next year as Russell was

teaching school every day, I was forced to do a lot of the hard work myself. So we decided to use some of the money from the teaching job to hire a Native girl to help me. We wrote a note to Minnie Georgekish, our closest neighbor, who was an older unmarried girl. We asked if she would come scrub my floors and iron our clothes once a week and we would pay her. Minnie wrote back, "I will do all the work." We've laughed many times because I thought I was asking her to help me and she said she would do all the work! What was I going to do if she did all the work?

One evening after our family devotions, having read about the crucifixion of Jesus, our six year old son Steve told his Dad he wanted to accept Jesus into his heart. Conviction had settled on him as he remembered he had stolen some Freshie (Koolaid) from the store. He had also taken a dime from a cash tray. Russell spoke to him about the sin of stealing and Steve confessed his sins to the Lord. Minutes after he and his Dad had prayed, he came out of his bedroom and proudly said, "I helped Glen accept Jesus too. I told him I'd give him a cookie if he'd ask Jesus into his heart."

To lead a person to Christ and have that person accept Jesus Christ has to be the greatest joy one can experience; next to knowing that one's own sins are forgiven by Jesus Christ through His death on the cross.

Chapter 21

The Fun, Funny and not so Funny Times

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you ... By this all men will know you are My disciples, if you have love for another." John 13:34, 35

I had an 8" x 10" photo that Sheryl had won in a beauty contest down in Cordell while we were on furlough. We ordered an 8" x 10" frame from Eaton's catalogue to put the picture in. After waiting many weeks, we finally got our shipment from Eaton's. There was a note apologizing for the long delay saying "in order not to inconvenience you further we are sending you two 5" x 7" frames." Can you imagine? What did they think I would do? Cut the picture in half?

One day Glen decided he would fly like an airplane. He came in to tell us, "Watch out the side window and you will see me fly by." It took a couple of seconds to dawn on us just what he had said. As we ran out the door he was standing on the wood pile tying a rope around his neck ready to leap to begin his solo flight. We put an end to that right away.

Russell had ordered a 50 cent book "How to Wire a House for Electricity" from Eaton's catalogue. By following directions he wired the house; only the electricity didn't work. That night he went to sleep pondering the situation. And while he slept, the Lord showed him what to do. The next morning he changed a couple wires and the electricity flowed. There was no doubt that God could speak through our dreams if He so chose.

We could now use our appliances with the generator. I no longer had to use a gasoline powered iron but could use the electric iron. We could use electricity for services instead of the gasoline lantern. We could read or use my sewing machine all by starting the generator. How blessed we were.

The gasoline powered snowmobile had become a common appearance

in the village. The interpreter at the nurses' station had been the first to bring in the Skidoo. It wouldn't be long until the snowmobile would replace the dog team in hauling home firewood and going hunting. We couldn't dispose of our dogs – we loved them. They had served us faithfully. We kept them as our pets.

We had lots of snow while living on the James Bay. The winds blew and the snow swirled around. Often we had what we called a three day blow when the weather was a complete white out. It was a nice time to stay inside by the stove and not have to go out except to feed the dogs. Other times the sun shone brightly and we loved seeing the trees with all the snow on them.

Our skidoo was sometimes used for pleasure. The new Hudson's Bay Co. clerk Ed and his wife Betty, sometimes asked us to go for skidoo rides with them. We put our children to sleep and then went out on a ride. It was so much fun to drive our skidoos on the snow covered trails with the moon shining down on us. But after a few times of leaving our children at home unattended; we were struck with guilt, thinking 'what if our house would burn down and we would lose our three precious children while we were riding around in the bush on our skidoo having fun?' Thereafter on the occasional time we went out, when we couldn't take our children with us, we asked Queeny and her husband to come babysit. Usually otherwise, we never had a babysitter. We took our children everywhere we went.

Ed and Betty taught us to play some table games. When Betty failed to play correctly or missed some opportunity, Ed always said "Stuu-pid" and we all laughed. To this day I can still hear him say that. And often we did ridiculous things as well. It was fun to relax and have fun.

One Christmas we were invited for dinner to the nursing station with the other white people. We enjoyed the delicious meal. When it was time for dessert, a steamed pudding with a caramel sauce was served. The nurse lit a match and the sauce caught fire. That was the first time we had seen a flaming pudding. Andy jokingly said, "You won't be able to eat any of this dessert because it has alcohol in it."

Just as quickly Russ replied, "But the alcohol has all been burned off, so we can eat the pudding and the sauce."

When we left, Russ accidentally left his fur hat in the nurses' residence and as he stepped back to the door of their apartment, he overheard Andy say, "Now to get down to some serious drinking," as Andy thought we were gone already. At that point his face turned red realizing Russ had heard him.

When Russ was teaching school, he took the students on a field trip. I went along. We searched out the flowers and plants growing in the open spaces. We talked about the little animals that scurried across our way.

One boy asked, "Have you eaten groundhog?" We said we didn't have any. "But if you did," he asked, "would you eat it?"

As soon as we got home we started to make a quick lunch so Russell could get back to the school. There was a knock on the door. Several school children stood there holding a plate covered with a scrap of paper. We lifted the paper, but we didn't recognize what we were seeing.

One boy said it was groundhog, while the others snickered. Russ transferred the meat to one of our plates returning the boy's plate to him. "Aren't you going to eat it?" he asked. The children persisted so Russ took a bite. It smelled and tasted like skunk. Neither of us liked it but forced ourselves to eat it. The boys left after seeing we had eaten the meat they brought. They were surprised that we had. We always ate the foods the people offered us. Most of their meat was boiled, but some was roasted over an open fire. We usually liked the wild food they cooked better than the way I cooked it. They knew how to cook the wild food to its best advantage.

Chapter 22

The Opposition Begins

“And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you; so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” Colossians 3:12-14

Our Good News club had been bursting at the seams. Whenever we held a service we could hardly accommodate the people in our living room with the overflow into the kitchen. Indeed, this was a good problem to have.

We decided that the money Russell received from teaching school should be used to further the missionary work instead of enriching our lifestyle. We consulted with the Mission Executive and they were in agreement. A hall would stand beside our house. We were excited thinking about next summer when we would hold a Vacation Bible school in the hall.

We ordered in the lumber to come on the summer HBC barge. In January, 1967, Doug Taylor, missionary from Moose Factory came to build the hall.

Barb* stopped by one afternoon as I was having a sewing class for the teenage girls. She admired the things they were sewing and said what a wonderful thing we were doing in having such a class for the girls.

The next week no girls came



Doug building the mission hall in January



Sewing class with the teen girls

to my sewing class. We asked Nancy why the girls hadn't come to my class. She said, "Barb started a sewing class for the girls at the same time." We were so disappointed and felt betrayed. Why would she have said what a wonderful thing we were doing by having the class and then turn around and have a class conflicting with our class? We had purposely never conducted our services to conflict with their church services. We had tried to live peacefully with them. Now we had to ask the Lord to guard us from becoming angry and spiteful. Instead we wanted to forgive them and be kind to them.

We decided we would pay Barb and Ed* a visit. (Not that we would bring up the subject of the conflicting class unless we had opportunity!) When we arrived at their house, they invited us in. We made casual conversation, but before we started to make preparations to leave, Russell asked if he could read the Bible with them. He had already explained the way of salvation to them. Then he went one step farther and since he hadn't brought a Bible with him, asked if he could borrow theirs. Ed went into the other room but eventually returned saying he couldn't find his Bible. He must have left it at the church. Russell then quoted the verses he had been thinking about and we left. The teacher and her husband moved away that July.

We had begun hearing rumors that the leaders at the local organized Church were telling the people not to go to our services. So Russell decided to attend a service at their Church one Sunday to hear just what was being said from the pulpit. He was surprised to see Georgekish, the shaman, leading the service. Georgekish looked in Russell's direction and pointed his finger at Russell. In Cree he said to the congregation, "If you read any other church's books, God will pluck your eyes out."

In August, we went to each of the homes and gave printed invitations announcing the Vacation Bible School and inviting the children to attend.

We had invited two young people to come help us with VBS. One

was a Bible School student, Ann Marie Cameron; the other was Joe Cheechoo, one of the young Native Christians from Moose Factory. Joe was willing to use time off from his job as a nurse to come help with our Bible school.

The first day of VBS our new building was ready for use with tables and benches to accommodate all the children. We sang choruses from song sheets on which I had printed the words and pasted various pictures to explain the meaning of the song or even just to draw their attention. We taught Bible lessons using flannel graph, did handcrafts and had refreshments for everyone. We invited the children to come back the following day bringing other friends with them. They smiled and waved as they left.

Russell and Joe went out after supper to visit in the village. First would be Nancy and Nellie's house because they were the Christians in the village. When they entered the shack Nellie asked, "Why didn't you go to the meeting?"

"What meeting?" Russ asked.

"It's about you," she said.

"Well, if it's about me, I guess I should go." Russ said.

Russ and Joe went to the school building where the meeting was being held. Opening the door, they soon saw it was full of people. There was hardly room to enter. Everywhere people sat on the floor in a circle around the room, while some stood in corners. A couple of people made room for the men to sit down on the floor. The only light was a gasoline lantern hanging in the middle of the room.

They had been talking about us, the missionaries who were in their village. Some people were arguing about the Vacation Bible School we had just begun that day in the new mission hall.

They became quiet when they noticed Russell and Joe come in; but then began saying harsh words directed to them. Mark was leading the meeting and everyone spoke in Cree. Mark was bilingual and interpreted some of what was being said.

Someone shouted out, "Mr. Mueller says the people don't know God. He doesn't believe in our baptism."

Russell made no comment as he tried to comprehend what the discussion was about. Then Simon said that Russell had not asked if his son could come to Bible school. Russell replied that the Sunday before, we had gone to every home with a written invitation for the children to attend. When he heard this, Simon said, "but it wasn't written in Cree." Then he

said we had never given him any old clothes. Russ made no reply as Simon was becoming angrier all the time. (He would have known there were 'old clothes' available as word spread rapidly by 'moccasin telegraph' announcing any clothes give-a-way. The entire village would have known.)

After this Georgekish, the shaman/medicine man who was quite



Georgekish, the shaman/medicine man

elderly, came and shook hands with Joe. He said to Joe, "I know you from when I was in the hospital at Moose Factory."

Another man, David*, came and thanked Joe for taking care of him in the hospital. Then David turned to Russ and said, "You

never gave me any old clothes either. Furthermore, I will not be sending my children to your Bible school unless the Chief tells me to."

We hadn't realized the strong influence the Chief had over these isolated people under his authority. There was an intermingling of native religion with the established church's religion that affected the people spiritually as well as culturally. The people were unable to make decisions for themselves in these areas. There was a power of darkness over not only this village, but the entire area of the James Bay. Actually it was over all the native people of Canada.

It was the general idea of the group that we had no right to have this school without the permission of the bishop. He said that 'the children shouldn't have to go to school in the summer, but should play. They already go to school in the winter.'

One of the lay readers in the church said he would like to say a few words. He told of how they had always believed and would not change. They had all been baptised, confirmed and taken communion and when they die, they will all go to heaven.

After a bit, the Chief got up and asked for a vote. "How many of you people do not want to accept the religion the missionary is teaching? Raise your hand now." Russell looked around. Every hand went up. He noticed

Nancy's hand was also up although her head was hanging down. He asked the question in a different way, asking "how many want to accept the missionary's religion?" and not one hand went up. So we knew they understood the question.

Russell stood up and in Cree spoke about why we had come to their village and how we had been teaching about salvation in Jesus Christ. After speaking the gospel message for four or five minutes, Russell sat down and nudged Joe and said, "You should get up and say something," but Joe stayed quiet. Again Russ nudged him, "Give your testimony. These are your people, they will understand you."

Mark then said that they would close the meeting by everyone saying the Lord's Prayer. As soon as the "amen" was said, but before anyone could move to leave, Joe jumped up, and in his mother language, boldly spoke for 10 minutes telling the people how he had come to receive Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin. As the people filed from the building, most shock hands with Joe and Russell, but some murmured under their breath. Georgekish said to Joe, "You have no business to talk to your elders like that. You are just a child. I am older than even your mother."

Russell and Joe came home heavy hearted to tell me what had transpired. We prayed, we cried, but there was no changing the situation. Joe said, "If an Indian doesn't want you, you should leave. I'm going home on the plane to Moose Factory tomorrow."

We begged him to reconsider, but he left for home the next day.

Chapter 23

The Beginning of the End

*"The Lord is for me; I will not fear. What can man do to me?
The Lord is for me; among those who help me ... It is better to
take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man."* Psalm 118:6, 8

It so happened that the next day the District Superintendent of the school division flew in with Craig and Lynn Innerst (a Quaker couple), who both would be teaching school that fall. It seemed ideal to us, but it set off an alarm for the Native people. Unbeknownst to us, before the previous teacher and lay reader left in July, they had the Chief and Counselors write up a petition stating they didn't want Russell to teach school again. They wanted only teachers from their religion. Three local fellows, who had completed grade 12 down south, applied for the three teaching positions. When the school superintendent came in with two white adults, the people saw there would now be three non Native teachers again, of which Russell was one. They were angry.

The chief called a village meeting that evening and at 10:30 p.m. he called Mr. Innerst and Russell to the meeting. The accusations and angry words flew through the room that night. We knew something would come of this, but didn't expect it to be as bad as it turned out to be.

On Monday Russell, Craig and Lynn got their books and supplies sorted and got their classrooms in order. On Tuesday no one came to Russell's classroom. There was unrest in the village. One could feel it. Craig phoned the school superintendent and he came in on Wednesday's plane.

Again another meeting was held and the false accusations flew aimed mostly at Russell. The Chief and Councilors seemed to be the angriest. One of the children had come home from school and told his parents that school

was not the same as it was when he was in grade one and two. Russ said, "Of course the things taught are different. It is more advanced."

Some complained he was teaching his religion. Russ told the people, "I teach the religion lessons from the text book. I read only the Bible. I do not teach any particular religion." Someone interjected, "That's a lie." The people said, "Just by you being the teacher, you are influencing the children to your religion."

The Superintendent said, "2+2=4 to me! 2+2=4 to you! 2+2= 4! It doesn't matter what faith the teacher has!"

Matches said, "We don't need any more churches here and Mr. Mueller is trying to turn the people away from the Anglican Church. If Mr. Mueller would become an Anglican, everything would be alright."

All sorts of things were said like:

"You said I didn't know God," and you said, "Someone's baptism wasn't any good."

"You promised to help the people but we don't see you doing anything for them."

"You told the children not to go to the Anglican Sunday School."

Harvey* said Russell had taken money from him and Robert* for one time when they had gone along with Mr. Mueller to hunt in the fall of 1964. Russell asked Harvey to repeat that again as he didn't know what Harvey was talking about. He had never taken money from anyone to go out hunting. In fact he had always used his canoe and motor and provided the gas. This time Harvey said, "If we had offered the money, then Mr. Mueller would have taken it. Mr. Mueller thought he was doing us a favor, but really we were doing him the favor by taking him hunting." Sound logical?

Someone then mentioned that Russell had asked for the job of teaching. Russell told them he came to their village to be a missionary, not a teacher. But when a teacher was needed, he had been recommended by Barb to teach and then been hired by the District Superintendent. He had filled out application papers at that time, not before. Someone asked why Russell had failed most of the students in his class. Russell said only two or three had failed because they had missed four to five months of school during the school year while the family was out on the trap line.

Emma* said, "Why not hire Indian teachers? We sent our children out to get an education so they can help their own people." Mr. Lambert said, "No one told me that. I didn't know. We have Indian teachers at Rupert's House and Fort George. I have no objection to Indian teachers."

Then Emma said, "John should be teaching." But Mark responded by saying his son John would not be able to handle teaching.

Visitor said that religion wasn't the only problem. "Last year the students were fighting with the principal." He said he heard that, "Mr. Mueller was going to beat the students with a big stick. Mr. Mueller was the cause of the fight." Russell knew nothing about that.

He said, however, one time he had kept a girl after class to finish her assignment. When the girl didn't come home with the other children, the mother came into the school and began hollering at her daughter. She was carrying a broom and told her daughter she would beat her with it. Russ told the mother the girl had done nothing wrong and she shouldn't beat the girl.

Russell assured them he had never and would never hit the children. He would teach only according to the Protestant school curriculum. Visitor replied he would soon know if his children were not being taught right, as he himself had some education.

Mark, who had done all the interpreting said, "When NCEM first came; the people of Paint Hills were told by Mr. Marshall Calverley that the Mission already had over 100 churches established across Canada. They now had lots of money to put into this place." He said, "I guess the people did not understand that when they signed the papers to permit a missionary of the NCEM to come into Paint Hills, because it is obvious that not much money is being spent to advance the financial status of the people."

Russell said, "Surely you didn't think that a mission is only a hand out agency?"

The Superintendent, Mr. Lambert said, "Let's solve our problem. I want to see the children back in school tomorrow. Let's forget about religious problems. They are solved. There will be no religion in the school. I want to go back to Amos (Quebec) and tell my people that you solved your own problem tonight. Mrs. Innerst will teach Kindergarten and grade one = 25 children. She cannot do a good job with more than 25. Mr. Mueller will teach grades two and three, if you are ready to cooperate. He doesn't want to see 20-24 children out of school. For the sake of your children's futures, send them back tomorrow. Mr. Innerst will teach grades four, five and six."

The Chief then said, "Good night."

Everyone left. We felt rejection from everyone. We thought the issue was settled and the next day all except one student was back in school. At recess the Chief called Russell over and said, "You are lying again. We know

you did fill out application papers. As long as you teach, there will be trouble.” At that point Russell knew it wouldn’t work for him to teach in the school.

The Superintendent was on the plane as it was taxiing out getting ready for take off, when Russell sent the Chief’s son out by canoe to ask Mr. Lambert to come back. The issue wasn’t settled with the people. Russell resigned that day.

Several days later, Nancy was the first to come to talk to us. She came to the door on the far side of our house after we had already gone to bed, probably after midnight, and in tears said, “I don’t want you to leave. I want you to stay and I want your religion, but the Chief said we all had to vote against you. Whatever the Chief says to do, we all have to do.”

The next day we phoned our Mission head office and told our director that the people had taken a vote ‘not to accept our religion’. Because this was a two way radio it was essential to keep our message short. The director said they would phone back as soon as possible.

As I walked down the sandy trail toward home, Elizabeth* came running out of her house pointing her finger at me and screaming, “You gave her some clothes and you didn’t give me any.” I just smiled at her and kept on walking. I acted as if I didn’t understand what she was saying.

Chapter 24

The End

“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” Deuteronomy 31:8

Our hearts were broken. Perhaps we had offended some. Certainly we responded more to those who responded to us. Perhaps another missionary could reach the people where we had failed. The director of NCEM phoned back saying there would be a conference in a few weeks down at Moose Factory, (Ontario). We will discuss this situation then.



Severn cargo ship

We sorted through stuff and checked to see if the Severn cargo ship that was supposed to come in would still be going south again or would it only come in to ‘winter’ here. We learned it would not be going south. When it came it would stay the winter. People came wanting to buy our stuff but we refused.

We flew out to the conference and there were 18 missionaries plus guests and Native believers there. They tried to encourage us telling us they too had faced similar situations in their ministry. They said, “You know you are getting through to them when persecution comes.”

Even though other missionaries told of similar experiences, we weren’t expecting this and weren’t prepared for it. We had been getting along with the people well. We were surprised at their sudden change of attitude toward us. During this time Russell and I spent much time in prayer asking

the Lord to search our hearts. We wondered how we would be able to minister to them after being told that they didn't want our religion. That was our heart, our life. Without sharing Christ we were nothing. Our directors told us to stay another year and just love the people. They said it didn't matter if we didn't have any services. We would have opportunities to talk to people on a one on one basis.

After conference we went back to Paint Hills to spend the next year seeking God, loving and praying for the people.

One by one and in small groups, people came back to our house over the next while.

Some came back and wanted to sing songs. The girls asked if we would have sewing classes. We said not right away, but later I did. We were exhausted physically and emotionally.

We sang and read the Cree Bible with those who came to visit us and we eventually had a small gathering that came regularly. There was a renewed interest by some while others shied away from us probably due to embarrassment.

Realizing that our Lord was despised and rejected of men, we knew we too as His followers would suffer likewise. The Bible even says we are to rejoice in this and that we are 'blessed'.

During the next year, though we didn't have formal services or Vacation Bible School, we continued to have people into our home and share the gospel with them every chance we had. We held small gatherings in some of the Native homes with six to eight people participating. Some folks told us they would like to have come but since they are leaders in the organized Church they just couldn't come to our meetings.

One family came to tell us goodbye before they left for their winter trap lines. Even the Chief came several times asking for help in repairing his Skidoo or to buy kerosene or some food supplies the store had run out of. We helped him.

On Christmas Day we moved our record player, Christmas tree, coffee and cake out into the new hall where we entertained nearly the entire village at an open house.

We lived doing the regular things a missionary family would do. Russell put up the next year's wood supply for the next missionary. We enjoyed the year and fellowship with the people who came to us.

Russ began homeschooling Steve and we had him enrolled in a correspondence course, which when finished would enable him to belong to a free book club. Steve was an avid reader. In grade one he was reading

the World Book encyclopedia and the Bible as if he understood every word written.

That winter several men from our Mission: Art Wellwood and Ed Hickey, paid us a visit. A number of homes were visited, including those of the Chief and Councillors of the village. We spent considerable time talking about the indigenous principle of missions (Indians winning Indians).

In March, for a week and a half, it was our privilege to have Gilbert Trapper (formerly from the Rupert's House band) and his wife Mary (from the Eastmain band), now Native believers living at Moose Factory, visit us. The Trappers were baptized believers having accepted the Lord less than two years before. They desired to take the gospel to their own people. Russell and Gilbert visited almost every home in the village and he spoke at each gathering we had. We called a special service on Sunday afternoon and about 50 people showed up. Russell recorded Gilbert's testimony and wrote it out in Cree syllabics to have it printed to distribute to the people.

At the end of March we wrote to the Eastern Council members, "Since your visit we have come to some conclusions regarding our mission work. Due to the past emotional stress and strain of the work we feel we must have a change of location. During Gilbert Trapper's visit here we were encouraged by the receptiveness the Indian people showed to him and to the message he brought. We therefore feel, a worker is needed here in Paint Hills and that perhaps a different person with a different approach could be more effective. After having spent six years here in Paint Hills, this place will always be special to us. We would request a transfer to a post where we would be working with Indian Christians. Our preference would be a less-isolated post."

When Jesus sent out His disciples in Matthew 10:14, *He said, "If anyone will not welcome or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town."* We felt He was releasing us from the ministry at Paint Hills; although when we went there in 1962 we loved it so much we thought we would stay there forever.

However, we began to make plans to leave that June and believed that the Mission was making plans to replace us and others would come to continue the ministry. The Mission Executive notified us of three communities that needed missionaries. One was Oxford House, Manitoba. It was a fairly large village of close to 600 people and there had been a group of people attending church before the missionaries had moved out. There was a chapel there. It was separated from the village by quite a long road, probably a mile or two.

The second place was Thicket Portage, Manitoba. It was a village of 200 people on the rail line North of The Pas, Manitoba, and drunkenness was a huge problem. There was an elderly Native man, Johnny Cook, and his wife who were Christians. There were also several Christian school teachers who were begging for a missionary. There was a very small chapel there and they were trying to hold the work together. We don't even remember where the third village was.

We said we would pray, and as we prayed we felt God was directing us to Thicket Portage. It really made no sense. We would be going to the smallest, least desirable place.

When summer came, we put our stuff on the ship to go to Thicket Portage. The last part of the move would be completed by rail. We left our dogs with instructions for the Hudson's Bay manager to put them on the plane in the crates Russell had made and ship them by plane and then train to Thicket when we would notify him. We were going on furlough for three months and expected that the household belongings might take that long to arrive in Thicket Portage anyway.

Later we received only three dogs. The store manager from Paint Hills said one of the dogs had gotten loose and the people were afraid to try and catch it. So instead they shot it. And thus Suggen didn't make the move to our next station. We weren't convinced that they couldn't have caught Suggen. We weren't even convinced that he had gotten loose.

Chapter 25

The Rest of the Story

"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." II Peter 1: 2, 3

The year after we moved out of Paint Hills, Russ and the others of the Eastern Field Council made a visit to the James Bay coastal villages. At Paint Hills they were welcomed by the people. Many asked Russell to come back to live with them. The women kissed him on each cheek while the men shook his hand. That night they had a service in the mission house that was now being occupied by a local family. Russell didn't feel any hostility. He felt welcomed by the people; no one mentioned the previous year's trouble.



*Ted & Martha
Leschied & family*

The men also visited Fort George, where Ted and Martha Leschied had opened up a station the same summer we had gone to Paint Hills. They had moved out of Fort George to Rupert's House (Waskaganish) the year before we left Paint Hills because of the opposition they were facing in their ministry.

Previous missionaries, Larry and Peggy Linton, had led a few people to the Lord prior to their leaving Rupert's House. Here in Rupert's House one of the Leschieds' daughters played with one of the Native girls. Eventually the little girl

accepted the Lord. She told her mother what she was learning. And in time her mother also accepted Jesus Christ. There is now a Native church with a Native pastor there in Rupert's House.

The Leschieds had to leave as Martha developed cancer and required surgery and treatment. Martha's cancer was too far advanced and she died. Ted later married Helen Hisey, the single missionary lady from Eastmain. They stayed in Red Lake, Ontario and never returned to the James Bay.

Several years later Russell and I made a visit back to Paint Hills and felt a warm welcome. But the Lord had released us. To this date no missionaries have moved into any of the mission stations of Paint Hills, Eastmain, or Fort George on a permanent basis.

For a brief time a Native couple, Gilbert and Mary Trapper, did live and minister in Fort George. Years later a single NCEM missionary lady had a ministry in Fort George and in the Inuit communities to the north on the coast of the Hudson's Bay. There have been a few missionaries to the Inuit people in the Hudson's Bay area.

Today there are Native churches pastored by Native men at Waskaganish, Quebec and at Moose Factory, Ontario. So we know if the people had not protested so vehemently there would probably be churches all along that coast. But people do have their choice whether they realize the consequences or not.

When Carroll Hill was the director of NCEM he made a trip by Austin Airlines up the coast of James Bay. Sitting down beside an Aboriginal man he asked the man's name and where he was from. The middle aged man said, "I'm James Visitor from Wemindji (formerly Paint Hills)."

"Wow! I've prayed for you for many years that you would come to the Lord," Carroll said. "The Muellers asked us to pray for people in Paint Hills and I took your name to pray for."

"Well, God has answered your prayers. I'm a Christian now. Praise the Lord!" James said. James, the son of the Chief, had been Russell's language teacher in the first years of our being in Paint Hills. They had used a language textbook in the Plains Cree and the Bible to learn the Swampy Cree spoken in that area. God's Word does not return void.

There are Christian school teachers at Paint Hills now. There is also a small group of Christians who meet together in homes mostly. It is my understanding they have built a new building which is sometimes used as a meeting place. They are under the direction of a Full Gospel Church from

southern Ontario. I was told that they 'lay low' to avoid the strong opposition.

Years later, probably 15 at least, I received a letter from Barb, the former school teacher. At that point we were living in Lac La Biche, Alberta. She stated that she was living in Toronto at the time and was visiting in a hospital when she spotted the *Northern Lights* magazine. It is a publication of the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission and inside was my picture and an article I had written. It brought back memories of the time she spent there in Paint Hills. She saw I was living in Lac La Biche and took the chance that if she wrote to that address I would get the letter. And I did indeed get her letter.

I still have her letter and in it she wrote, "Let me ask your forgiveness for my attitudes and my narrow mindedness towards you at that time. We could have had a growing, loving relationship in the Lord Jesus but I was not willing to offer that at the time. Please forgive me for this and any unkindness or hurt I may have caused you or your family. The last five and one half years have been an adventure in walking with my Lord. It hasn't been easy; in fact it has at times been very difficult as I grow in the faith and learn to trust Jesus in all things. Do you remember asking us for a Bible at one time because you wanted to look up a reference and we didn't have one in the house? I not only have one now but am continually giving away my own copies so I finally bought one that I keep as my own and a copy or two to give away. I never fail to be amazed at how my Lord speaks through its pages. May the peace of God be upon you."

What an amazing harvest from seed sown years before. We just never know. We plant, others water. But it is God who gives the increase.

Later, while living here in Spruce Grove, Alberta our son Glen, living in Prince George, BC, introduced us by phone to a born again minister and his wife who had served at the organized church in Paint Hills 20 some years after we lived there. They said the Bishop flew in and asked them to leave Paint Hills because they were preaching the gospel instead of just following the liturgy of the church. We met them personally later and had good fellowship with them on several occasions. In their opinion they felt the people will always remain Anglican. They believed even those who accept the Lord, and may for a time leave the church, will come back to the Anglican Church eventually.

About 10 years after we moved out of Paint Hills, the Cree Nation of the James Bay got a settlement of millions of dollars when the government dammed up the Fort George River for a hydro power plant. It destroyed

the traditional hunting and trapping grounds of the people of the area. The lives of the community would change forever.

A road from the south was built into the community. Schools, a gym, a swimming pool, a hockey arena, other stores and motels have been built. Tourists come and the ladies are able to sell the handicrafts they make. Eventually half of their 16 teachers are Native young people.

However, they also have a liquor store, casino and anything else they might want. Consequently, there is also a RCMP detachment and Alcohol Abuse Treatment Centre.

"The Lord gave them their request; but sent leanness to their soul."
Psalm 106:1



Part 2

The years in THICKET PORTAGE, MANITOBA

1968 - 1970



began by giving his testimony in the services. He told us, “At first I would say only a few sentences, begin to cry and then sit down.” But with experience came new courage and Johnny was now a radiant Christian. In the past year he had traveled up the rail line sharing his testimony with the people in Cree to all the Natives.

Returning from a three month furlough, we stopped at The Pas, Manitoba at the Mission’s air base. Imagine our surprise when we learned that the Mission executives had taken our shipment of belongings off the train and stored them in the airport hangar at The Pas. Imagine them being allowed by the station agent to do so. The Executive still wanted us to go to Oxford House. Realizing we hadn’t changed our mind; they put our stuff back onto the train bound for Thicket Portage.

Christian school teachers, Eden Funk with his family (Edna, and five children: Leonard, Louise, Marlene, Eleanor and Esther) and Eden’s sister, Verna, together with Johnny and Mrs. Cook and their family were trying to carry on the work and had been praying that God would send in missionaries. Now they thanked God in every prayer for answering their prayers and sending the missionaries to Thicket.

Johnny and his wife still had a teenage son, Gordon, living with them. They were raising a granddaughter, Donna, as well. We believed God was calling us to go to Thicket Portage to train the believers. This was what we wanted to do.

Thicket Portage was approximately 660 miles north of Winnipeg, Manitoba on the rail line to Churchill. About 200 people, mostly Métis

Chapter 26

The Different Way

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” Isaiah 43:18, 19

For the past year we had been anticipating a transfer from Paint Hills and especially since spring of that year we felt the Lord directing us to enter a different type of work. It was hard to bid farewell to the Native folk at Paint Hills and the work which we had begun there six years ago. But as we prayed, the Lord continued to lay Thicket Portage, Manitoba on our hearts. We knew little about the place until late in June when we were privileged to go in for an overnight visit.

Here we met Johnny Cook and his wife, an elderly Native couple (who we later learned were only in their sixties). For the previous year they had been carrying on the ministry as there had been no resident missionary. Johnny told us he was saved about 14 years before when the mission work was first begun, but that he didn’t really live for the Lord until four years ago. Upon returning from the hospital where he had been treated for TB, he and his wife decided they would not only be Christians, but they would also serve the Lord and help give the Gospel to their people. He



Johnny and Mrs. Cook, native believers at Thicket Portage



Thicket Portage train depot



Johnson's Store & Post Office

(half breeds) and some treaty Indians lived in Thicket with about a dozen white people. The community was old and had no doubt seen better days. For a community so small, it was spread out over a fairly large area with shacks scattered here and there. A gravel road made its way between Johnson's store and the railroad tracks. Calvin Johnson owned a half-ton truck and used it to haul freight from the train station to his store and around town when someone needed a truck.

When approaching Thicket from the South the mission house and chapel were the first



Moving into the Mission house in Thicket

buildings one would see, and were close to the railroad tracks. Men unloaded our belongings from the box car onto Calvin's pickup and he hauled it to the mission house.

A picket fence with peeling white paint half standing, half fallen in front of the house while the rest of the large yard was fenced with wire, sagging here and there. Needing repair, the house left a lot to be desired. It wasn't as nice as the house that we left in Paint Hills. It had the ever popular 'grey asphalt rolled sheet siding'. The main part of the house was a two room building with a closed in porch on one end and a lean-to room on the other end, which had been added at some later point. A second story had been added over all of this at yet another time. The slanted ceiling in the lean-to had not been removed when the rooms above it were built. It was really quite a configuration of rooms, with a steep stairway leading from the ground floor up to the second floor. There had been missionaries living in this house over the years and no doubt each had done their part to improve the house and make it more livable for their family.

In the front yard just off toward the back of the house, was a low squatty 18' x 22' log building that was the chapel with a sign next to the door bearing the name, 'Northern Canada Evangelical Mission'. In the back yard behind the house was a small barn which we didn't use. It had horse manure a least a foot or more deep from who knows when.

Before we could unpack our things into the house, we carried out



NCEM Chapel

garbage of every sort that had been left behind. When we mentioned we wanted to make some changes in the house the Funks offered to buy the new wallboard. When Russ removed the slanted ceiling in the lean-to a huge amount of saw dust, that had been used for insulation, came down on his head. What a mess. He put a level ceiling in, and new wall board and paint. Over time Russell built kitchen cabinets and replaced the linoleum. We even put olive green carpet in the living room; transforming the odd building into what became a comfortable home; even if the floors were uneven and the exterior didn't look so good. Upstairs there were three small bedrooms and a tiny bathroom (for a sponge bath) and the 'honey bucket'. We didn't do much to change the upstairs, even though the floors had linoleum with curled edges, some of which were nailed down, and areas where the pattern was worn off. The floors were uneven as was the ceiling.

The main building in town was a fairly new school and a teachers' residence with two apartments. There was also an outdoor hockey rink. In the center of the village was a squatty log building which was Johnson's Store and included a post



School and outdoor skating rink

office in one corner, run by Calvin's mother. Down the road back toward the rail line was a frame building referred to as the Hotel, owned by a Mr. and Mrs. Freeman. It housed the only phone with a line actually going outside of the community. Up the hill, off to the side of the community, was a small white frame Anglican Church where services were held occasionally when a minister came into town.

Dividing that side of the village from the side where we lived was the train depot and railroad tracks. The Polar Bear Express came through town on its way North from The Pas to Churchill stopping at every community along the rail line every second day; even dropping people off who lived away from the tracks hidden away in the bush. The alternating days it made a return trip back from Churchill to The Pas, again stopping at each

community. We had understood there would be only one passenger train a day traveling either North or South. However we soon learned there were also several freight trains rolling through as well.

Living beside the railroad tracks were two railroad workers and their families. One was a young couple, Tony and Lana Kovach and their baby; the second was Joe*, a middle aged man with a Native common law wife half his age, and their baby. He had replaced a young family by the name of Lamb who left soon after we arrived. Upon briefly meeting Mrs. Lamb, she said to us, "We are so happy to have you missionaries here. It helps keep down the drunkenness and violence." Further down the rail line was a large diesel power plant that provided electricity to the village. The Dept. of Indian Affairs later hired Russell to fill the fuel tank with diesel as needed.

At the opposite end of town from where we lived, down the railroad tracks, was a small white building which was a small grocery store of sorts. It later became the liquor store. Set off back among the trees behind that store was a very nice home where a middle aged woman lived alone. She was a sister to Mr. Freeman, who owned the hotel. I never saw this lady, but occasionally heard stories of her activities. Between her house and our house was an assortment of mostly shacks. There was also a small pump house where everyone in the community came to get water from a community well.

The curse of the community was liquor. The people were able to hop the train going into Thompson, buy a supply of liquor for themselves and others, and return the next day. Everyone except the Christians and one other family were alcoholics and drank daily.



Russ at pulpit, Johnny at organ

Andrew had once been an alcoholic, but one Christmas he woke up from his drunken stupor and realized that because of his drinking addiction, his children would have no Christmas presents. That realization caused him to break the liquor bottles he had stored in boxes under his bed and go 'cold turkey' stopping his drinking habit. He had a couple of young sons near the age of our sons



Johnny Cook's home



Transporting the kids to Bible club

and they lived only two doors away. They often played with our sons. The boys were regulars at Sunday school.

When first arriving at Thicket, Russ spoke Cree to an older man he met on the road. The man responded in English, so Russ switched to English. The man replied, "No. No. You talk Cree." We learned, to our pleasure, that most everyone could speak English. Mrs. Cook was the exception.

It was a privilege to share the ministry with Johnny. Russell would lead the singing accompanied by Johnny on an old pump organ. Russell would preach in English and Johnny would preach a different sermon in Cree. Usually more people came for the Sunday evening evangelistic services than for the Sunday morning Sunday School Classes; but we were pleased and enjoyed teaching them either time.

The weekday meetings were held in the Cooks' home. Their home was a low building that had a roof that was almost flat. During the winter months we gathered the children up by skidoo and sled, and drove them to the Cook's home for Good News club. I'm sure they enjoyed the ride as much as the class. I led the children in choruses with our homemade flip song sheets and Edna accompanied us on her accordion. We used flannel



*Elden Funk, & Johnny Cook
doing renovations in chapel*

graph to teach Bible stories and illustrated stories, most of which I had made. We had various scenes Russell had drawn with chalk on flannel while he was attending Bible College. The children seemed to like the visual aids.

The old chapel needed some work done on it. Johnny had added an eight foot addition on the back end which would serve as a raised stage. It would house the pump organ and a huge pulpit. Also electrical wiring and new wallboard were added. None of it had been completed. Johnny hadn't felt well and had left the renovations unfinished. However, he and Elden were happy to work with Russell to

finish the improvements. Chapel funds were adequate to pay for these improvements. Electricity was available and we used wood heat. It suited our needs quite adequately.

So far so good. We were sure after we got situated we would enjoy the work.

Chapter 27

The Ministry

“For this purpose I have appeared to you to appoint you a minister and a witness ... to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God.” Acts 16b, 18a



Virgie teaching Good News Club

We enjoyed meeting the people and it was so good to be able to communicate freely with all the people. It was especially good to have Christian friends. Immediately upon settling in we began Sunday school for the children followed by a Sunday school for the adults. Only the Christians attended the adult Sunday School class and they helped with the children's Sunday school. We had an evangelistic service on Sunday evenings with attendance varying. Besides the Tuesday afternoon Good



Edna Funk & Virgie with Good News Club kids

News Club for the children, on Wednesday evening we met in the Cooks' home for Bible study and prayer. Then on Friday we often had a youth fellowship time with group games and Bible lessons for the teenagers.

Besides the Cooks, there had been others who had made decisions for the Lord over the years, but had fallen away. Some like Joshua had even taught Sunday school for a time but was now living a life of sin. I believe it



Verna Funk with young people's group

is true what has been said, that 'there is no one more deplorable and miserable than a backslidden Christian'. We believed there were people who were sick of the pleasures of the world, and we had the answer to what they needed.

Frank* was a teenager who had accepted the Lord under the ministry of a former Christian school teacher who had taken him into his home when conditions in Frank's grandfather's home, where he was living, were intolerable. Ken Neufeld led Frank to the Lord and during the summer months Frank attended a Cree Bible School at Island Lake, Manitoba. Frank was presently attending high school in Southern Manitoba, living with Ken's parents.

Early in September Rose* and another teenage girl had come to us. Rose said, "I would like to become a Christian." When we asked her why, she said, "Because of the way I am living. It is so bad. I have been considering becoming a Christian for a long time already." So we had the privilege of leading her to the Lord. The girls stayed a little while longer and Rose said her friend, Betty,* would also like to be a Christian. So we prayed the sinner's prayer with Betty. However the next day Rose came over alone. She said, "Betty has decided to quit being a Christian. She says it's just too hard."

About a month later Rose's brother and his wife had a baby that died at birth. They grieved without hope because their baby had died without being baptized. They asked Johnny and Russell to come sing hymns, read the Bible and talk about God at a 'wake' beside the casket of the baby before burial. This was a carryover from their pagan beliefs that evil spirits could enter the body of the dead and torment the people. People came and went all night and food was served. It actually became a social time as the people visited with others whom they had not seen for a while. Christians attended wakes as an opportunity to share the gospel with the mourners. In the following weeks the grieving mother made beadwork and sewed parkas until all hours of the night, so she could earn money to hire a priest to come say a mass for the salvation of their dead baby.

One night we were awakened at 1:30 a.m. by sounds of someone screaming. When we could stand it no longer, Russell went over to the house a few houses away from ours to see what was going on. A man and his son were fighting. The mother and girls had run outside barefooted and were looking in the windows. They were screaming in fear and sobbing because of the effects of alcohol on their family. We were so touched with compassion for these people whom Satan held captive.

On more than one occasion Russell would step in and physically break up a fight between drunken men. He would often say, "You are friends. You don't really want to fight each other." Usually they apologized to Russ. He made them apologize to each other and hug each other, before they went their separate ways.

Joyce* was a 26 year old mother. She came and unburdened her heart to us. She was living common-law. She said, "I would like to become a Christian, but what is the use as I am living in sin every day?" Her husband wouldn't divorce her. But she didn't know if he would take her back, now that she had a two year old daughter with this other man. All she had now was food and a comfortable home; but she had no joy and no peace. It did seem hopeless, but God had called us to go and make disciples. Some of those who followed Jesus were less than honorable.

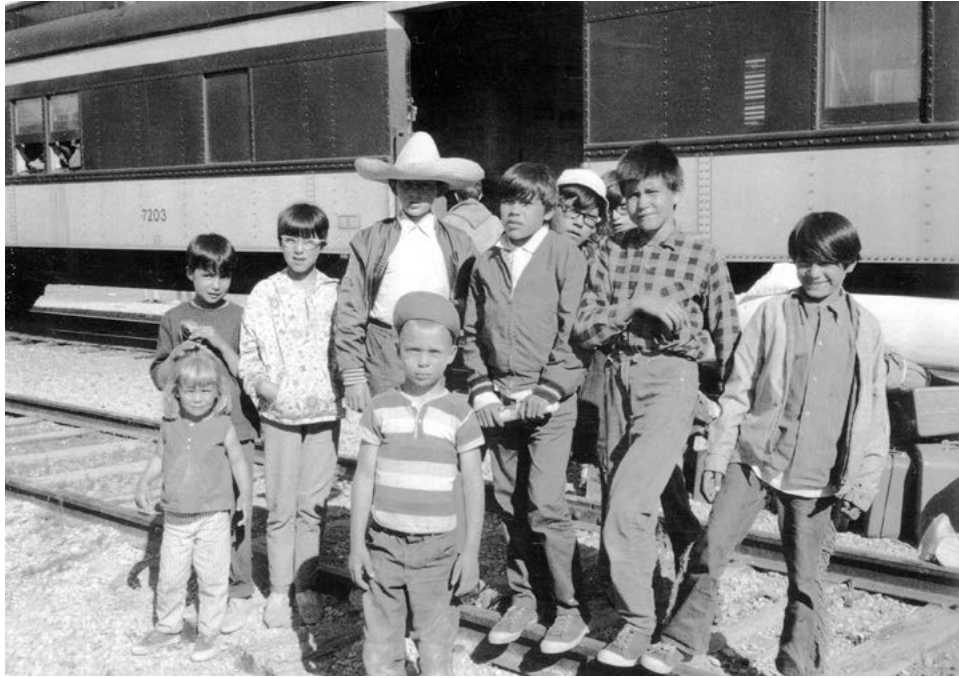


Sunday School group at Thicket

Johnny playing the organ and Edna's father playing the harmonica, they provided music; entering enthusiastically into the evening's program. It gave a festive feel to the service. The audience loved them.

The nativity story was acted out by our 'semiprofessional' actors who looked like the children in our Sunday school class. Even with glittering garlands on their heads and on their sleeves, they still looked like our blond haired daughters while the shepherds and wise men looked like our sons and the other Sunday school boys. It was so much fun to have a group of responsive people to work with and an audience of people proud of their children, who came to hear the Christmas program. People came for the program that usually never came to services. If there were special services of any sort, people would usually come.

I arranged a Christmas program with costumes for the Sunday school group and all of the regular attendees participated. Even Edna's father, who was visiting the family over the Christmas holidays, participated. With Frank singing and playing the guitar,



Kids leaving for Bible camp



Arriving at Camp Midway by boat

That summer we had our first experience as camp workers. We helped get Camp Midway ready for the summer camps. On one occasion Jay Jennings, who was cooking for the workers that were preparing the camp grounds for camp, mixed up pancake mix storing it in a Tupperware container the night before he would use it. He put the big lid on, but couldn't find the smaller lid to cover the pouring spout. Thinking it should be okay he left it and went to bed. Arising early the next morning to prepare breakfast, Jay poured the pancake mix out of the Tupperware container onto the hot grill. Several times the spout would get plugged so he would shake the container and try pouring again. After doing this a number of times, he became impatient and took off the lid. Stirring the mix with a wooden spoon, he found a mouse in the pancake mix. Evidently it had crawled through the spout during the night and suffocated. Jay fished it out and laid it on the shelf and proceeded to fry the remainder of the pancakes. After the men had enjoyed their breakfast, Jay told them what had happened during the night and showed them the mouse covered with pancake mix. The men all got a big laugh out of that.

We helped the Thicket Portage children go to camp, first by train to Pikwitonei, about 40 miles north of Thicket, then by a large flat bottomed homemade boat with benches another several miles to where the camp was held. It was exciting to be involved with camp work. Russell was a counselor and I was camp nurse. Our own children were younger than the campers but were allowed to attend because we were there as staff. Our children loved the experiences of participating right along with the other campers.

One summer Russell wanted to get his 23 foot freighter canoe to camp but freight on the train was costly. He asked Joshua if there was a way he could travel through the lake system with the canoe instead of going by train. Joshua said, "Yes, there are some portages but it can be done." Joshua offered to help Russ and show him the way. They went to the West to a small creek that was often blocked with beaver dams. They had to get out of the canoe and drag it over the beaver dams four or five times. A trip that should have taken two hours in ideal conditions took six hours. Russ paid Joshua some money and bought his train ticket back to Thicket.

We had left the large gasoline powered generator we had bought from Missionary Supply Co. at Paint Hills for the next missionary when we to moved out. Since no missionary went in to Paint Hills, the generator was no longer needed there. The camp here could use it. We asked the Hudson's Bay store manager to ship the generator out by barge then rail to Pikwitonei and we gave it to the camp. The camp paid the shipping costs.



Russell with campers at Camp Midway

Russell helped to build cabins to improve the campgrounds belonging to the Continental Mission (later renamed Midway Leadership). Our home churches donated sports equipment and some of our supporters gave money to buy materials to build cabins for the camp. We appreciated the missionaries from this sister mission and camp was a highlight of the following summers.

Many campers made decisions for the Lord. Some memorized entire chapters in the Bible to win a week at Bible camp the following year. Camp was a wonderful ministry.

The Mission had not been able to place missionaries into Oxford House. We felt responsible for the village being without missionaries, so we offered to go conduct a Vacation Bible School in Oxford House the next summer. The Mission plane flew us into Oxford with our equipment and food to last for two weeks. We stayed in the mission house that had been vacant for a year and had been vandalized. We held our VBS in the chapel, which also had been vandalized. The mission house was a long way from the village. For some reason, we had failed to bring matches with us. The pilot gave us the four he had, but we needed more; so we began the mile long walk to the store. Along the way we stopped to talk to people letting them know what we would be doing in the community for the next two weeks.

As was expected, the children came to the mission and to the Vacation

Bible School. They came out of curiosity, if nothing else. We had a very enjoyable two weeks ministering to them. And we prayed that one day missionaries would reside there once again. Missionaries did eventually move in and there is now an active Native church in Oxford House.

Russell flew into Oxford House sometime later with some of the Mission men in the Mission plane to minister to the people. Another time he flew into other small villages that had no resident missionary.

He also taught a short term (two week) Bible school at Wabowden where missionaries with Continental Mission were stationed. He especially enjoyed teaching the Bible as teaching is his spiritual gift.

An Indian man living in Cross Lake, another Native community, came to visit our village. He had sold his dog team and trapping supplies because he said he had received a vision that the end of the world was near and he should go preach the gospel to everyone. He also said he had another vision portraying Thicket Portage as being a frozen manure pile and he believed God had sent him to thaw it.

Steve had been playing outdoors and had a headache. When he came in, we gave him some Aspirin and told him to lie down. The man wanted to cast out the evil spirit, but we said, "We've given him Aspirin. Just leave him alone." We asked the man to come to speak with Johnny and us at the Cooks' home. The man spoke only of his visions, and didn't talk about the Lord Jesus. Johnny advised us not to become involved with the man as it would only confuse the people. There were a number of religious groups that came through and wanted to have meetings. We listened to Johnny's advice as to whom we should welcome and whom not.



*Marianne Sinclair,
our foster daughter*

Often when we went to the Cook's home, their son Gordon was hanging around. He played the guitar and we enjoyed talking with him; although he usually kept his distance not becoming too involved with us. We also met the Cooks' daughters: Edith, Elizabeth, Stella, Nora and Isabelle, who did not live in Thicket but came home to visit their parents. They were delightful women and we enjoyed meeting and

visiting with them. The Cooks also had a son, Samuel, who came and went from time to time.

We hadn't been in Thicket long, less than a year, when Marianne came with a request. She was a ward of the province and had been living south of The Pas with foster parents. Her foster family was good to her, but she wanted to live closer to her own people.

After praying about having Marianne move in with us, we approached Social Services on her behalf and they were happy to relocate Marianne to her home community under our care. We insisted that since we had three children of our own, we would require Marianne to 'live like we would expect our children to live'. That meant she would have to attend school, be home in the evenings (not roaming the village anyway), not drinking or smoking. She would attend church services and participate in work around the house as we directed. Social services would pay a small remuneration for her keep and give an allowance for her clothing. Each fall and each spring Marianne and I would shop the catalog for her seasonal wardrobe. It was quite adequate and she was better taken care of than other girls in the village. I escorted her to Thompson for dental treatment and it was as if she were our daughter.

Marianne fit in well with our family as our children were younger than she. She was sixteen, whereas Steve was 9, Glen, 6 and Sheryl, 3 years old. We even took Marianne with us to Kansas and Oklahoma for Christmas one year and introduced her to our families. Marianne helped in our house and with our children and they liked her. She cleaned the chapel each week; washing the floor and arranging the benches. The white people soon realized they could trust Marianne to babysit their children and were happy to hire her.

Shortly before Spring break, Marianne said she'd like to visit her former foster parents during the Spring break. Thinking that was probably a good idea for her not to loaf around Thicket for those 10 days, I phoned her Social Worker in Thompson to request this trip for her. Marianne left and to my understanding she would be gone for the duration of the break; but when the time came for her to return home, she didn't arrive on the train. Alarmed, I phoned her Social Worker to report Marianne hadn't returned after her visit to the South. The Social Worker replied nonchalantly that she was aware of the situation. Marianne had contacted her, saying she had gotten off the train at The Pas to visit her biological mother instead of going to her former foster parents. She became involved with drinking

alcohol with her mother. But 'she wanted to come back to live with us'. Would we agree?

The Social Worker said, "It was a good experience for Marianne. She has had an opportunity to see the life you were offering her as well as see the other side of life." We didn't even have to think it over. We knew it just wouldn't work for her to come live with us anymore. She had deceived us and betrayed our trust. We just couldn't have her coming and leaving at will to pursue her former lifestyle. We had our own children to consider.



Homes scattered in the community

Marianne returned to Thicket to pick up her personal belongings. She wasn't the same cheerful girl she was before. As she was leaving she defiantly threw her Bible back into our yard.

One night a young fellow came to our door. He said his girlfriend was sick. I wasn't hired to be the nurse as Manitoba Health wouldn't hire a registered nurse for a community as small as Thicket Portage. I said I'd work for lay dispenser wages, but they said they couldn't do that according to the nurses' union. So instead they hired a woman with no training to dispense medications. On occasion I was called upon to help someone, giving advice or some treatment, since they knew I was a nurse. And I was hired as 'stand by' when the lay dispenser was away. I was to keep track of the 'actual time' I worked and they would pay me accordingly. That amounted to practically nothing. Thirty minutes now and ten minutes another time. One weekend however, I did see 14 patients and most of them needed to be transferred to the hospital in Thompson. But because I did not have a nursing job during these years, my nursing license expired.

"What's her problem?" I asked the young fellow at my door, wondering if I needed to take Aspirin along. Maybe I should take a hot

water bottle, ice pack, bandages possibly saving me from having to make an extra trip later with the supplies.

“I don’t know,” the fellow said. “Come quickly. She’s really in a lot of pain.”

I left immediately with the fellow walking as fast as I could. We went about a block from our house to a small shack. Upon arriving at their house it was very obvious the girl was about to give birth. I didn’t have time to make any preparations before a normal healthy baby boy was born. But he was not welcomed. The mother wanted me to take the baby and keep it myself.

“I’ll have to wait until I can talk that over with my husband,” I said.

Since arriving at Thicket, people were often dropping children off at our house. Sometimes parents were drinking and/or had left their child/children unattended and some others brought those children to us to keep until the parents would come for them. We kept various children before social services would come in and take the child out for placement in foster care; but to take a baby ‘for keeps’ would change our lives forever. The NCEM strongly discouraged missionaries from taking foster children into their homes due to problems foster children often caused the missionary family. Instead of helping the child, the child was often a grave hindrance to the mission work.

Later Russell and I decided we couldn’t take the baby into our family, and the baby went to Social Services. We never saw him again.

The railroad worker and his Native common law wife Jane* were having problems. For a short time they brought their beautiful daughter, not yet two years old, to stay with us. One day as I was upstairs I saw her step into space as she started walking down the steps. I screamed for Russell, who quickly looked up and seeing the danger was able to rush to the bottom of the steps. He saw her flip two complete rounds and still caught her before she reached the bottom, unhurt.

The man thought if his common law marriage broke up, he would have no claim to his little girl; so he decided to marry the mother and adopt the little girl. They came to our house and asked Russ to marry them. We didn’t know at that time what the baby’s mother’s legal status with her previous husband was. And we could see this was not a good arrangement, so Russell refused to marry them. The man was angry and threatened to have Russ’ clerical license taken away; because if a minister or justice of peace is the only one available to marry someone in the community, they

could not refuse. The couple did go to Thompson and were married shortly by a RC priest.

But a marriage license didn’t improve conditions in the home. John* kicked Jane out, declaring her an unfit mother. The state sided with the mother in the custody suit. After several weeks John called Jane to come back to his home and she did for the sake of her baby. We didn’t ever hear that conditions improved or the end result of the paternity suit of the little girl.

We never knew what to expect next from the people among whom we lived. Joshua had accepted the Lord some years before but he had fallen back into sin and was far from the Lord by the time we moved into town. One Sunday evening Joshua came into the service very drunk. During the service as the room got warm, he fell asleep and slid to the floor under the bench in front of where he had been sitting. He lay there. No one bothered to help him up. We all were going to let him ‘sleep it off’. Russ continued preaching, using an illustration of the one who was lost without Christ, as if they were drowning. They needed to be rescued. Joshua raised his arm up and responded loudly, “I’m not drowning.”

The next day a young girl came running to our house. She said, “Come quickly. Joshua is eating the Bible.” Sure enough, Joshua was tearing the pages from the Bible and eating them. He had taken Russell’s message literally to feed on the Word of God. He didn’t comprehend the scriptural cliché in his drunken stupor.

When he was home in Thicket Portage, Frank often came to our house. He liked the records we had, especially the one with the song by Larry Crump, “If the Lord makes you a plumber, be a plumber for the Lord.” Frank wanted to borrow some of our records, including the one by Larry Crump. We loaned it to him, but he didn’t return it and we forgot about it.

Frank sang at our services, playing his guitar. He was a likeable fellow and an exceptionally nice looking teenager. He chummed around with another young fellow, nicknamed Peanuts and a fellow called Pronto, when he was in town.

About this time Frank’s grandfather became ill and Frank left school, to come home to be with his grandfather. Before his grandfather died, he sat up in bed and raised his arms saying, “I see Jesus, He is reaching out to me to take me to heaven.”

Frank told us later, “If my grandfather could live a life of sin like he did, and still go to heaven, why am I struggling now to live for the Lord?”

Frank didn't return to finish high school. He back slid from that day on. 2 Corinthians 11:14, "*Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*" Russ tried to explain to Frank that not all visions or dreams come from God. We are told to test the spirits to be sure the message is confirmed by God's Word. We believed that Satan had used this vision to deceive Frank, causing him to fall away from the Lord.

When one of the men in the village died rather unexpectedly, the family washed the body and bought some new clothing to dress the man in and shipped the body in a new pine box by rail to Thompson for an autopsy. When the body was returned a few days later, the family opened the box and to their horror found the body unclothed, with the clothing rolled up in a ball, and his internal organs placed in a black garbage bag. Russell contacted the authorities to complain about the manner in which the body had been returned to the family, but no apology was made.

In March of 1970 John Unger came on the mission plane to conduct evangelistic services. He had been our language teacher in Meadow Lake when we first came north and was fluent in Cree. Russell drove out by skidoo to the plane which had landed on the frozen lake to get him. On their way back to town, they stopped at a number of houses to invite the people to come to the services. A number of the people did come and some responded to the Lord. The chapel was packed out on Saturday and Sunday evenings with 60-70 people and still half full on the following



Bible Study & prayer meeting group

evenings. Five first time decisions were made for Christ and three for restoration.

Those making first time decisions were Jackie* and her 15 year old daughter Beth*, our 19 year old neighbor John, who was a regular at our services, Annie, who was a sister to Mr. Cook, and Evelyn Mercredi. Evelyn's son Paul* and her 19 year old daughter Rose, reaffirmed their faith as did our foster daughter, Marianne. We were rejoicing in the lost sheep who were found.

Five of these were present at prayer meeting on that Wednesday and prayed aloud thanking God for their salvation and prayed for strengthening in the faith and courage to witness for Christ. They prayed for the salvation of their unsaved husbands, children and parents. Mr. Mercredi looked on skeptically. "If my wife remains true to her commitment to Jesus for one month, I too will become a Christian," he said. Evelyn went through the community witnessing to all the people about her faith in Jesus Christ. Never had we seen such a bold witness for Christ. We even heard from people up the rail line that Evelyn was at the train depot witnessing about the Lord.

An event which came unexpectedly, and one which we can't at all understand the reason for, came to us late on that Saturday. Rose and a cousin came running to our house saying "Come quickly. My mother is dying." Upon our arrival at the Mercredi home we found Evelyn had left this life and slipped into eternity just five days after receiving the Lord Jesus as her personal Savior. Apparently this was caused by a heart attack. We can only take comfort in the fact that she was ready to go. She had never gone back on her commitment to Jesus Christ. With Evelyn gone, her husband found it too hard to come to Christ. He even believed God had punished his wife for betraying her old religion. Rose came daily to study the Bible with me for four months, until she too got 'tired of being a Christian'.

out of my private life. You had no right to tell Susie she couldn't go swimming or hang out with me. You leave me and my friends alone."

One day Russell was driving the skidoo pulling Steve on cross country skis behind the skidoo as Steve held onto a tow rope. It was fun and required only the ability to keep both of the skis going in the same direction.

Russ stopped at Frank's grandmother's house to repair an electrical problem. After the repair was finished Russ came out of the house finding a drunk Frank sitting on the skidoo pulling the starter rope again and again trying to start it. Russ told Frank to get off the skidoo. He then jumped off and said, "Are you going to make me?" Russ said, "I don't have to as you are already off."

Russell then sat down on the skidoo, turned the key on, pulled the starter rope and started the skidoo. Before Russell realized what was happening, Frank ran toward the skidoo, reached across Russ and jerked the key out, killing the engine.

Russ got off and started walking toward Frank saying, "Give me the key." Frank then threw the key into the snow. As Russell bent over to search for the key, he suddenly thought that was a dumb thing to do. For sure Frank would hit him on the back of his head and knock him down, which fortunately he didn't do.

After finding the key in the snow Russell got back on the skidoo, told Steve to take hold of the towing rope and then started the skidoo. Driving only a few feet, Russell saw Frank coming to take a swing at him; but Frank's fist only glanced off his shoulder. After stopping the skidoo and walking toward Frank, Frank started to cry. Russell told Frank to leave them alone or he'd be sorry. But seeing him cry moved Russell to compassion for Frank so he put his arms around Frank and said, "Okay. Go to the house." Just as they were about to drive away, Frank ran at Russ again and grabbed his parka sleeve tearing it from the shoulder seam. Frank hung on till the sleeve was completely reversed, but still attached at the wrist band.

Russell got off the skidoo and wanted so much to punch Frank once and for all. He felt justified and could have done it, but God restrained him. Frank started to cry again. So Russell put his arm around Frank and hugged him; maybe this was finally over. But 'No', as Russell began to drive away, Frank ran and grabbed the tow rope and gave it a jerk sending Steve 'head over heels' into the snow. Now Steve started crying, so Russ helped Steve onto the back of the skidoo and told Frank to leave him alone.

Russell then realized a large group of people had gathered around and

Chapter 28

The Miserable One

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:2

First, we heard reports of Frank drinking, and then shacking up here and there. He said it was his goal in life to destroy as many Christians as was possible.

Even in his drunken stupor, Frank would declare, "God wants me to be a preacher." We thought it was mockery for him to even say that, when he was living such a sinful life.

Arriving on a train one day was one of the missionaries' daughters. She had come to visit Frank. She had met him while he was living for the Lord and was a friend of her parents. She wanted to stay night with us while hanging out with Frank during the daytime. Russ shook his head. "Frank isn't the fellow you remember him to be. He has backslidden and has been living loosely around town." Susie* was shocked and very saddened. Russ advised her to get back on the train and go home right away. She shouldn't spend time with Frank. He was up to no good. If not that, then, Russ offered to pay her rail ticket to Bible camp if she would go there. "Go anywhere, but don't stay in town." Sadly she left town to go to the Bible camp as Russ directed her.

The next time Russ saw Frank, he and a friend Pedro*, were riding around on a dirt bike. When they saw Russ, they turned the bike and headed straight across the school yard toward him. They came to a skidding stop. Frank got off the bike and waved his fist at Russell shouting, "You stay

had been observing the commotion. With heart beating wildly, Russ and Steve drove home carrying the skis on the Skidoo with them.

When they arrived home Russell was so emotionally drained that he had difficulty walking to the house and actually couldn't walk into the house before sitting down on the outside step. He then realized this had been more than a conflict. It was a spiritual battle.

A few days later Frank came to the house as if nothing had happened and asked if Russell would help him fill out his income tax forms. This was a shock to us but the Lord seemed to say he was to do this without any reference to the occasion before. He was to do this out of love believing that God wasn't through with Frank yet.

Frank came over one night a few weeks later and sat down at our table setting a bottle of wine on the table between himself and Russell. I went quickly to draw the curtains before anyone would see them sitting at the table with a bottle of wine between them and would misunderstand. Russ tried to persuade Frank to give up the life of sin he was living. Talking didn't seem to get through Frank's foggy, drunken mind. Russell picked up the Bible and started reading aloud from 1 John 1:1, verse after verse. He kept reading. When he got to Chapter 4:8-10 he read, "*This is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*" Frank looked up and brushed his hair back from his face saying, "You mean He loved me that much?"

"Yes, Frank, God loved you that much. Won't you let him be Lord of your life?" Frank stood up, saying: "No. Alcohol is my lord right now, I'll make him Lord of my life when I'm sober tomorrow," and he walked out leaving our house.

The next day Russell decided he had to once again confront Frank with his need to surrender his life to Christ. He went first to Frank's grandmother's house, but Frank had slipped out the back door. Russ went to the next house only to learn Frank had just left there and gone on elsewhere. He had seen Russ coming and wanted to escape.

Russ kept trying to track him down for days, but to no avail. Finally when he did see Frank, he said, "Frank, I am not going to keep on running after you. You know where I am and when you get ready to come back to the Lord, you know where to find me." Frank told us later that had really frightened him to think we would not be running after him anymore. He was being left on his own. He was responsible to God for himself.

One Wednesday night we were having prayer meeting at the Cooks' home. Frank in a drunken stupor burst in the door and everyone became

quiet. Frank said, "Why don't you pray? Isn't that what you're supposed to do at prayer meetings? Pray around the circle?"

After a few seconds of shocked silence, I began to pray aloud for Frank, that the Lord would convict him of his sin and bring him back into fellowship. Frank fell on his knees, right in the middle of our circle, with his face in his hands, head on the floor. He said, "Oh, God. I'm in a holy place." He began to cry. Russ got up and walked over to Frank but as he reached to put his hand on Frank's shoulder, Frank got up and went toward the door.

Russ followed him putting his arms around Frank saying, "Frank, God loves you." Frank pushed him off as he ran out into the dark.

Later that night (well after midnight as we were already asleep) there was pounding on the door. Russ went downstairs to see who was there. Frank was lying there in the snow and crying. Russ helped him up and brought him into our living room. Frank said, "When I came to the prayer meeting, I knew I didn't belong there. So I left and went to the dance hall, but I didn't belong there either. I didn't belong with the Christians and I didn't belong with the world. I didn't belong anywhere. I went home and loaded my gun and was going to shoot myself. I knelt down in the snow and had the rifle barrel in my mouth ready to pull the trigger when I remembered the words you said, 'Frank, God loves you.' I dropped the gun and came right over here. I want to listen to that record of George Beverly Shea singing, 'Lord, I'm coming home.'"

We put the record on and let him listen to it quietly. I got some bedding and we fixed a bed for Frank to sleep on our chesterfield hide-a-bed. (Years later he told us it was the first time anyone had made a bed with white sheets for him and had given him a pillow.) He was soon fast asleep. We went upstairs, praying for Frank until we fell asleep. The next morning Russ got up at 6:00 and went down stairs to be there when Frank woke up; but he was already gone.

Some of the other missionaries, who knew Frank, were praying that God would remove him from this life because he was such a hindrance to the gospel. We couldn't pray that way. We prayed God would do whatever He needed to do to bring Frank back into repentance and spare his life until he made that recommitment.

Because there were so few people that could be depended on to do manual work around the village, Russell was often hired to do the odd jobs. And we needed the money. Our support wasn't keeping up with inflation. He was hired by Indian Affairs to do electrical wiring in some of the homes

and do repairs. As he went into the homes people told Russ story after story about Frank. Everyone was disturbed. Even people who were not Christians did not like to see the life Frank was now living. They much preferred the former Frank.

Time passed and nothing much changed. Life was one continuous challenge after another.

It was the middle of the afternoon one day, as Russ was walking down the trail, when he met Frank. Frank was carrying a .303 hunting rifle. Frank had been drinking again and as they met on the trail he pointed the gun at Russell's chest. "Are you ready to die?" Frank asked.

"Yes," Russ replied. "But the question is, are you ready?" Frank laughed in a smug manner, lowered the gun, and said, "I was just checking."

Russ came home and lay down on the bed, his heart pounding wildly. He felt faint. Frank could easily have pulled the trigger. Then what would have happened to Frank? Would he have to spend the rest of his life in jail? Would he have ever come back into fellowship with the Lord?

Chapter 29

The Family and our Friends

"May the Lord bless you and protect you, May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you His favor and give you His peace," Numbers 6:24-26

There were some advantages in living along the rail line. We could now go to Thompson once a month to shop for groceries. We could buy fresh foods. We bought fresh milk and froze it in our deep freeze. When we thawed it, we mixed it half and half with powdered milk. We couldn't disguise the powdered milk taste enough to fool our children as they still did not like it.

On occasion Russell went moose hunting with Elden and his young teenage son, Leonard. Sometimes he went alone and stayed overnight. He slept inside his -40° F. Woods sleeping bag, under a canvas tarp propped up as a lean-to to protect him against the weather. And for sure it was snowing when he got up the next morning. As he set about to light a fire, he heard rustling in the nearby bush. He grabbed his gun and watched. Near the ground a short distance away he saw the legs of a moose. The moose was headed toward the creek some 40 feet away. Russ started running toward the creek as well, knowing that the noise of the moose breaking through the brush would cover the sound of his movements. There they stood, looking at each other.

The moose was in perfect position, Russ was ready with his .303 army rifle, but he took one step more and hesitated one minute too long checking through the thick falling snow to see if it had antlers. The moose bolted and as Russ looked up, he saw only the rump of the moose as it disappeared into the bush. A perfect opportunity lost. The hunter was in the right place. The hunter was ready with the right equipment. But one moment's

distraction and the opportunity was gone. That's how we felt at times in our witnessing. A lost opportunity can never be regained.

Another time Russ was able to kill a moose, which provided us with fresh meat for a whole year. I found if I ate wild meat every day, I enjoyed it much more than just eating it occasionally.

Often we were invited to the Funks' house for meals. Actually we spent a lot of time with them. Edna made the best buns and she had a never ending supply of homemade bread, pies and cookies of every sort.

Our children, the Funk children, Donna Cook, plus other of the village kids were out sliding down the hill on their toboggans one Sunday afternoon. It was a lot of fun for them while we adults visited at the house. The toboggan Marlene rode went out of control and slid sideways crashing into a tree. She lay crumpled on the ground in agony. Her sisters came running, telling us to come. We made a stretcher to take her home. I sat with her all night to calm her fears and offer what relief I could to ease her pain and anxiety. The next day she was flown out to Thompson on a helicopter for medical treatment. When she came home a week later on the train, her hip and leg were entirely encased in a cast. (Her friends all got to see a bedpan be used for the first time. That was unbelievable to them.) And for the rest of that winter, the outdoor fun wasn't nearly as much fun.

Glen turned six that summer after we had lived in Thicket for a year. He started school with the other two dozen kids his age. Verna was his teacher and taught him the joys of reading, writing and arithmetic. But after school he learned the other things that made life more exciting but posed a threat to his very life. He ran with the older boys behind the truck, grabbing hold and hanging on for dear life, all the while trying to climb on while it bumped its way down the dusty road. Sometimes they made it on, and sometimes they didn't; but they tried again next time they had a chance. No one was seriously hurt.

One afternoon Glen came home with his jeans wet and oily. The fellows had been jumping from one 45 gallon drum to the next in a cesspool of water and oil behind the generator shed where diesel fuel and water had been disposed. The barrels were floating and rolled as the boys jumped from one to the other. It was fun until Glen found himself looking through the black slimy oily water and suddenly he was afraid he wouldn't be able to find his way to the surface or catch his breath ever again. He was terrified. He was disoriented and didn't know which way was up. He clawed with his hands into the mud until he finally reached the surface at the edge of the

pond. God must have had a purpose for him, to have saved his life, yet again; especially since he was such a daring and often accident prone child.

On the way back from one furlough the kids were fussy. They were crowded and the trip took days. We stopped at various places where people gave us canned jams, and frozen chickens, etc. We took whatever we received and just loaded it in, crowding the kids more and more. Isn't that what missionaries do? Take everything anyone offers them for free?

We had borrowed Elden and Edna's car for our trip to the states. We left the car at Wabowden and took the train the rest of the way home to Thicket.

Returning from our furlough we brought back a Siamese cat Milton and Marie had given us. It had never been outside except when we took it into our car for the trip back from Oklahoma to Thicket Portage. It was beautiful, and had only one bad trait and that was its howl and did it ever howl! Siamese cats are known for that.

Elden told us while we were on furlough our female husky, North Star, had gotten loose. Evidently she ran loose for a couple of weeks until someone reported they saw her caught in a lynx snare. That was the second of our three original dog team gone. It was the end of any hopes of ever having a litter of pure bred puppies for sale.

We had company from the Mission and extra bodies in the house



Bud Elford, Jay Jenning & Art Wellwood visit

meant it was hot in the house. With a wood stove, we couldn't get the heat down fast enough to a comfortable temperature. We propped the back-door open, just a bit. Now that was more of a temptation than the cat could handle. When no one was watching, she snuck

out the open door. She carefully walked through the grass when she noticed an animal; a Siberian husky dog. She only wanted to be friends and she walked toward him, rubbing her soft body and tail against his leg. But to the dog, a cat wasn't a friend. His territory had been trespassed and he

spared no time in protest. He ripped into the fragile skin and within seconds the cat lay mangled with bones protruding. Hearing its cries of anguish, Russell rushed to the back yard. There was nothing that could be done except to put the cat out of her misery and it took only 1 shot.

For little girls the temptations were of a different nature; like licking the ice crystals from the rim of the burning barrel. One lick and Sheryl's tongue held fast. She began to cry to no avail. Her tongue wouldn't let go. Her Daddy came to her rescue while I brought a kettle of hot water. We poured it onto the rim of the barrel and the tongue was released, but how frightening and how painful.

For grown up girls the temptations were different again. It was a beautiful sunshiny Sunday afternoon when Verna, the school teacher, accepted an invitation to go riding on the skidoo with Calvin, the store owner. When it started getting dark, and was time for Verna to be back to play the organ at church for the evening service, they hadn't yet returned. Her brother Elden came to us saying he was really concerned because Calvin had been drinking and they may have gotten into trouble. He suggested we go hunt for them. Driving our skidoos out on the trails there was no sign of their skidoo. Elden contacted the RCMP in Thompson but was told they would not start searching for the lost snowmobilers until they had been missing 24 hours. Now 24 hours was too long when the temperature was below freezing and it was already dark.

Out in the bush the skidoo had run out of gas. Calvin and Verna began to walk. She was dressed appropriately with mukluks and a fur-trimmed parka and warm mitts. Calvin wore only jeans, a leather jacket and work boots. Calvin by now was feeling the effects of the alcohol he had consumed and stumbled as they tried walking through the deep snow. Verna tried to keep him upright, but snow got into his boots that he wore with the laces untied. Fortunately they found an old trapper's cabin and went in. Verna lit a fire and tried to keep it burning all night with whatever twigs she could find or break off the trees; while Calvin struggled to get his boots off intending to rub his feet to get circulation into his toes. But his feet were frozen into the boots. When there was even just a bit of thawing, the frostbite hurt so badly, it was unbearable.

When the sun came up the following morning, they left the cabin to head for home. They began to walk in the general direction they thought Thicket Portage to be. The Johnsons had hired a small charter plane that was searching the area when they spotted the lost snowmobilers. The rescue was made and Verna and Calvin were brought back to Thicket 15 hours

after they were noted to be lost. Verna suffered no ill effects other than feeling really cold, as she was dressed warmly. Calvin suffered frost bite to his feet and in the end he lost half of one foot plus the toes on the other foot. He was sent to Winnipeg for amputation and therapy for many months to learn to walk again with prosthesis.

We decided it was time the kids start learning that to have money you had to work for it. We made a chart and taped it onto the side of the refrigerator. It was important to keep them accountable for their tasks. Each day when they had made their bed, they got to mark it on the graph. Brushing their teeth gave another mark. Reading their Bible, helping with assigned chores like washing dishes, drying dishes, or carrying out the garbage, all of which they rotated doing week by week, earned another mark. By the end of the week each child could have potentially earned 25 points or 25 cents for their allowance to spend as they wished. For a while this was an exciting challenge, but after a while they needed some prodding. All three learned to work and work hard in their early years, which they all three do today.

Chapter 30

The Pathetic Ones

“His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin. He will die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.” Proverbs 5:22, 23

Joshua’s wife, Margie*, stood by our back door. Although she was a middle aged woman, she was still popping her bubble gum and pulling it out of her mouth stretching it as far as she could. Putting it back in her mouth she blew another bubble. Taking it out of her mouth again, she stuck it down into our water barrel and put it back into her mouth, much as the young girls had done at Paint Hills.

Russell stood by the large wood stove and asked her what she wanted. “Why did you come?”

Margie said, “Is your wife home? Come, let’s make a baby.” Russell told her to leave at once.

Steve brought the mail home after school one day and as the door was locked he laid the mail on the floor of the enclosed porch next to the back door. He noticed that a yellow box had come and knew that it was slides from film we had sent away to be developed. He went out to play.

At supper that night Steve asked, “what were the slides about that we got today?” We told him there were no slides. “Yes, there were. I laid them in the porch right by the door,” he insisted. Then he remembered seeing two of the Roberts* girls leaving our porch earlier that afternoon.

As soon as supper was over, Russell walked back toward the Roberts’ house, which was setting off behind our yard toward the bush. Along the path he found several slides. The trail of slides led right to the outhouse in their yard. In fact, Russell saw a number of slides that had been thrown into the toilet hole. As is obvious, we only retrieved those found on the path.



Our backyard with Robert’s house in background

Sam* worked in Thompson, and often his children ran wild. His oldest son was already in prison, and it seemed the younger girls were headed the same way. Often when they should be in school, they were seen to be playing hooky in an empty box car.

Russell decided to go talk to the family about the girls. He went to the house and told the mother about the slides her girls had stolen from our porch. Russ said the girls needed to be punished for stealing or they would end up in jail like their brother.

“The police told me not to hit my kids.” Mrs. Roberts said.

Russell said “then since their father is not home, maybe I will have to do it.”

The mother said, “No, I’ll do it.” She sent the girls out to cut a switch. Not knowing which size would be less painful, they brought in a thin green willow branch to their mother. She proceeded to whip those girls across the legs in a way we had never seen anyone whipped, and across the bare legs at that. We felt sorry for the girls.

The next day Mrs. Roberts came to our house. She asked if I had some used clothing she might have. She wanted a dress to go into Thompson. I helped her sort through some used clothes and gave her the dress she chose without charge and she left satisfied.

One Sunday morning I decided to briefly leave the church service and go meet the train coming from Churchill on its way south. It would be

Tuesday before my letters would go out through the post office and since there was a locked box at the box car opening we could drop in letters going out on Sunday. It was often used.

As I turned around after depositing my letters, someone grabbed me by the collar of my blouse and began to twist it. It was Sam and he was angry and began choking me. His wife wearing her 'new' used dress stood behind him. Sam proceeded to yell at me about beating his kids. Everyone there heard and saw the commotion. I was embarrassed and frightened, but in as calm a manner as I could muster, I said, "If you have anything to say to us, come to the house and talk to my husband." I went back to the chapel, shaking and with tears glistening in my eyes.

Sam did come to our house. Russ explained the situation to him as accurately as possible telling him how the girls had stolen the slides from our porch. Sam by now in a drunken rage said, "You are the one who stole the slides."

Russell explained how the girls had taken our slides from inside our porch. Sam said, "If my girls stole the slides, the slides then belonged to them and you had no right to them. But you wanted to steal them away from my girls. Then you gave them a lick'n." Russ tried to explain that their mother had given the girls the whipping and not he.

Sam replied, "But you told her to."

It was impossible to get Sam to understand. When he turned to go, he said, "Don't you ever come onto my property again. I have a shotgun and I'll shoot you." Russell agreed saying, "I'll not come on your property if you and your kids stay off of mine." With a grunt Sam left.

The next morning Sam stood at our door again, sober this time. He said he and his wife were going into Thompson on the train that morning to look for a house to rent for their family. They were leaving their girls at home and asked if we would check on them that evening to make sure they were okay?

"Yes, of course," Russ said. "We'll be glad to do that for you," not mentioning the ultimatum of the previous afternoon not to step foot on their property. The event went without incidence.

Without notice, and how it happened, we aren't sure; but the next thing we knew Ms. Freeman had brought liquor into her grocery store for sale.

People were buying liquor all day, every day. In fact, the teachers said there were kids in grade two and three that came to school drunk. We heard that kids were pushing drunken customers down on the steps of the store

so they could take the bottles of wine from them and drink it themselves. It was a vicious cycle. Drunken parents were raising drunken kids. Someone told us that Ms. Freeman had gone down to a hospital to 'dry out', so she could continue drinking. She had evidently done that before.

Our neighbor, Andrew, approached Russ. He said, "What are we going to do about this?" So Russ and Andrew put their heads together to talk about what should be done. They decided to draw up a petition and find out what the people really wanted. Each of the men would take half of the community and present three petitions to the people. People could sign on one of the three papers stating: (1) Yes, we want the Liquor store in Thicket (2) We do not want the Liquor store in Thicket (3) We do not wish to commit ourselves for or against and thus refuse to sign either of the other two petitions.

When the men had gone door to door in the village they came up with some startling observations. Of course, most people refused to sign either for or against. Some even threatened to shoot them if they didn't leave the house.

Next we noted that more people signed they did not want the Liquor store in town, than those that did want the store to remain. Some said with the liquor store in town every dollar they had went for liquor leaving them no money for milk for the babies; whereas if there was no liquor store they had to save up enough money to make the trip into Thompson and buy a quantity of liquor so it was a deterrent not to spend everything they had for booze.

Russell sent copies of the petitions as they were to the Liquor Control Board, the Attorney General of Manitoba, the Premiere of Manitoba, the Member of the Legislative Assembly and the Manitoba Métis Association.

You know how news reporters grab at a story? It wasn't long until the newscasters gave the report on the radio that the people of Thicket Portage, Manitoba, had signed a petition to get rid of the liquor store.

The averages weren't exactly correct as a man running for political office gave the information to the reporters. He had grouped those who refused to sign with those who signed against the liquor store creating a larger percentage against the liquor store than in favor of it. Everyone knew who was responsible for the petition and if they weren't sure who that was, a pretty safe guess would be Missionary Mueller.

Louis* came over drunk, with a shot gun. He said, "We want all you Germans to leave. You are living on our land. We don't want you here."

Russ looked him straight in the eye and said, "You know, Louis, you

are the one who is trespassing. You are drunk and in my house threatening me with a gun. I could call the police (in Thompson) and they would come arrest you.” The man quietly responded, “I didn’t know that they could do that.” He turned and left.

Some days later the man from the Liquor Control Board got off the train and headed straight for our house. He spoke with a shaky voice as he shook the petitions in Russ’ face. He said, “you won’t get away with this. I have to remove the liquor store now from the community, but we’ll bring it back in about six months. The people just don’t know how to control their liquor, but they’ll learn.”

Russell calmly replied, “We will keep praying that it will never come back.” And according to reports we’ve heard, it never has.

Chapter 31

The Black Years

“When I say to a wicked man, you shall surely die, and you do not warn him or speak to dissuade him from his wicked ways in order to save his life, that man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin: but you will have saved yourself. This is what the Sovereign Lord says. Whoever will listen let him listen and whoever will refuse let him refuse.” Ezekiel 3:18, 19, 28

Our sons were being bullied and they consider this a ‘black’ time in their life, even yet. We couldn’t continue subjecting our children to this lifestyle. As it was, Russell was working at manual labor during the day and doing the mission work in the evenings and on weekends. We were tired physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We couldn’t do this anymore. We had lived through two years of intense spiritual warfare and it didn’t seem there was a break coming in the near future. Everyday was another challenge.

One evening as we were visiting at the home of the teachers, a woman came to the open window and screamed at the teacher in her drunken stupor of the assumed injustices to her child. Her husband stumbled nearby. Another day we met a young man silly from drink who asked, “Do you love God?” He then went on to say, “I love Satan.” We were horrified that he would dare to even say such a thing. Then there are others who stumbled and fell on the road ‘dead drunk’ as one might say. Russell even picked one woman up from the path one night, put her on the skidoo and drove her to her house, less she freeze to death.

One day when Pedro* was drunk he saw Steve and started to chase him. As he ran he swung his beer bottle yelling, "I'm going to kill you." Seven year old Steve took off running in fear, but Pedro was uncoordinated and fell so Steve got away.

We were saddened to expose our young children to this; yet all the while our hearts went out in compassion to the multitudes outside of Christ. We pled with the Lord as to what we should do.

We wondered if what we were able to accomplish here was worth what it was costing in the lives of our children and our own lives. We felt we had honestly warned the people of the judgment to come if they refused Jesus Christ.

There were a few people we had led to the Lord as first time decisions and several were brought back to Christ. For several months some had showed interest but eventually they fell away.

A young woman, Gertrude*, held her hand up for prayer after one of the services. She came into the house with us and we explained the way to Christ. She accepted Him and continued to study the Bible with me for about a month.

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprung up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew



Our daughter, Sheryl



Our sons with friends in our home

and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times. Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." Mark 4: 3-9

A big factor in this place, as well as in all Native communities, is the extreme pressures brought on by the unsaved family members and friends. Everyone must be brought 'down to the lowest common denominator'. No one was allowed to be 'better than anyone else'.

We had planned to do more personal one-on-one visitation when we first arrived, but the routine of services and preparation for the services, took most of our time beside daily chores. We were still in semi isolation where we still had to cut firewood and haul it home, haul water in from the well and carry out the honey bucket.

We thought perhaps, if Russell was a school teacher, we could minister to the people in that manner and he would be compensated for his work. It would make living in the north easier because the housing would be provided and we would still continue to minister to the Native people.

"Wouldn't that be acceptable, Lord?"

Living on the North American continent was considered 'home missions' and we were only allowed one month vacation per year, or three months every three years, even though the Native communities were as foreign as any overseas location. We were in a foreign country, in a foreign culture, with a foreign language, and even a foreign lifestyle. For us, who had a long distance to travel to do deputation services as well as to visit our families, one month just wasn't enough time. We had no time to rest and be rejuvenated before returning to the work again.

We couldn't continue like this.

Chapter 32

The Report

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2, 3

In our yearly report to the NCEM we wrote that there were many disappointments as the work had not progressed as we had thought it would. We thought we would be training believers and working with them in the church. As it was, Johnny was the only steadfast believer; although his wife followed in most of his desires for her. She came along with Johnny to all the services; but due to the language barrier, we really never knew where she stood with the Lord.



Our family at Thicket Portage

Russell wrote, “The constant pressures of the work and the lack of evident results in this work do become very discouraging at times. I believe our often discouragements are due to four things:

- (1) Lack of results, such as few new converts
- (2) The falling away of so many
- (3) The negative effect on our children’s lives
- (4) The plain hardships of living here when much of our time is taken up just trying to exist.

We are to bear fruit for Christ and the lean results do tend to make us think that we are not as effective as we desire. As to whether this discouragement is to the point of our leaving the mission work, we would have to be honest and admit that this has occurred to us. Just this year we have talked about a possible year’s leave from the work. We have been on the field for eight years and we feel we need to have a ‘leave.’

Our support is not adequate but we manage with the extra help of some odd jobs in the community. Our monthly support average over the past year is less than \$250.00. This includes extra gifts so that usually our support coming in regularly is only \$180.00 to \$200.00. We keep up with acknowledging gifts from supporters as well as other correspondence. We are free of debt. Our food bill is our single greatest expense and we eat wild meat as often as possible. We believe in eating balanced diets. We have been free of any expenses due to ill health, for which we are thankful. The hours of sleep are often short, but I believe are sufficient. We get plenty of exercise while living without modern facilities.

We are striving to maintain a Christian home in all we do. We pray we are not lukewarm or lacking in mercy to the lost. We pray concerning this, and trust the Lord will reveal in our lives where, if this coldness may be true.”

A reply from Phil Howard representing the Eastern Field Council of the NCEM was dated December 8, 1969, and read in part as follows:

“This will be an attempt to reply to your annual report written November 15th and sent in to the Eastern Council. I attended the Eastern Council meeting in Winnipeg and we divided up the task of replying to these reports among the various council and board men. I requested the privilege of answering your letter because it contained several matters that I felt I would like to speak to.

I have had as much experience in my own missionary life as you have in this kind of situation, maybe more. I understand fully how such things can tend towards discouragement on the part of the missionary.

I stand with you, Russ and Virgie, in this matter of possible discouragement, and I feel we missionaries must resist this as we would resist the devil. There are certain things that we can and must do:

We must seek the Lord in earnest prayer as to whether we are indeed in His place for us.

Let us earnestly ask ourselves whether there may be ways of revisiting our methods and approach to the work.

Is there a chance that God does indeed want us in a different place? Certainly a change, perhaps even a year's leave, such as you have suggested is sometimes within the plan of God.

But again most basic of all is that we ask God to reconfirm our calling as missionaries and then stand by that.

But above all, the question is strongly upon my mind, are we missionaries of NCEM spending enough time in prayer? Are we truly laying hold of the power of God at the Throne of Grace?

The battle is after all spiritual and Satan will not let these people go, unless compelled by a mighty hand, as was the case with Moses. I feel it to be a real fact that demons and other satanic powers hold the Indian people in an iron grip. You and I are in a battle which is going to require our 'binding the strong man'. All of our methods and meetings put together cannot do this. Only the power of God released in response to much waiting upon Him will avail.

I might say much more in response to your report, but I will merely comment upon the possible leave of absence. If you honestly feel that such a leave could result in refreshing and renewal, I am sure the Council is prepared to consider it."

Over the next months we prayed and thought lots about a leave of absence. We thought about becoming tent maker missionaries; reasoning that if Russ would go to university to become a certified schoolteacher, we could still minister in the north to the Native people and be paid a decent wage and not have to live in the ghetto.

We approached the NCEM executive to see if we could indeed take a year's leave of absence to go to Brandon, Manitoba for Russ to get his teaching certificate. The more we had thought about it the more interested we became. However, we put ourselves under the direction of the board. By now we realized we needed to be under the guidance of spiritual leaders. We weren't on our own. Where better could we be advised? We continued to pray for God's will to be made known to the board and to us.

The response from the Mission board as a whole was a lot different. They said, "You aren't working hard enough if you are thinking of taking a leave of absence. The Popes have been missionaries longer than you have

and they have wanted to take a leave to do some upgrading in Bible College. There are two couples ahead of you waiting for a leave."

So instead of a leave of absence, plans began to be put into motion for the Popes to move out of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan and we would move in using the same truck they would move out with. Our belongings were shipped out by rail to The Pas, Manitoba. And later a truck borrowed from a farmer coming from Saskatchewan would haul them into Cumberland House.

The last evening we were at Thicket, we were given a farewell coffee with Tony Kovach (railroad worker) and his wife Lana, who were also leaving. We were each presented with a \$25.00 love gift. The next morning Sam (remember him?) stopped by the house to give us a farewell gift. It was a full newspaper page photo of Queen Elizabeth. He shook our hands.

It was with mixed emotions we boarded the southbound train. We had only spent two years in this place. These people were heavy on our hearts. We wondered if there would be any lasting fruit from our years of labor.

Chapter 33

The Afterglow

“Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and forever. Amen.” Ephesians 3: 20, 21

We hadn't been at Cumberland House very many months when fellow missionary, Jay Jennings, phoned from The Pas to ask if he could come to visit. He had someone he wanted to bring with him for a visit. Of course we were pleased to welcome guests.



Fred Evans visited us at Cumberland House

When Jay arrived he brought with him Fred Evans (Frank*) from Thicket Portage. Fred was a different man. He walked upright and met our eyes. He asked forgiveness for all the trouble he had caused us. He had come back into fellowship with the Lord after four years of wandering in sin, and now he wanted to restore fellowship with the people he had wronged; had sinned against.

We welcomed him with open arms, crying with him for the ruin he had caused; the past that could not be undone, only forgiven. He told us about how he and some friends had been in a boat and somehow the boat had tipped and he was thrown into the water. He fought to breathe and feared for his life and wondered if he would go to heaven should he drown. He pleaded with God to spare him and he promised he would live for Jesus and be a preacher.

Among other things, he wanted to pay us for a record he had borrowed, but had not returned to us. We said it was \$10.00 and he had \$10.00 and only \$10.00 in his wallet. We told him not to bother. He could pay us when he had more money. Later he told us that was a mistake. God had told him to pay us the money and it was a set-back in his restoration when we said he didn't need to pay it back at that time. He said the Lord wanted him to pay it back then and he knew he should, even if it meant doing without money for a time.

Fred also said, “When I tried to get you to fight me, I wanted to see if you would or not. If you had, I'd have thought you were no different than the rest of us.”

A few years later (1975) Fred applied to come to Key Way Tin Bible Institute, where we were then serving on staff. We were happy to have him,



Fred & Charlotte Evans & family

his lovely wife Charlotte, and their two young daughters come to attend Bible school. At school he sang with his guitar and often Charlotte sang with him. He involved himself in visitation and didn't hesitate to witness for the Lord in down town Lac La Biche.

Before he left Lac La Biche, Fred went to all the stores where he had done

business while he was a student, and witnessed to the store keepers of Jesus Christ. Many of the store keepers were Muslim. After graduation, he left pulling a trailer behind a station wagon hauling his guitars and sound equipment and on the side of the trailer were Bible verses and signs telling people, "Prepare to meet your God." and "Jesus Saves."

Fred became an evangelist. The call of God was on his life. He has now been in full-time missionary work since 1978 preaching on the radio and TV, doing itinerant missionary work, visiting the reserves, and without shame is telling people the change Christ has made in his life and how they too can come to faith. He is a 'hell-fire and brimstone' preacher. We thank God for him.

We had Fred come back to Key Way Tin as a closing conference speaker. He was preaching for all he was worth when he got a nosebleed. He wiped his nose several times with his hand; finally I took him a Kleenex. He tore a corner off and stuck it up his nose leaving part of it protruding from his nose. He said, "This is how an Indian treats a nosebleed," and went on preaching.

Fred has mentored at least two former gang members that he led to Christ. He continues strong for the Lord, as does his wife. Fred frequently visits Thicket Portage and holds revival services there. Fred told us when he went back to share Christ at his home village of Thicket Portage he was surprised by the people's response as he was saying goodbye before boarding the train. One man said, "We have all signed this petition which says, we don't want you to come back! We want you to stay." At first he was stunned, but then he realized what they were saying. He couldn't hold back the tears of joy. Even though he had hurt these people so much in the past, they had forgiven him. They had seen the change God had done in his life!

The people have again begged him to come back as their missionary; but his field is much larger. He preaches on the radio in the Cree language, writes articles in the *Muskeg Moccasigraph* and hopes to spend more time as a traveling evangelist. He has recently purchased a tent for use when conducting revival services.

Another student who came to Key Way Tin Bible Institute from Thicket Portage was Gordon Cook, the son of Johnny Cook, who was the one steadfast Christian when we first went to Thicket. With him were his lovely wife Lillian, and young daughter. They became special friends of ours and we often babysat their children. Sometimes Lillian was sitting in our house when we came home and she borrowed some of my clothes, especially for special occasions. I was very involved with Lillian at the time she was



Gordon & Lillian Cook & family

pregnant and gave birth to their son. After Gordon graduated from Key Way Tin, they went as missionaries to Fort Chipewyan, north of Fort McMurray, under the auspice of Baptist Missions. But things did not go well with them. Eventually they moved out to Edmonton where Lillian went to University in hopes of becoming a lawyer. We did have a little contact by phone with Gordon, but things could not be resolved between the couple. They divorced and Gordon has since remarried. In 2011 he contacted us and said he and his new wife were involved with a Christian ministry to troubled kids. We have since had students from Fort Chipewyan at Key Way Tin.

Our former foster daughter, Marianne, married a Frenchman and had several children. They visited us at Lac La Biche and stayed in our home until he was earning an income and they could get into a house of their own. Russell helped him get a job with one of the men from the church. Several years after they moved back to The Pas, MB. Marianne's husband committed suicide. We heard she was attending a Salvation Army Church and has remarried. We have not heard anything more for many years.

In 2000, a beautiful girl named Michelle Cook came to Key Way Tin Bible Institute. She was another of the granddaughters of Johnny Cook from Thicket Portage. Michelle married Eric Sinclair, also a graduate of Key Way Tin and they served with NCEM briefly; before they moved to



Eric & Michelle Cook Sinclair

Edmonton for Eric to attend a course in mechanics. He was restless there and they returned to Key Way Tin where they believed the Lord wanted them to serve. In 2010, Eric became the administrator of Key Way Tin and they were on full time staff, serving as career missionaries. They have two young children, who were homeschooled by Michelle. In 2012 they left KBI and returned to Eric's home reserve in Ontario to minister as tent maker missionaries.

Eric and Michelle often sing together

on Tribal Trails (NCEM Native gospel broadcast) and for a short time Eric was host on Tribal Trails.

Another granddaughter of Johnny Cook, Donna, is living for the Lord. She has chosen a secular career and she and her husband are living in Red Deer, AB. She has several grown children at this time.

When we look back at our ministry in Thicket Portage, we don't see only the darkness. Now we also see the precious souls that came from that wicked village and the fruit they have produced. We look back over the years there and see what God has done and the small part we have had in lives of various people.

We have been challenged with the importance of telling our children what Christ has done for us. The Bible says that *"the people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived him and had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel."* Judges 2:7, 19

We are saddened to see so many children of the Native believers who do not follow the faith of their parents who are first generation Christians. Did they fail to tell their children what God has done for them?

These Native children have often grown up in places where sin is rampant. Where evil prominently exists and people are held in the grip of Satan. They have been affected one way or another. Satan must be renounced in the lives of our children. They belong to Jesus and Satan has no claim to them.

For further help regarding demonic activity read *Christians and Demons. Armed and Anchored for Spiritual Warfare* by Dr. Jerry Johnston, at Crossroads, 100 Huntley Street, Hamilton, Ontario.



Part 3

The years in CUMBERLAND HOUSE, SASKATCHEWAN

1970 - 1974



the ferry for when Leonard wanted time off. Russ did all sorts of casual jobs at each station we lived.

Following the river, about a mile down the road from the ferry, was an old, two story house, with grey rolled asphalt siding. Standing on the one side of the house was a split log building; quite large, which appeared to be in fairly good condition, but was basically unused. I think it was used for storage. On the other side of the house was an old chapel, with peeling white paint. The house and other buildings with the large yard, stood in the midst of a number of Native homes.

There had been missionaries here for 20 some years and there were several Christians from the community that were no longer living here: Margaret Budd, who had attended the LaRonge Indian Bible School and was at present working with NCEM, Helen, wife of Native evangelist Tommy Francis, who had been a Fish and Wild Life Ranger when they met, Herman and Virginia Cook, who were getting further education, and Caroline McGinnis who had also moved out of the community. There may have been one or two more, but we didn't know them at the time.

The larger part of the community of 1200 people was in town, approximately five miles from where we would live at the house at Pemican Portage where a few Métis lived.

On one side of the town of Cumberland House, the treaty Indians lived, sort of to themselves in an area covering quite a large area of land. A number Métis and several dozen Caucasian people also lived in town.

Chapter 34

The Continuing Story

“Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet, and all your ways will be established.” Proverbs 4:25, 26



Ferry across the Saskatchewan River at Pemican Portage

It seemed we had a problem of always arriving at the ferry just minutes before midnight. Always as late as possible, as tired as possible, as broke as possible and as heavily loaded as possible.

The ferry operator lived right at the ferry crossing. Leonard Wurdrick was a family man. He and his wife, Anne, had four young children the ages of our three. Our kids became friends at once. Russell was trained to run



Aerial view of Cumberland House

There were two stores, The Hudson's Bay Co. and the Co-op, with homes for their managers, a large school with a hockey rink plus numerous residences for teachers all in a row, and a nursing station. Seems there were some other government buildings as well. The NCEM owned a house in



Truck moving us into Pemican Portage



The mission house & chapel at Pemican Portage, Joe & Helen Pope & family

the main part of town where a single lady missionary, Alma Redlick, lived. Alma was to be our co-worker as there was a large children's work there. We had been with Alma in language school eight years earlier.

Our personal belongings came by train to Nipawin, Saskatchewan, where they were loaded on a three ton farm truck to be hauled up to Cumberland House.

Arriving at Pemican House, we unloaded our things onto the lawn, so the Popes could load their belongings from the house into the truck we had moved up with.

The house was definitely an improvement over the one we'd left at Thicket Portage. The porch entrance led into the dining room which was large enough for the table and chairs at one end and a rocker, bookcase, and a lamp at the other end. From this room was a stairway leading to the second story, which we didn't use it as it wasn't finished and we really didn't need it. The kitchen came equipped with a propane range, cabinets, and refrigerator.

The bathroom off the kitchen had an installed white enamel bathtub, a sink with a drain to the outside, and a 'honey bucket'. Behind the bathroom door hung a leather belt referred to as 'the strap' which the Popes had left behind. Leading off the kitchen in the other direction was the relatively small living room. From there a doorway led to a small back foyer. From the foyer was a doorway leading outside and another doorway leading to the 'master bedroom' and yet a third doorway leading to the basement or more correctly, a cellar.

The dirt cellar was dark and damp and had four or five 45 gallon drums Russell kept filled with water, which he hauled from town with a drum in the back of our station wagon. A gear pump and a 10 gallon pressure tank gave water 'on demand' to the faucets in the kitchen and bathroom. There were rubber water pipes leading from each drum to the other drums siphoning water from one to the next, depleting the same amount from each. Thus we had running water, with limited supply.

There was also a large garden behind our 'new home'. We didn't have much experience at gardening, but when we looked at the seemingly endless acres of garden, we knew it was more than we needed. Even dividing it in half was more than we needed!

Actually, we didn't start life at Pemican Portage with a station wagon. We had not had a car for eight years, so when we moved there, we needed a car immediately. A young man preparing to go into missionary work in Borneo had driven his car into the 'bush' junking it. Since we needed a car

the missionary at The Pas pulled it out and gave it to us to drive until we could buy a more satisfactory car. The car, a huge old Chrysler Saratoga, needed repairs to the generator. It didn't have a muffler and when we drove to Nipawin, the fumes came up into the car through the rusted out floor and Alma got sick. Several times we had to stop on the side of the road to let her relieve her stomach of its contents and gasp for some fresh air.

When Russ went to The Bay store in town one day, he was backing out from angle parking and backed right into a car setting across the street. The afternoon sun was shining into his eyes. Besides, no one was supposed to park on that side of the road. And the worst was the car belonged to the Bishop of the Anglican diocese. When the RCMP came to investigate the 'accident' the policeman said, "When you preachers fight, you fight dirty." He let both of the men off with a warning and advised Russ to replace the junk heap of a car ASAP, which we did with the red station wagon.

Chapter 35

The Life On and Off the Reservation

*"Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place
in all generations." Psalms 90:1*

"Let's play cowboys and Indians. We'll be cowboys and you be the Indians," a red haired boy called as he ran across our lawn. When we had only been at The Portage for about a week we were invited for a barbeque at the ferryman's house. I suppose it made Leonard nervous to have the missionaries come over for supper, but Anne wanted to welcome us. We were to arrive for supper at 6:00 and we were maybe five minutes late. Leonard sat at the table eating his hamburger. He said, "When I say 6:00, I mean 6:00 and not five minutes after." We felt adequately rebuked.

Our children were excited to have white friends their age. They had Native as well as Caucasian friends. It didn't seem to matter. They all played together. The children all rode the school bus into town for school each day. Four year old Sheryl had dreams of sharing a future with Paul, a teacher's son.

Even though we tried to reduce the size of the garden, it still produced abundantly. We harvested a trailer load of carrots and another trailer load of potatoes, giving 100 pound bags to the missionaries at Key Way Tin Bible Institute at Lac La Biche, Alberta plus bags of produce to anyone visiting. Our kids weren't happy that they had to work so hard in the garden, and then we gave so much away. May the Lord bless them for their labor, even if at times begrudgingly done. The Friesens (missionaries at KBI) took red potatoes to Lac La Biche. Years later when they moved to Vanderhoof they took some of these seed potatoes as they said those were the best potatoes they had ever had.

One day when I was gardening in the hot summer, a crow hung



The garden at Pemican Portage

around cawing at me over and over. It annoyed me. Besides the mosquitoes, sand flies and hot sun, it was something I just didn't need. I felt cross. My temper snapped. I picked up a rock and threw it at the crow. It moved a little. But settled down to caw at me some more. I picked up rock after rock and threw them at the crow. Finally it settled on a fence post, and to me it seemed he was mocking me. I took a hoe after it, hitting it until it couldn't fly anymore. Good riddance. Later Glen said to me, "Mom, the crow you killed, was Linda's pet crow." Linda, living just behind our house, was a special playmate of Glen's. I never imagined crows could be pets and I was indeed sorry for what I had done to her pet. I needed to ask her forgiveness. I was ashamed of my fit of anger.

Since the village was spread out over a number of miles of actual gravel road, our family frequently rode our bicycles together after supper in the summertime. Russ even perfected riding his bike sitting backwards on the handlebars, much to the delight of the children. Leading off the main road was another road that led to 'the island'. On the island was the 'government farm'. People who wanted to try their hand at farming were given cattle and could graze them on the land. The farmers would repay the government when the cattle reproduced and calves were ready for sale. The farmers could also work the fields for grain crops and use a plot for a garden spot; which is what we did, as well after selling the garden, with the house at the Portage. Steve had a friend whose father was one of these farmers and Steve often spent time at their home.

A funny thing happened once when we were visiting friends at Nipawin. I guess it wasn't really funny, but Sheryl's response to what happened was funny. She must have been about five years old and was riding on the back of a bicycle driven by Brad. Since there really wasn't any place to put her feet, one dangling foot accidentally got caught in between the spokes and the frame of the bicycle. Of course that stopped them and she fell to the ground. Crying as her Daddy untangled her foot from the spokes of the bicycle wheel; she looked up through her tears and said, "If I had died would I have gone to heaven with this bicycle on my leg?" Oh, the innocence of children.

In the house at The Portage, the three bedrooms were all in a row. We had the one toward the back of the house, the boys had the one toward the front of the house, and Sheryl had the middle one. In her bedroom was a cupboard across one entire wall with large drawers at the bottom and large shelves at the top. The shelves had no dividers between them. Our kids loved to crawl through the cupboards the entire width of the room. It was a good hideout and provided a lot of good times. They remember that once when we had bought a two quart bottle of pop, we hid it up there from them, not knowing they would find it. Pop was a treat we seldom bought.

During our time out at the Portage, Glen had his first experience in his future career of firefighting. There was a wood 'ice house' with one foot thick log walls. During the winter the commercial fishermen cut blocks of ice from the river and stored them in the ice house to have available to pack with the fish when the fish was shipped out to be sold commercially. Wood shavings were used for insulation to keep the ice frozen until it was all used. When Glen and his friends played in the dark ice house, the temptation to light a fire was too great to resist. They weren't aware how fast wood shavings would catch on fire and burn. When we were called to the scene of the fire, we grabbed our small fire extinguisher and hurried down the road. I'm not sure how much it helped, but the fire was extinguished before the building received much damage.

Both Steve and Glen remember the fun of driving their bikes off the high bank along the shore of the Saskatchewan River in front of our house and landing in the sand below. If they had enough speed they could even land into the edge of the water and it was lots of fun to see who could go the farthest before sinking into the soft sand and water.

Dogs plagued the community. There were little dogs running around all the time. But the bigger dogs created an even worse problem. So the town council decided to hire a 'dog catcher'. Steve had a 'Heinz 57' dog that

was very special to him. In fact, the dog gave birth to her first litter in the coat closet in our living room, while we all watched. One day Steve came home from school for lunch and let his dog out to do 'her job'. She was off the leash for hardly a minute and was still in our fenced yard, when the 'dog catcher' shot her right before his eyes. Steve was heartbroken. The dog catcher was being paid \$1 for every dog he shot 'running loose' and the dog catcher stretched the law to the limit, including our fenced yard. We didn't want to cause conflict with the people, so we consoled Steve telling him this shooting of his dog was part of our life as missionaries.

We felt our children were blessed to have the experience of living in a multi-cultural community. Although our children had friends among the Native children, they still felt like outsiders. Some of the Native children bullied them. They felt they were discriminated against because they were white. It was reverse discrimination, because the Caucasian children were then in the minority.

Walter and Ann Shewchuk, a farm family in the Nipawin area, had given us three live chickens. It was late at night, as usual, when we got home from Nipawin, and we naturally didn't want to butcher the chickens yet that night. Russ dragged an old toilet (no longer used as a toilet) over next to the house and laid it face down against the basement wall. We put the chickens into it for the night. During the night sometime, we were awakened by chickens squawking for their lives. We ran out in our pajamas to the back of the house where the chickens were being stored. A dog was half way under the toilet, having dug its way under to get to the chickens.

Russ pulled the toilet away from the wall and as the German Shepherd dog crept out Russell hit it on the head using a board he found lying on the ground. When the dog was hit on the head, it collapsed on the spot. Russ looked at the dog. It belonged to our neighbor, who unfortunately was a Special Constable with the RCMP. How could we face telling him we had killed his dog? Russ came up with a bright idea; although rather deceptive. He dragged the big dog to the back fence and heaved him over into the neighbor's yard, thinking they would never know why their dog was dead. Well, to our surprise when the dog hit the ground, he came back to life and ran away. What a relief!

Another time when Russ went to the town well to get a load of water with the Skidoo and a drum on the sled the same German Shepherd started chasing beside the Skidoo and barking and nipping at the front of the skidoo. Russ swung his hand to hit him on the rump and chase it away, but accidentally grabbed hold of the dog's tail and next thing he knew, he was

dragging the dog backwards by the tail while he continued to drive the skidoo further. That dog never chased him again.

Dogs seemed to get us in trouble frequently. Another time, some Caucasian Christians gave us 100 leghorn chickens after camp. Now most people would not want to eat laying hens, least of all leghorns, but as I've said many times, "Missionaries take whatever people give them free and use it." We were frugal. We put the live chickens in large cardboard boxes and set the boxes on the back rests of the seats in the school bus. Arriving home late, we left the chickens in the boxes and went to bed. The next morning there were wet boxes, soggy with broken eggs, chicken poop on the seats and floor, and chickens fluttering here and there in the bus. It wasn't a very nice sight and was awful to clean up. We then butchered the 100 chickens and canned them in quart jars to be used for meat later on. What a big day's job.

Butchering the chickens drew the attention of a small dog that had come in through our driveway. Russell wanted to chase the dog away, so he picked up a small rock and threw it underhandedly at the dog. To his surprise it hit the dog on the side of its head and the dog went down immediately. Just as Russ got over to where the dog had hit the ground, it stood up and started walking around in a circle several times before finally walking out of our yard. This dog belonged to the lady living on the other side of our house so we were glad he hadn't killed the dog.

The red station wagon we had bought following the Saratoga we had been given, was a lemon. The frame didn't hold up. Evidently it had been in a collision and the frame damaged, which the used car dealer denied. But the car just couldn't handle the rough gravel roads. We went to Nipawin to see about replacing it. Our friend, Paul Pylatuk, said since we had 100 miles of gravel road with no services or people living along the way, we shouldn't settle for another used car.

And at that exact time the Canadian Sunday School Mission missionary from the local Bible camp stopped by Paul and Ida's home while we were there. The missionary had just bought a new 11 passenger van for use at the Bible camp. We asked how he could afford it, knowing he also lived on faith support. He said simply that he needed it for the Lord's work and he went to the dealer, picked it out and stopped at the bank to set up a loan.

We had never operated that way, but Paul challenged us to trust God for a new car. He said we needed it so we wouldn't have trouble on that 100 mile stretch. So Paul went with us to the bank where he co-signed the loan

for us. The Bank Manager gave us a check and told us to go and buy whatever car we wanted. The new car was a Ford Torino and cost \$4200.00. I think Paul even made the first payment. God honored our faith and all the payments were made on time. That was the first new car we had ever owned.

Coming home from Nipawin it was raining hard and the car got very muddy. We left it setting in the driveway. The next day was Sunday so we didn't wash the car. That evening we went to town for a service and one of the girls, Marlene, wrote her name in the mud on the door using a board with a nail. It went right through the paint. Forever thereafter the door bore her name. We complained to our director Bud Elford. He told us, "when you can let the damage done to your property go without becoming angry or taking revenge, the Lord knows you have given possession to Him." The car belonged to God. He was merely letting us use it.

Chapter 36

The People We Associated With

"Know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Psalms 46:10b



The mission house where Alma Redlick lived



Our co-worker, Alma Redlick

At first Alma lived in the big mission house in Cumberland House, and the children's classes were held in the unfinished basement of her house.

Alma was a hard worker. She bore more than her share of the ministry and work in the garden, and helped with our family when it was necessary. Our children still remember Alma for the carrot juice she drank and tried to get them to drink. We had such an abundance of carrots that Alma consumed many by juicing them. We also had boxes of carrots that were bagged in bread bags, with holes poked into the bags to prevent build up of moisture. The bags were then packed in card board boxes and covered with old quilts and stored in the 'cold storage'

room in the basement. They lasted until the new crop was ready the next year.

Alma also helped to pick berries. She taught us where to find them, which ones we could use and which we should avoid. Russ and I enjoyed picking the high bush cranberries by the gallon full. They weren't anything like a cranberry. They were red and round and juicy and had one large flat stone in each. We just stripped them into the pails. We used these berries for juice, jam, ketchup (like a steak sauce on our wild meat) as well as just plain cranberry sauce. We picked choke cherry, pin cherry and wild raspberries as well. Alma picked the wild strawberries, but they were so small we chose to pick the more abundant fruit.

On one occasion we upset a bee hive. The bees felt we were invading their territory and let us know. Alma tried to help ward them off of the kids and me as we all slapped at them; but she ended up also getting bit badly, as did all of us.

Most of our church services were held in various homes in the community on Sunday evenings. We gave people rides into town for the services if they wanted to go. In fact, we were considered to be a 'taxi' for people wanting a ride into town for whatever reason. As we had a phone we tried instead to get the people to phone for a taxi from town to come get them for their personal needs. Joe Pope had strung the phone line from our



Portage Sunday School kids by chapel



Caucasian Christians in our basement

house in the Portage into Cumberland. It was only connected to the taxi, RCMP and the nursing station.

The Caucasian people attended the Sunday morning services, first at the old chapel at the Portage; then later at the chapel in the community of Cumberland House, after the log building from the Portage was moved in beside the mission house in town. We had one of the farmers pull the log building into town on skids. It required electrical wiring, which Russell did and we continued heating with wood.

Schoolteachers: David and Donna Little and their three boys, Art and Katherine Jahnke and their teenage daughter, Steiner Haugen, his wife Gayle (a nurse), and their three children, the Co-op store manager's wife Lynn Munson (who had formerly been a RC nun before her marriage to Sandy) and their two children, (Sandy attended in later years), Anne Wurdrick, (the ferryman's wife) and their four children; as well as any of the Métis people who wanted to come, also attended the morning services as well as Alma and our family.

When we first arrived Alma was doing Bible studies with Naomi*. Naomi had accepted the Lord as Savior and assisted Alma with Sunday school. The priest noted that she wasn't attending church, so he forbade her to associate with the Evangelicals or attend our services. When we noticed she was missing our services, we questioned her about it and she said she had decided to go back to the organized church. The clergy from the

organized church threatened the people that if they left the church they would not be permitted to be buried in the church cemetery. There were others like her, some of whom we considered our best friends that were unwilling to leave their church. It seemed the people had the idea that we were an auxiliary arm of their 'real church' and wanted both.

Among the most faithful attendees from among the Métis was Marjorie, a lady a little older than us. She was Roman Catholic. Alma led her to the Lord and we helped to mentor her. Her husband was quite opposed at first, but he didn't practice religion of any sort so she didn't pay much attention to his objections. She worked for a time as a guard at the jail.

We made arrangements for Marjorie's daughter, Ruth* and a girl friend of hers, to live with friends of ours, Jake and Tina Ens, while the girls were attending high school in Nipawin. The girls then attended the Alliance Church with Jake and Tina and their daughters and Ruth accepted the Lord.

A special honor to me was when our friends George and Elvina Fiddler named their baby girl after me. Who would ever expect to find a Native girl named Virgie in a Native village?

Fairly often Russell visited with the old man



Marjorie Chaboyer



Virgie Fiddler with her Mom & sisters



Mr. Budd visiting in our home

living across the road from our house. He was Margaret Budd's father and spoke no English. He had one amputated leg, and walked with a crutch. He sat outside his house when the weather permitted and whittled on wood. Russell tried speaking Cree with Mr. Budd, (switching back to the Plains dialect). On one occasion Russ was called over to the Budd's house as Margaret's brother had shot himself in the stomach. Russ drove him into town for medical treatment, after which he was transferred into Nipawin.



Douglas Crane with beaver he trapped

Another man Russell spent a lot of time with was Douglas. Douglas was a likeable fellow; but also an alcoholic. We understood that he had once made a decision for Christ, but he certainly wasn't living for the Lord now. He was a good hunter. Russell took Douglas on the skidoo out into the bush to hunt a number of times. That winter on one occasion after traveling for about 10 miles, they set up a tent and spent the night and next day hunting. Late that evening Russell shot a moose; they gutted and skinned it out. In the meantime a deer came to see what was going on and Douglas shot it. By then it was so dark, they decided to come back

for the moose the next day. They covered it with snow so the lynx or other wild animals wouldn't get it. As they were loading the deer on the sled Russ learned Douglas didn't have a deer tag.

The men could no longer see the trail, as they were in a large muskeg with small shrubby trees and bushes and they couldn't decide which way to go. The temperature was dropping and they had left their tent where they had spent the first night. They had to make it home. They tried driving in what they thought was the right direction then turned another way before realizing they were lost. They couldn't just keep driving around or they'd run out of gas. Douglas told Russ to stay with the skidoo and he would walk ahead hunting for the trail home as he thought he knew where they were. Douglas said, "You watch in that direction and when you see a little light flicker drive straight for it."

*Right: Grinding up moose meat
Below: Head of moose Russell shot*



Russ waited, wondering if he would be able to see the light or even if they would find each other. Eventually there was the faintest flicker about a half mile away, which was actually a match Douglas had struck. As soon as he had fallen through the ice of a creek, he knew he had located the trail since that creek never froze solid. However, his clothes were wet from the waist down and were freezing stiff. They had to get home fast. The next day they went for the moose. Russell remembers carrying the moose down the basement stairs to hang it for 10 days; after which they shared the meat. Russell also bought a deer tag for Douglas' deer.

One day a drunken man, named Bob*, came to our house wanting to call the taxi. Russ told him the phone lines were down and the phones were not working. Bob thought Russell was just withholding the use of the phone, so he challenged Russ to come out and fight. Ignoring Bob just made him get madder so Bob broke the glass window in our porch door. Russ said, "Now, I will have to report you to the police."

Russ got into the car to drive into town to get the RCMP. When Russ saw the RCMP arrive at Bob's house just a little way down the road, Russ went to see if he could help. They tried to get the belligerent, drunken man into the paddy wagon. He resisted and when they tried to push him in the rear door, he propped his feet against the edge of the opening of the door. He was strong and at first they weren't able to get him in. The Native RCMP constable said, "OK, Bob. You can go." When Bob let down his restraint, the constable pushed him in, slamming the door shut behind him. Bob lay down on his back and started kicking, trying to break the windows. The next day when he was sober they let him out of jail and he came back

to our house after getting drunk again. He began shouting and wanted Russ to come out and fight him. What else could Russ do but pray? He prayed and decided not to back down from Bob. People were starting to gather to see what was going to happen. As Russ started down the sidewalk toward him, Bob suddenly turned and ran away. He did seem more open to talk after that, and didn't bother us again.

We felt it would be an advantage for us to live in town. It would certainly be less travel. Alma was willing and moved across the street into a new seniors' home, which had not yet reached capacity, and we moved into the mission house which was a more modern house and more convenient than living at The Portage. We did still have to haul water from the community pump and had no hot water. We had to use a heating rod to heat our bath water after pouring the water into the tub. We also used a 'honey bucket' which had to be carried out.

Consulting with the Mission Executive about moving the split log storage shed into town, they were agreeable but said they could not finance it. So we moved the large shed into town on skids pulled by a caterpillar driven by one of the local men. We settled it on logs, for a foundation, beside the mission house. Russell wired it with electricity and we continued to use wood heat. Men from the Mennonite Church at Rosthern, Saskatchewan, came to help with renovations. They covered it inside and out with new plywood and painted it blue! I can't figure out why blue, unless it was because the trim on the white mission house next door was blue and



Moving the storage shed into Cumberland House

we had to use up the bucket of blue paint. One of the men gave us a used piano in exchange for the old pump organ that had been in the old chapel, but was no longer being used. It was an antique, and no doubt went to grace someone's parlor. This building became our new chapel and was a big help in our services.



*Men from Mennonite church in
Rosthern do renovations*

We sold the mission house at The Portage with its big garden to one of the local families for \$1300.00 and the old chapel there for \$100.00.

We had become acquainted with various church people from the South due to connections the Popes had made over the years. We found the people helpful and we enjoyed the occasional visits with them.

Steve had opportunity to baby sit the Co-op store manager's children. Their oldest child was a boy named Russell, called Rusty. Steve had other opportunities such as taking a canoe trip down the Saskatchewan River with a group of boys from school. They had made the fiberglass canoes in shop class with Mr. Little. Brad, a friend of Steve's from Nipawin, came up and went on the canoe trip with the boys from Cumberland.

Russell, Steve and two teenage boys from Cumberland House also made a trip by canoe down the Saskatchewan River to The Pas with his freighter canoe. They had to travel during the night, so they could catch the train for Pikwitonni the next morning. Arriving in The Pas in the early morning hours Russ left the boys at the shore and went to find a phone to let the local pastor know they had arrived. While he was on the phone, the RCMP came to question why the boys were hanging around out there in the night. Russ came back and told the police the boys were with him. The Cumberland boys had relatives in The Pas and stayed with them. Russ and Steve went with Mr. Ritter. From there that morning they took the canoe with them to Camp Midway for use at the camp. This was much shorter than to drive a car from Cumberland around to The Pas and go by train to Pikwitonni and then by water to Camp Midway. Russ was to be the camp speaker that year.

Chapter 37

The Camp Work

“And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink; truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward.” Matthew 10:42

The Associated Gospel Churches in the Melfort, SK. area operated Stony Lake Bible Camp each summer after which they had loaned it out to the previous missionaries to be used for Indian Camp; but we didn't know what arrangements they had. We weren't sure how things would be regarding Bible camp. It seemed no one explained the details to our satisfaction and we had to learn by guess and miss.

Eventually, after much prodding we learned we could use the grounds and they would even transport the kids to camp with a school bus. I was curious if this would cost us money or if they were providing it for free, so I asked Ed, who was on their camp board, “Who will be paying for all this?” He looked me in the eye and said, “Don't worry your blinking head about that.” So I didn't. We eventually learned they would provide food for camp and staff to cook for the kids, but we would have to recruit the counselors, the kids and run the program. It worked out well and we had good cooperation between us.

For several weeks prior to camp we went around Cumberland House as well as two different reservations informing the children and their families when camp would be held. At one reservation we saw a gathering of a lot of tepees. We didn't know a Sun dance was taking place. This was an annual Powwow where the Native people gathered bringing their own tepees. There was drumming and dancing, a sweat lodge and smoking of the peace pipe. They wondered why we were there. We told them we only



Grounds after sun dance was over

wanted to invite their children to Bible camp where we would be teaching them about Jesus Christ. This was our first encounter with the Sun dance.

When the big yellow school bus driven by Lloyd Lees came into Cumberland House we rode around stopping here and there to pick up kids. Some kids we didn't even know, but their parents didn't seem to mind our taking their kids to camp, thus taking them off their hands for a week.

We then went to Fort la Corne and Chagoness reservations and picked up kids. Here we knew none of the kids. None came with a suitcase or bedroll. We pointed at their bare feet and said, "You can't come without shoes." Women pointed at kids standing there and said, "Hey, give them your boots." Mothers pulled rubber boots off kids not going to camp and put them onto the kids going and away we went.

It never ceased to amaze us how the people would let their children be taken to Bible camp with people they didn't know who claimed to be missionaries and they didn't know what we would teach their children or do with them for the week we had custody of them.

We were so fortunate to have Elroy Ratzlaff, and his wife Erma, come from Oklahoma as our camp speaker. Elroy had been an instructor at the Christian Academy when Russ was a



Kids attending Stony Lake Bible Camp

senior in high school and they had mutual respect for one another. Also coming from Oklahoma were five young people from Russ' home church in Enid who served as counselors. It was so good to work with people from our supporting churches and for them to see firsthand what missionary life was like.

We had about 100 kids that week, give or take one or two. It wasn't a piece of cake. We expected it to be bad. Only we didn't know how bad it could be. The camp was primitive, and it rained and the mud was something,



Chapel time at Bible Camp

sort of like gunge. I am surprised anything got through to the kids as restless as they were those first few days of camp.

The Métis kids from Cumberland House thought themselves better than the other reserve kids, so there was fighting be-



Activities at Bible Camp

tween them all the time. They all loved archery and the sports, especially swimming and riding on the barge with the 18 hp boat motor. Elroy enjoyed operating the barge and a small speed boat for the kids to be pulled on a surf board. These were provided by the camp board.

We literally ran day in and day out to try to keep them all under control. And we did pray a lot, late into the night until we fell asleep from exhaustion. Our bed was a flat mattress lying on floor boards. We used wash basins for washing up and had to walk quite distance to the outhouse. There was nothing hygienic about it. Everyone used the same towel, except us. We kept our own in our room. I was camp nurse, but thankfully nothing serious happened.

Marjorie's youngest daughter Mary*, ran away from camp. We knew she couldn't make it home those 150 miles to Cumberland so Russell went looking for her. He chased after her across the fields and came to a dirt road where he saw some young fellows walking. He offered them \$5 to catch our camper who had run away and bring her back to camp. He pointed down the road where Mary was walking by then, but seeing Russ and the boys she took off into the bush. Eventually they did catch her. Russ paid the boys the \$5.00 but he and Mary still had to walk the three miles back to camp. Russell talked to her and asked if she had any idea what those boys would do to her if they caught her all alone on the road? They passed a resort where there was a phone and Russ asked her if she wanted him to call her mother to come get her. She didn't want that, so he said he would have to restrain her unless she would promise not to run away again. We had to get her back to her mother at all costs. She stayed and didn't run away again. Surely she knew she couldn't have made it home on her own and she was probably glad we had come after her. She was just being rebellious but she wanted us to care about her.

Some kids wouldn't obey the rules. One rule was No Smoking. When a girl from the nearby Chagoness reservation persisted, we decided she would have to be sent home. As Russ drove onto the reserve, she jumped out of the car and stormed into her house and told her father what was happening. Her drunken father came out swinging his fist. "You can't tell my girl she can't smoke and you can't turn her away from camp. I'm going to shoot you if you ever come back here again."

She was over the age limit of the kids allowed at children's camp so she proved to be a ring leader for the younger children. We should never have taken her to camp in the first place that year. Now her six foot 300 lb. father pounded on our car hood and we waited for him to quiet down so we

could explain. He had threatened to kill us, and he may have, except his cousin intervened by holding back the man saying, "Forgive him. He doesn't know what he is saying. He is drunk." He continued to pound on the hood as we backed out to leave. We could see those indentions as long as we owned the car.

As the week of camp passed, most of the kids settled down and listened, and some even made decisions to accept the Lord into their hearts. That made it worth it all.

For follow-up, we visited each of the past campers' homes and met their parents during spring break the next year. We wanted to remind the kids about the upcoming summer camp. It was an opportunity for the parents and kids to become better acquainted with us and us with them.

As we entered the reservation, we questioned whether we should go back to the man who had threatened to shoot us, but Russ felt the man was lost and he had to talk to him about the Lord. This time the man was sober and he invited us into his house to sit down with his wife and him as they were having tea. Russ explained the way of salvation to them and they listened quietly. They didn't make a decision for Christ, but our job was to present the way of salvation to people and leave the results to God. The next year we learned the man had been killed in a tragic car accident not long after our visit.



Steve with his pet dog

During spring break Steve was sick with Hepatitis B, contracted probably from close contact with his pet dog. Our other children then had to take 'needles' to prevent them from also contracting Hepatitis. We left him at home alone for the week we went to visit the other two reserves. Our co-worker, Alma, lived across the street and would check on Steve and bring him one meal each day. We made up a bed for him on the hide-a-bed in the living room and he lay there day and night, his dog and books keeping him company.

We tried another year of camp the next summer. We divided the kids, enrolling the Cumberland House kids for one week and the kids from the other two reservations for the second week. The second year of camp went easier. This time we tried to get some information as to names, ages, phone

numbers, health issues, etc.

Rev. Victor Nickel from Watrous, SK. came as camp speaker for the next several years. He brought with him a crew of counselors from his church, who were young adults. Being farmers they brought ponies which was a big attraction to our campers. As they came several years they formed close bonds with the kids and continued a follow up.

In fact, they had so taken the Indian camp as their mission field that their youth group had a walk-a-thon to raise money to buy a small school bus which they gave to us for use in our ministry. We could haul kids to and from our Bible classes. It was so small it looked like a school bus cut in half. But it served the purpose and was really a tremendous help to us. We



Counselors at Camp from Watrous, SK



Counselors with kids from their cabins lined up for dinner



Rev. Nickel and Wes Schroeder with the donated bus

took it with us when we moved to Lac La Biche and used it at the Bible school.

Our children so thoroughly enjoyed camp for the several weeks we were there each summer. On the weekends between camps our children learned to operate the boat and to water ski. I was scared when I looked out onto the lake one time and saw my six year old daughter Sheryl riding a surf board pulled behind the boat. It glided over the water and she could handle it well, with only an occasional tumble into the water. She learned to water ski, to shoot archery and ride the ponies. Her age didn't stop her from trying all the activities.

Without thinking through all the consequences, we even let Steve drive the pontoon barge when campers were on board. On one afternoon,



Going home after Bible Camp

one of the kids fell off the front of the barge into the water. The other kids hollered and Steve had the presence of mind to raise the engine so the propeller didn't touch the child and he came out the back end between the pontoons, unhurt.

We praise God for safety for the hundreds of kids we had at camp those four years. Actually it was five years, because Russell and Steve went back to serve at camp the year following our move out of Cumberland House.

held. The Caucasian Christians helped with the crafts and music. Altogether we had some 85 – 100 children attend the hobby classes each week.



Children's Hobby Class



Kids at Hobby Class



Russell teaching Bible lesson

Chapter 38

The Schedule

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord Almighty." Zechariah 4:6b

Plans don't always turn out as we think they will. After praying about the work at Cumberland House, we thought we would be starting with a visitation ministry.

However, immediately we were faced with harvesting the garden: canning, pickling, and freezing an entire year's worth of produce. If I didn't know how before, I soon learned, and Alma was most helpful with that education. We made dill pickles, bread and butter pickles, sweet pickles, icicle pickles, beet pickles, end of the garden pickles, chow chow and whatever else there was to make. We chopped cabbage and packed it into crocks for sauerkraut. We bagged carrots and put potatoes in the bin in the cellar. We blanched peas, beans, corn

until we had no more room to store it. We made jellies, jams and juices.

Next we were faced with Children's Hobby Classes. To start, we reduced the number of classes to two evenings a week instead of the four previously



Our children sold excess garden produce

Eight of the children's parents chose Evangelical religious instruction in the public school. So 30 minutes of a school day each week was also scheduled for religious instruction and had to be included in our week's schedule. These eight children plus another dozen also attended Sunday school (so we could not repeat the lesson in the other class). It required a lot of preparation to teach all these classes and prepare craft projects for the 'hobby classes'!

Russell was also asked to be a guidance counselor for the 7th, 8th and 9th graders in the public school. This gave him an inroad with the youth and by Christmas we were able to start a young people's group. We only held these

activities twice a month, alternating with the younger youth one week and the older youth the following week.

The young people from the Baptist, Alliance and Community Churches from Nipawin came at different times to join us on a Friday evening. We found it such a blessing to have their help and enthusiasm. Even the co-operation of a number of church groups was a wonderful blessing to us. It was good to have non-Native Christian youth to interact with our Native youth and hopefully it impacted the non-Native youth as well.

It was the requirement of a number of Bible schools that in order for their students to graduate, they had to spend a summer in an internship. The NCEM Executive assigned some Bible School students to do their internship with us as well for up to a year. We had several different young ladies.

There were also missionary trainees from the Northern Missionary Training Camp come up to work with us for the summer several years. We, as senior missionaries, were to find accommodations for the trainees and some got only unoccupied shabby log housing. They had to learn to 'make-do' with no furniture at all while they carried on a ministry with the children and youth, conducted a Vacation Bible School and carried on a visitation ministry. We supervised them and made suggestions to help them in their



*Sunday School children's Christmas presentation:
Costumes & Program by Virgie*



Young people's group



NMTC trainees we supervised one summer

quest to become missionaries. We prayed with them and for them hoping some would sense the call of the Lord to join in the work to the Native people on a long term basis.

One evening at one of the youth activities, we were having popcorn with the young people, when we realized one of the teenage girls was choking. She had been throwing popcorn into the air and catching it with

her mouth, the same as everyone else. But this time it went down her 'wind pipe'. I rushed over and tried pounding on her back to dislodge the popcorn, but it didn't help. Russell picked her up by her feet holding her off the floor while shaking her. I got on the floor and tried again to dislodge the popcorn in her throat with my finger. God did hear our frantic prayers and the popcorn came out. To recover we lay her on the floor and we sat around and everyone started laughing. We missionaries were shaken up at such a close call.

About once a month the Shantyman missionary from Carrot River, SK. came rolling into town with his pickup. He spent his time visiting lumber camps and Native villages showing Bible filmstrips. Everyone welcomed him and he clearly presented the gospel message. For such special occasions we could get up to 100 people on short notice for his service. The next day he would travel on.

Even though Russell and I had our own private times with the Lord, as a family we read the Bible each day memorizing scripture verses which we often repeated at the table. We also wanted to study the Bible and pray with Alma, so we set aside time each week for that. By the second year Marjorie joined us. She had been reading her Bible for years, but she found it difficult to understand spiritual things. She asked us over and over until she finally could either understand it or accept it by faith. Her spiritual growth was slow but steady. She brought her grandson, who she was raising, to our church to be dedicated to the Lord instead of having him baptized as a baby.

We requested Christmas gifts, not to exceed \$1.00 each, to be sent for 100 children which we handed out after our Christmas program. These were sent by a church in Ontario interested in Native ministry. We also received filmstrips from a lady in Ontario to use in our classes.

The first of January the community would have dog races. A number of the men ran a team of eight or ten dogs and the competition was exciting. The dogs barked and raised quite a ruckus. Many people would come out to watch the teams race so it was quite the community affair. The races began on the main street of town and raced into the country several miles. The dog mushers were so into the sport they often traveled to other communities to race their dogs. It truly was a Northern sport. It excited our sons and occasionally Steve ran with Lobo in a race that only he competed in. Lobo loved to pull and sometimes Steve would hook Lobo up and just have a ride around town on the toboggan.



Dog team races

In the dead of winter when there weren't many activities, we held a series of evangelistic services. One year Tommy Francis came with his wife Helen. They were missionaries with NCEM and later Tommy was a co-founder of the Native Evangelical Fellowship, which is an organization for Native fellowships to join together as their own indigenous churches.

Another year we had Barney Lacendre as speaker. Barney had once been a medicine man and communicated with evil spirits. He is the man of whom Owen Salaway wrote in *The Bushman and the Spirits*. Barney said to us, "When I preach the gospel in my Cree, I can really spit it out." The ministry of these Native men was indeed effective.

We also set about to visit each home at least once every three months, leaving Christian literature even if we weren't invited in for a visit. The people learned to know who we were and why we were in their village. We

took the *Muskeg Moccasin Graph*, *Indian Life*, *the Cree Witness* and *Chick* booklets (Christian comics) and an assortment of children's story papers as we visited around the village. Only at a few homes did the people refuse the papers.

As it was hard to get people into a church building for a service we made it known that we would like to come to their homes and conduct an informal service with singing and scripture reading with them. We encouraged the hostesses to invite their friends and neighbors to come to their house as well. This seemed to produce fairly good results as we were



Bible Study in our home

invited to different homes in different part of the community each Sunday evening. Anywhere from five to ten adults would usually be in attendance besides the children and us. Only twice in that first year

did we not have an invitation for a Sunday evening meeting place. One time we had an invitation, but when we arrived no one was home.

A number of people told us they would like to be Christians but they didn't want to change their religion. Believers' baptism was a hindrance to them and yet they knew it was part of following Christ. Clement* said, "If I were to become a Christian I want to go all the way, even go to Bible school and become a pastor." He wasn't ready to make that commitment.

A generation later Clement's son did make the break and accepted the Lord. He came to Key Way Tin to attend Bible school. A number of other young people from Cumberland House also came to Key Way Tin. There is now a church there with their own Native pastor who is another graduate of KBI.

Chapter 39

The Bigger Picture

“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 6: 10–12

We knew we were in a spiritual battle. Every day we asked the Lord for His protection as we committed the day to the Lord. We asked Him to help us remember who our enemy was.

When we went to our first mission station at Paint Hills, it occupied the majority of our prayers and thoughts. Rightly so. When we moved to Thicket Portage, we were presented with another community to take over the majority of our prayers and thoughts, but we couldn't forget where we'd been, even though/or because of the great differences. The third station of Cumberland House with its different people and lifestyle again required the majority of our prayers and thoughts but the windows of our hearts were opening wider with each move. No longer did we see just the small community we were living in, but we saw the work as a whole, more like God sees it. We were really just a little spoke in His wheel.

When Russell was appointed to serve on the Eastern Field Council of the NCEM the world suddenly sprang open to expose a much bigger picture: the whole Eastern part of Canada with its variety of fields, people and so many spiritual needs.

On one trip three of the Eastern Council men flew to Rupert's House from The Pas. It was a 1000 mile one way trip with the mission's Cessna 180 over lakes and barren lands. They planned to stay the night at Rupert's



Mission Planes

House and tied the plane down as secure as possible along the shore of the Rupert River before heading to the house for supper. However during supper they saw dark clouds coming from the west. A big wind came up and the trees began to sway and water began to stir and waves began forming on the water. Ed and Russ started running to the plane, probably about two blocks toward the river thinking perhaps if they got into the plane their added weight would help hold it in down.

Before they got there, the wind was so strong they had to seek shelter behind some buildings. Afterwards the men realized how foolish to have thought their weight would hold the plane down on the water. Had they been in the plane they would have most certainly been seriously injured or even killed. The plane, which was facing the wind, was lifted up like a paper box. It appeared to be flying 15 feet above the water but wasn't moving because the tail was tied with a strong nylon rope attached to a heavy chain anchored near the shore. The plane then made a nose dive right into the river with most of the cockpit under water with its tail section up in the air.

Within minutes all was calm, leaving behind destruction to tents, a school and a warehouse that was completely destroyed. Ed and Russ, along with some local men who had seen the wind pick up the plane and throw it into the river, rushed to the shore. They were able to right the plane back onto its floats by pulling the rope anchoring the tail toward shore. It took more than 20 men to lift the entire plane and carry it up further onto shore to get it up above the tide level. The pilot Ed spent the next two days taking the instrument panel of the plane apart and drying out all the parts. Mr. McComb and Russell went on to visit the other stations by commercial airways.

One wing and the propeller needed replacing before the plane could be flown again. Ed had to leave the plane there until he could get parts for

the repairs from the mission airbase at The Pas. Then Ed and another missionary pilot brought back a new prop and wing which was tied between the pontoons of their plane. They repaired the plane and flew both planes back to the Mission airbase.

“Our fight is not against people on earth but against the rulers and authorities and powers of this evil world’s darkness, against the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly world.” The men often sought the Lord realizing He was their help in times of trouble.

Russ enjoyed traveling with Ed Hickey and other council members in the Cessna 170 or Cessna 180 over a vast country of endless muskeg, forests, and lakes. He was so blessed and encouraged to meet the Native believers and see the Native churches that had sprung up during the past several decades.

On one such trip he attended the dedication of the Weagamow Church at Round Lake, Ontario. It was a common practice when they visited the Native churches that all the missionaries were asked to give a message. They didn’t seem to mind sitting for a three hour service. They just felt so blessed to have the visitors share from the Word of God. Another interesting observation was that if a child was misbehaving in church, one



Ed Hickey, NCEM pilot



Weagamow Lake Church dedication

of the church elders would tap the parent on the shoulder with a pole. The parent would then get up and take the child out to discipline him.

Russ also had opportunity for travel to the Maritimes, with its beautiful and different scenery. He had a different experience when one of the directors of the NCEM was ill and Phil Howard needed to attend a conference in Missouri. He asked Russell to accompany him, which was a most welcome invitation. It was only a few hundred miles from his Mother’s place in Kansas so he even got to make a side trip to see her after the conference.

When the men arrived at their host’s house Russell’s eyes grew large when he saw a big yacht and several expensive cars in the yard. The house was a large elaborate home with rugs you could lose your shoes in. Later Phil said to Russ, “I’m sure you wonder how this Christian man can justify living like this?” Russ said, “Yes, it did enter my mind.” Phil then explained their host was an important lawyer and was an influential man. He moved in circles neither Phil nor Russ could ever dream to be accepted in, especially not to witness. And in that circle, this man witnessed for the Lord and he led some of his co-workers to know the Lord Jesus. This man had financially blessed the mission work with his money and his prayers. Now God was blessing him and using him in the place he was, even though it was a long stretch from the shacks and trails we were accustomed to. Isaiah 55:8-9, *“The Lord says my thoughts are not like your thoughts. Your ways are not like my ways. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”* Who are we to judge another? God uses various people in various ways in various situations.

The Northern Canada Evangelical Mission became an organization in 1946; but a few years prior there were a few missionary couples who



NCEM headquarters in Prince Albert, SK

ventured out with much hardship to reach the Native people to whom God was calling them. They planted the Seed, and watered it with their tears and prayers and within 15 or 20 years there were small groups of believers congregating into small churches. A few years later these small churches organized into the Native Evangelical Fellowship, which is the offspring of NCEM, and now is registered as a



NCEM Eastern Field Council

denomination. We praised the Lord for what we have seen in the years we had served in Northern Canada.

While Russ was on the Field council, he was given the opportunity to visit the stations in the James Bay area in Quebec where we had served 1962-1968. This was an official trip for Russell but since the trip was to be made by mission plane, it was decided that I should accompany him. Our co-worker, Alma, so graciously agreed to keep our children and to carry on the services.

On a cold January morning, we left on a three week trip east in the mission's Cessna 180 with a retired business man who had a small plane of his own. He had volunteered to help with the mission work by flying the Mission's plane that January.

Our first evening and night were spent at The Pas where we spoke to the Young Peoples' group. In the audience that evening were several Native believers who were not walking with the Lord anymore. Russ spoke on back sliding and one girl walked out of the meeting. Later she apologized to him and said she just couldn't take the conviction anymore but she wasn't ready to surrender to the Lord either. Also in the audience was Marianne, the Native girl who had lived with us one winter at Thicket Portage. In this work, we often came across people we had previously met. Fred Evans said after becoming a Christian he found friends everywhere he went.

The next day we headed out on an overnight in Red Lake, Ontario where we spent the night at the Mennonite Mission guest house. We then flew on to Moose Factory, Ontario. Here we spent a Sunday and Monday enjoying the fellowship with the Christians. Their pastor, James Moses, was



James Moses

a local believer who had been out to Mokahum Indian Bible School in Bemindji, Minnesota, and had returned to pastor his own church where his relatives and friends were among the believers. The congregation was totally supporting the Moses' family. It was such a joy to fellowship with them.

The Christians at Moose Factory donated several boxfuls of groceries to feed us while we were in the area. The next day the mission plane made a flight with supplies into Rupert's House.



Early believers at Moose Factory

On the second flight of the day, we were on board the plane which had to fly over to the Moosonee airport to fuel up and for the pilot to file a flight plan. After refueling, the airport tower directed us to wait

on a side runway until a DC3 had landed. Our pilot noticed a different runway going a different direction and he asked if he could depart on it. The tower told him that he would encounter a side wind on that runway and that he should wait. But the pilot, Jim, said he would be okay, so the tower gave him approval. As we began our take off we were hit by a strong side wind which caused our plane to head toward the high snow banks that the grader had made. He wasn't familiar with handling this tail dragger plane in a cross wind. Before Jim could correct the plane's direction with the rudders, the plane rode up on the snow piled on the side of the runway propelling it into the air. Since the plane was not going at a speed to remain airborne, it nosedived into the snow bank causing the suitcases behind me to come crashing down over my head leaving me in darkness for a bit. As I

looked down in that split second before darkness hit, I saw Russell and reached out my hand toward him. I remember thinking "This is it. We are dying."

The plane, with the tail up in the air, then continued to plow the snow bank a distance before the wing made contact with the runway. The wheel/ski strut on one side had broken off. The plane



Damaged plane after crash landing

made several circles on the runway before it came to a stop. We were all momentarily stunned, but as Russell became aware of the steam rising from the engine, he thought it was on fire. "We have to get out right away," he said as he reached over the pilot's lap to release the door. The pilot continued to sit there stunned. We all three had climbed out by the time the airport personnel and police arrived with the fire truck. They said, "Observing you from the tower, we thought you were going to tip right over. We were sure you were going to catch fire." It was just steam rising from the snow on the hot engine. It was so good to know help was there had we needed it.

After that Jim returned home. Soon Ed and another pilot flew from The Pas in another mission plane with replacement parts: a wing, struts, propeller etc. whatever else was needed, and spent a couple weeks working under a tent with heat repairing the plane.

Russell and I took the Austin Airways scheduled flight up the coast to Rupert's House where we spent four days before heading on to Paint Hills. What a privilege it was to see the folks there at Paint Hills again. I never thought that would happen. The people gave us a warm welcome, some with tears in their eyes. Some apologized for the wrong way they had treated us in 1967 when they had opposed Russell teaching in the school and in general had opposed our ministry leading to our eventual transfer out of the village. We held no resentment to the people. It was with love that we went door to door greeting the people, catching up with things that had happened in the past six years. We even held one service in our old house at their request. It was packed out with people. We read scripture and prayed with most of the people as we visited in their homes.

On the next scheduled commercial flight, as we had to leave, it was with tears that we gave our final hugs, kisses and handshakes and said our final goodbyes. As long as we could see them they waved. From there we

flew up to Fort George where we spent time with Gilbert and Mary Trapper, a Native couple serving as missionaries there from the Moose Factory church fellowship. We also had opportunity to meet a former Hudson's Bay Co. manager we had known at Paint Hills. He had since come to know the Lord and was married to a lovely Christian Native girl.

Arriving back at Moose Factory we found the plane wasn't yet repaired, so we had to board a bus and spend two nights and three days traveling cross country. At our first transfer, we missed the bus, so had to take the taxi and chase after the bus for 26 miles till we caught up to it. Oh, the joys and hazards of Northern travel. But the Lord protected us without a scratch. There is no safer place than to be in the Lord's Will.

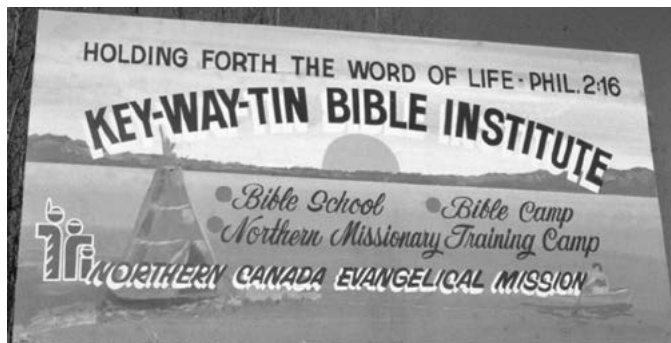
Chapter 40

The Next Phase

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations and then the end shall come.” Matthew 24:14

After we had been at Cumberland House four years, we learned that Alma was going to leave the Mission. She was going to marry her ‘honey man’. Since NCEM was a faith mission each of us missionaries were responsible to raise our own financial support. Thus Alma’s supporters were different than ours and among her supporters was someone who delivered a five gallon pail of honey from his bee hives to her each year. Although we hadn’t met him, he also brought a pail of honey for us. We wanted to thank him but Alma was reluctant to introduce us. We assumed she was afraid this person would divide their support between her and us. So we didn’t pursue the issue until she told us she was leaving the mission to marry the man who brought honey to her each year. We then referred to him as Alma’s “honey man.” We were happy for her and they have had a happy life together. They have continued to garden and take produce up to Cumberland House to sell and they have visited the people and handed out Christian literature.

NCEM was planning to move



Key Way Tin Training Centre



Building first used for classes, dining room & dorms

the LaRonge Indian Bible School from LaRonge, Saskatchewan, to Lac La Biche, Alberta, as someone had given lakeshore property to NCEM for a Bible school. Access to Lac La Biche was more readily available, and the buildings already on the property were larger and more modern than what was at LaRonge. The board had asked Bill Friesen to move to Lac La Biche to start up the Bible School and teach there.

In 1973 Ray Larsen and some volunteers built a large building to house the classroom, kitchen, business office and dormitories in a three level building. Bill and Mary Friesen moved into one of the apartments in the main building. Jack and Florida Gordon were already living in a residence on campus doing a ministry at the Kikino settlement and running Bible camps.

The year before, the NCEM board had asked Russell to consider taking responsibility for the short term Bible schools, which he did. He went to Grand Rapids, Island Lake, Wabowden and Moose Factory. He had also previously taught a course at LaRonge and then went to Lac La Biche to teach several courses in 1973. Recognizing Russell’s gift in teaching the Word and his desire to teach, Bill asked the NCEM board to transfer us to Lac La Biche for Russ to help get the Bible school operational and share the teaching with him. When the board approached us as whether this would be something Russ would like to do, we were delighted.

This was exactly what we wanted to do. Now we could see where the previous 12 years of such diverse mission stations with various ministries were in preparation for this work of training Native believers. We would know and understand the backgrounds of the students that would come to study at Key Way Tin Bible Institute. It was a perfect fit. One we would do for the next 18 years.



Part 4

**The years in
LAC LA BICHE,
ALBERTA**

1970 - 1974



Chapter 41

The Bible School

I thank Christ our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service.” 1 Timothy 1:12

“Where are the students?” Jimmy asked. “You’re it.” Bill Friesen responded.

“You mean there are no other students?” “Not yet.”

Jimmy, an Ojibway Indian, had left his home in Ontario to come to Bible school and there were no other students! This wasn’t what he had expected, but he stayed. The Bible school officially opened in 1973 with one student.

Frances Pate-naude came later that winter to complete her training begun at the La-Ronge Indian Bible School and she graduated in the spring.



Jimmy Keesic, first student at Key Way Tin



Some of the students in later 1970’s

By the fall of 1974 the student body was five and our family had moved from Cumberland House onto the campus at Lac La Biche as well. Thus began our ministry with the Key Way Tin Bible School. (Key Way Tin means ‘north wind’.)

It was decided that a multi-purpose Training Center would occupy the 19 acre lake shore property just two miles east out of the town of Lac La Biche. The campus would include a Bible School, a Missionary Training program and Indian Bible Camps and was to be called Key Way Tin Training Center.

The Bible school would be the major program for six months of the year. Its purpose was to teach the Word of God to the Indian Christians and to teach them how to share Jesus Christ with their own people.

Bill Friesen, Jack Gordon and Russell became the executive of the Key Way Tin Training Centre. They met regularly to pray and plan for the classes and activities.

Russ was busy preparing and organizing lessons: three – 55 minute lessons for each school day (keeping the entire semester in mind). Besides teaching, he rotated speaking in chapel, supervised boys’ dorm life and school activities and was to be available at all times to counsel students and just generally be available for them. The Native culture revolved around much visiting; just ‘hanging out’, which we seemed to never have enough time for. Students often dropped in at our house. In fact, sometimes we found them waiting in our house for us when we arrived home.

Living on a campus offered opportunities to our children they hadn’t enjoyed before. There were nine missionaries kids in a six year age span; the oldest two were the same age: Joyce Friesen and Steve, and the youngest two were Kerrylea Friesen and Sheryl, who were the same age. The other children: Gordon Friesen, John Gordon, Glen, Lyle Friesen and Rebecca Gordon were each about one year apart between the oldest and the youngest. They went swimming, diving off a canoe, ice skating, playing with school sports equipment (like the canoes) and just generally playing together. Before the lake was frozen, they walked up to skate on a slough that was already frozen. Daily the kids also had to walk the half mile driveway to wait for the school bus together and occasionally that ended up with someone getting punched by someone else.

On one boring fall day, John and Glen, Rebecca and Sheryl wandered off the Bible school property and found an abandoned shack. They went in to explore and after a while decided to build a fire on the floor. When it was

time to return home, they thought they had put out the fire and proceeded home.

While they were eating Jack Gordon saw a fire burning up towards the golf course. He questioned John, who confessed that he and Rebecca had been up at a shack and had lit a fire. He also said that Glen and Sheryl were there with them.

At our house a solemn Glen and Sheryl had asked me to come to the basement and told me that they had been in the shack and had a fire on the floor. They had seen the shack burning as they were walking home but didn't know what to do about it. When he learned about the situation, Jack came to talk to me. (Russ was away on an Eastern Field trip). By then the shack was destroyed. We decided however, that we should call the fire department. The RCMP came out to talk to the kids but the police said the building needed to be destroyed anyway, so they only reprimanded the kids. No charges were laid.

Our children had many good experiences while living on campus. There were 'tons of things to do' and they enjoyed it immensely. They attended Bible Camp, interacted with the students and baby sat the students' kids. The students had a positive influence on our children's lives. They were no longer isolated but now they had Christian friends and Christian activities to attend. They also attended young people's meetings at the local church.

Glen and some of the other missionary teenagers even went hunting in the bush for moose and deer. I don't remember that they shot anything, but they went out hunting anyway.

We also had sewer and running water for the first time and we could all have a hot shower every day if we wanted. We bought an automatic washing machine, as well. Life was good.

There were however, adjustments for all of us, families and students, living so closely with one another. One evening after we had promised a 'family night' with our children, a student came over. The student had many problems and things he wanted to discuss; so Russ told our children to go downstairs and we would spend time with them some other day. Glen looked up at Russ and with a twitch in his jaw, gritted his teeth and said, "You like the Indians better than us."

"But that's not true," Russ responded. "It's just they need help right now and we can always play with you another time." That didn't set well with Glen. He felt he took second place to the students in our lives. Russell began to rethink what we were doing to our children. We asked the Lord

how we could change the situation. It eventually meant moving off the campus onto an acreage of our own where we were able to spend more undivided time with our children. When we were at the school, we gave our attention there; when we were at home our family had our attention.

While Russell was enjoying the work, I too felt left out as did our boys. I wanted to be a part of the work, as I had been a partner with Russ for the past years of our missionary career. When I asked, "What can I do?"; there didn't seem to be much of anything (except to plant a garden as Bill suggested). I tried, but the soil was hard and full of grass and not at all as fertile as the garden plot at Cumberland House. I felt discouraged and prayed that God would give me a ministry.

"Maybe now is the time for you to get back into nursing," Russell advised. We began praying in earnest whether this was what the Lord wanted me to do. We presented this to the NCEM executive for their approval and they thought it would be okay.

Inquiring to renew my Registered Nurse license, I learned I would have to take a refresher course as I had spent too many years out of nursing practice. The nearest school I could go to take the classes required was to go to Vermillion College, about 186 kilometres away. Alternating one week there and one week back at the Lac La Biche Hospital working under the instruction and supervision of head nurses of each department: Medicine, Surgery, Obstetrics, Paediatrics, and Emergency Room for the next six weeks. Then I could write the exam for my Alberta nursing license. This was a challenge for a 36 year old with three school aged children.

For the students as well, there had been many adjustments coming to school. Most had never had to follow rules, such as getting up in the mornings to meet a schedule, or even in matters such as going to the dining hall for meals at a set time. Gary said he had never sat at a table to eat with others and he felt embarrassed to think they would watch him eat. At home he said the food was cooked and left setting in the kitchen and family members would just help themselves whenever they felt hungry. After being at KBI they were confident to face the society in which they now lived and would be comfortable there as well as in their own environment.

and being away from home. Nothing had changed with my body after 10 days so the doctor sent me home on bed rest.

My Mom was very concerned about me. Her sister had died in childbirth, so Mom was afraid that I might also die, since she thought we were lacking in adequate health care. Furthermore, Russ was busy trying to keep up with his work at the school, his Christian work assignment and keeping three young children in school with clean clothes and school lunches. My Mom decided to come from Oklahoma to help care for the family.

The students weren't shy about coming over to visit us and they visited us often in the days following my return from the hospital. My Mother became very fond of them. To her it was next best thing to being a missionary herself.

One man from the church came to install a shower head as I wasn't allowed to take a bath in a tub. People came to visit and brought food for the family. We felt loved and comforted. We formed bonds with people we had never thought would be our friends. Some of these friendships have lasted to this day.

Mom stayed close by me and not long after she had arrived, on a Sunday morning when my family had gone to church and I was resting in bed, my Mother went down stairs to get something out of the deepfreeze. Not turning on the light over the stairway and not noticing there was one more step, she stumbled and fell on her right knee. She tried getting up but the knee gave way and down she went again, this time breaking her left wrist. She called for help, but I didn't hear her, so she crawled up the stairs and lay on the floor until I heard her calling and came to her. She felt weak and asked for a piece of bread and some coffee so I obliged and gave her something to eat. (This was the wrong thing to do before taking her to the emergency room, which I knew we'd have to do. I just wasn't thinking straight.)

Soon Russell and the children came home from church. They were alarmed. Russell called for an ambulance and 12 year Glen, who had taken a St. John's First Aid course, got a magazine and made a temporary splint for his Grandma's wrist.

Mom would have to go to surgery to repair the broken wrist and the broken leg, which was cracked from the knee down. Because she had eaten such a short time before, the doctor said we would have to wait several hours before she could be given anesthetic. I got out of bed and went to the hospital to be with Mom when she came out of surgery. That evening

Chapter 42

The Unexpected

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28

After finishing the refresher course in nursing and writing my exam to qualify as a RN, I was hired to work casual hours at the hospital, usually the 3-11 shifts, so Russell would be home with the children after school when I was working.

Rather unexpectedly, I suspected that I might be expecting a new baby. Our youngest child, Sheryl, was almost nine years old. It didn't take long for the surprise to become an anticipated joyous event. However our joy was short lived, as one day several months later while working in the hospital, an elderly stroke patient hit me in the abdomen. My amniotic fluid ran down my legs, onto the floor and out into the hallway. In alarm the other nurse working with me called for the Supervisor who took me to the emergency room where it was confirmed that my membranes had ruptured. I was ordered off work and to bed by my doctor. I was afraid I would start labor right away, but I didn't.

About a week later, the Director of Nurses wanted me to go for a check up with an Obstetrician in Edmonton, since the incident had occurred while on duty and was a Worker's Compensation Case. I spent 10 days in the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton on bed rest. A friend from the church at Lac La Biche had told one of her friends in Edmonton about me, so her friend came to visit me in the hospital. I didn't even know her, but I was glad for a visitor. She brought books for me to read.

I had a few other activities to do to pass the time. I made a stuffed toy in an occupational therapy class. But I missed my husband and children

twinges began and soon I was in labor. I wasn't quite seven months pregnant! And that frightened me.

At first we hadn't expected a child, then when we knew one was on the way, we were thrilled; but when complications came we feared we would lose the baby. We wanted the baby so much. As my labor progressed I began crying inconsolably.

Dr. O* ordered an injection of Valium for my near hysteria, which was the wrong thing to do. It couldn't be reversed, like a narcotic could have been. When our little daughter was born, she lay flaccid and Russ watched as her heartbeat and respirations slowed, then stopped. She lived only two hours and fifteen minutes.

Immediately after our baby's birth, which Dr. O hadn't expected to be a live birth, he called the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton requesting the Neo Natal Intensive Care Unit to come out with special equipment and medications to stabilize the baby and transport her to Edmonton. They arrived just minutes after our baby had taken her last breath. Our baby was dead. But our emotional rollercoaster wasn't over yet. It would take months for the grief to ease.

We named her Crystal Janette. The name Janette means "God is gracious." Even though we didn't know why, we acknowledged that God



KBI staff & students around Crystal's grave

was in control. He could have reversed the situation, even though human error had caused it. We claimed Romans 8:28, "*And we know that God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.*" He gave us peace in the midst of the storm. Even though we didn't understand why; we knew God was going to bring about good in our lives, because we loved Him.

Staff members rallied around us to do what we couldn't do. Mary and Florida, dressed our little Crystal in a white flannelette gown, and Jim built a small wooden box to serve as a coffin. Charlotte made a bed in the box on which Russell laid our baby. They placed a pink carnation in Crystal's hands. I hadn't even gotten to hold her. Russell took her home one night so our children and he could have a private time with her before the burial the next day. Her two brothers and sister sat beside the coffin and held her hands. She was so perfect, just small.

On November 13th a service was held at the graveside in the Willow Park cemetery in Lac La Biche. Jack officiated and the students sang several songs. Neither I nor my Mother was able to attend. An older lady from the church came to sit with me during the time of the committal service, but I only wanted to be alone with my tears.

A friend of ours from Nipawin, Saskatchewan, who sold grave markers, donated a grave stone to us. It read:

"CRYSTAL JANETTE MUELLER
Infant daughter of Russell & Virgie Mueller
November 11-12, 1975
God is Gracious."

My Mother went home to Oklahoma in January. It hurt in my heart to put her on the plane in a wheelchair with casts on her left arm and right leg; but the airline attendants took care of her and assisted her through the transfers. She then received physiotherapy and recovered well.

I was depressed. It was months later before I realized when I could sing praises to God that the depression left and peace returned. Now it was time I get back to the ministry.

Chapter 43

The Increase

“And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Acts 2:47b

On the campus was a large building built the year before the Bible school began. The basement of this building housed the classroom/library in one room, kitchen/dining room with ping pong table in another room, business office in yet another, laundry/furnace room and then storage in the last room.

On the main floor, just above the classroom, dining room and office, the principal lived with his family. At the opposite end of that floor were a couple of rooms for the single men students. The upper floor housed the single lady students with a small suite for Charlotte McClennan, the ladies’ dean of women, who was also the cook.

While the Bible school students had been eating their meals in the basement of this building during the school term,



The all purpose KBI building

the missionary trainees’ meals were cooked and served from a shanty behind the Quonset, using the Quonset as a dining room in the summer time.

Art Tarry, director of the Northern Missionary Training Camp, along with Bud Elford and Russ as assistant directors, decided a kitchen needed to be built to accommodate cooking and serving of the meals for the summer missionary trainees. Plans were made and since Russ was living on campus the lot fell to him to take charge of building a large modern kitchen

which was to be attached to the 50’ x 30’ Quonset. Can you imagine Russ lying on his back on the ground in the crawl space under the floor of the kitchen installing heating ducts? Jim Stauffer helped with the plumbing and electrical installation. No doubt others gave a hand with the construction as well. This kitchen then served the trainees, KBI students as well as the children who came from the surrounding areas for children’s Bible camps each summer.

The Northern Missionary Training Camp ran a program in June for 10 days when young people came from across Canada and even some states to Lac La Biche. Some Bible college students came to take an internship as required by their Bible school, while some potential missionaries also enrolled to see if the Lord was calling them into career missionary work with the Natives.



Trainees making song sheets

both of which Russ taught. Mrs. Tarry taught beading of necklaces and making song sheets using large spiral notebooks of cardstock. These were illustrated with pictures cut from magazines or calendars. They would be used by the trainees on their summer village ministry to teach the choruses to the children.

In the evenings a message or further teaching was done and the trainees each had to demonstrate teaching the song they had chosen to make to the other trainees.

After the 10 days of intense teaching, the trainees were then assigned in pairs to various locations to work under the supervision of senior missionaries. From their enrolment fees they were given an allotted amount of money and it had to be enough to last them for the six weeks they spent

Each morning several lectures were taught. In the afternoon the group was divided into smaller groups for practical workshops. There was bannock making (usually in a cast iron skillet or sometimes on a stick over a fire) which I taught, canoeing and fire making

in the village. I can remember there were 78 trainees at the peak enrolment in the late seventies. After the village ministry the trainees were brought back to the campus and for three days they shared testimonies of God's work in their lives and those to whom they had gone to minister. Most were involved in Bible camps with kids from their village. Many decisions were made about their future careers during this time. Better to discern the Lord's leading before going into the work as a career missionary; then dropping out which would hurt the missionary's reputation, hurt the mission organization and disillusion the supporting public.



The Quonset at night

The Quonset was being used as the chapel. When two classes at the Bible school were running concurrently, a second classroom was needed. The Quonset was then used as the second classroom. When a third classroom was needed, an old empty house was moved across campus close to the kitchen/Quonset for another classroom.

By 1977, the fourth year, enrolment of the Bible school had grown to 32 students. The needs for the school had grown as well. In particular we needed more staff. First to join the teaching staff on a part time basis were Bill and Shirley Jackson. Bill was a Native believer and the Jacksons lived on a nearby reserve. They were missionaries with the NCEM. Bill became the teacher of Doctrine and years' later, Bible colleges, which accepted our graduates as transfers into their degree programs, said our graduates had the most solid knowledge of doctrine of any students they enrolled. Bill also taught syllabics to the students who wanted to learn to read and write Cree. Other missionaries like Bud Elford, Art Tarry, Jay Jennings, the local



KBI Student body in 1977

pastor and a number of others came on a short term basis to teach block courses for a few weeks each.

Honeymooners, Jim and Lois Stauffer, had come to assist in maintenance and construction. A fellow by the name of Paul Ford volunteered his services for maintenance and construction as well. He caught the eye of our secretary, Laura Bradford, and a January wedding was planned on campus. They stayed on as staff but Laura moved into a different role. Again the school needed a secretary. Margaret Budd, formerly from



The staff increased as the student body grew

Cumberland House, came to take her place as secretary. We were pleased to have her as it was our goal to have as many Native staff as possible. Anne Penner also served as secretary until she met and married Robert Anderson, a

brother to several of the Anderson student girls. In later years Barb Wiebe also served as secretary.

In the spring of 1978 the school graduated its first three year diploma graduates. They were Fred Evans from Thicket Portage, Joe Kakegomic, Gary Quequish, David Kanakakeesic from Weagomow Lake, Ontario and



Fred & Charlotte Evans & family

Clara Wapachee, a widow with three children from Moose Factory, Ontario. There were several others receiving certificates of completion of two years if they chose only to attend for two years or were unable to fulfill the requirements of the regular course.

After graduation Fred and his family were accepted as missionaries with Continental Mission, Joe and Gary went to Kenora, Ontario for a street ministry. A year later Gary returned to KBI to join our teaching staff. David and his family returned to Weagamow Lake to serve in leadership in the local church. Clara and her family returned to Moose Factory to help with the church there.

A house had been moved to the campus from Uranium City. It was put on a basement and the single men now lived in the basement. In 1979 Dave and Muriel Anderson moved from northern BC. Dave became the business manager and supervised maintenance and Muriel worked in the



Gary Quequish & Joe Kakegomic



David & Mary Kanakakeesic & family



Clara Wapachee & family

office as book keeper. The Anderson family moved into the main floor of this house with two of their children adding Bruce and Glenn to the collection of MKs on campus. When Ken and Mildred Crooker came with their family from Ontario to assist in maintenance; another three MKs, Darlene, Danny and Melanie, were added. The first of numerous mobile trailers was moved onto campus for staff housing.

With the increased student body, came the need for larger facilities. Plans began to be formulated to build a new, larger academic building.



Administration & School Building

The mission had a no debt policy. The men proceeded to build an \$800,000 building, whereas the actual cost was more like \$100,000 with volunteer labor. Truly God had worked a miracle by supplying money, manpower and materials.

A semi-retired construction worker, Peter Nikkel and his wife Edith who served as cook in the school kitchen, came from BC. Peter would oversee the project. Other skilled laborers like Mr. McNaughten wired the building. Phil Ford came as a volunteer and met his future wife, secretary Carol Mullin at KBI, and after their marriage they joined NCEM. Jack and Lucy Vogt were also volunteers and joined NCEM. With all the volunteer labor the building was ready to move into within one year.

The finished building set on the hill. The classes were now held in three large well lit classrooms with a separate library/study hall. The general office had more than tripled its space and there were offices for the principal and academic dean. There were also a small bookstore and a large gymnasium with a stage to accommodate large gatherings like graduations and youth retreat when as many as 350 people were in attendance.

The gymnasium was the frosting on the cake and was in use every day. Organized sports like volleyball, floor hockey and students just shooting baskets with a basketball were some of the activities.

North Quest was a highlight for Native youth when they were invited for a weekend in February to attend a youth retreat on campus. Food, sports,



Key Way Tin Building/School as it is today

and music were in abundance. Testimonies and preaching were also part and parcel of the weekend. Alumni served as speakers, participated with the students and guests in the various activities and gave leadership in all aspects of the weekend. For the alumni it was a homecoming and they loved it. Missionaries brought young people from various places in Canada and from as far away as the Northwest Territories. The young people thoroughly enjoyed themselves even if they had to buckle down to rules like 'No Smoking' and 'Attendance at all Services is Required'. Some made decisions for Christ those weekends and some of them returned to enroll as students at KBI; but all were introduced to Jesus Christ and His plan of salvation.

Joe and Helen Pope moved to Lac La Biche to set up the Bible Education by Extension (BEE) program. They began by rewriting courses already used in other third world countries, then developing new courses. Russell met with them one day a week to give guidance and edited their writing. Their courses served mostly people in the villages who were older, had families or for any number of reasons couldn't attend a residential Bible school. These courses are still being used today.



North Quest Youth Retreat



Hockey

There was quite a turnover of staff in the 1980's. Joining us as staff for short term, part time and full time were Ed and Karen Lytle, John Gordon, Steve and Rosella Werdal, David and Kathryn Ives, Kene Jackson and Leigh and Terry Wolverton.

When students (that had literally grown up on ice skates) began attending the school, it didn't take long until the school had a regular hockey team with Dave and Bill as coaches. The team wore bright gold sweaters bearing the name "KINGS" with the school's cross and crown logo on the front. The team entered the local commercial league and excitement grew. The Kings were indeed outstanding. They won every game for the couple of years that Mervin, Bobby, and Steve Cheechoo, Paul Ford, Robert Young, Ron Desjarlais and Randie Ross played. The Cheechoo boys were from Moose Factory, and were top notch players. (Among the children of the students was baby



Mascots in one sweater with team trophy

attending the school, it didn't take long until the school had a regular hockey team with Dave and Bill as coaches. The team wore bright gold sweaters bearing the name "KINGS" with the school's cross and crown logo on the front. The team entered the local commercial league and excitement grew. The Kings were indeed outstanding. They won every game for the couple of years that Mervin, Bobby, and Steve Cheechoo, Paul Ford, Robert Young, Ron Desjarlais and Randie Ross played. The Cheechoo boys were from Moose Factory, and were top notch players. (Among the children of the students was baby



The KINGS hockey team

Jonathan Cheechoo, son of Mervin and Carol Ann Cheechoo. He was later drafted into the NHL.) The competition was fierce but in the end, the Key Way Tin Kings were crowned Commercial Hockey Champs.

Years later while we were on furlough in Oklahoma, Bryan Kroeker and Russ took down an old scoreboard that was no longer being used. It didn't work, so the scoreboard was left with Melvin Schultz, who refurbished it and shipped it up to the school. Now it worked well and was used when basketball was added to the sports department with Leigh Wolverton as coach.

Chapter 44

The Outreach

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19, 20a

Each of the staff families and the students had outreach ministries to surrounding Native communities on weekends. There were 10 Native settlements or reservations around the area of Lac La Biche.

Russell and I took the Hylo Sunday School and it became a special



The little white church at Hylo

part of our life in Lac La Biche. Attending the Sunday school were a number of Métis and white families, almost all ranchers and farmers. We met on Sunday mornings in an old, empty Evangelical Free Church building that stood on a corner lot in Hylo. Mr. McFarland had started a Sunday school there several years before. He moved on to start another Sunday school and Ray and Esther Larson continued the work. We followed the Larsons.

Mr. Mac was a single



The Hylo Sunday School people

school teacher who felt called to teach school and reach the children in the north for the Lord. He had given up marriage to his sweetheart who felt called to Africa. Neither married but fulfilled God's call on their life and God abundantly blessed both of their ministries. Mr. Mac walked miles to communities that had no evangelical work. He started something like seven Sunday schools. It was through his ministry and that of some Sunday School Mission workers that the Evangelical Free church of Lac La Biche was begun. He often asked Russell to take him to Owl River for visitation at the homes there.



Mr. William McFarland

The Hylo people and Russ worked to renovate the old church building which had gone into disrepair. First the building was wired for electricity. The wood stove was taken out and propane was installed. A new roof was added, new steps, new paneling, flooring; even the basement floor with its frost-heaved, cracked cement floor was replaced. Partitions were added to make three Sunday Sschool rooms. What a transformation. The steeple added to the charm of the little white church that had come back to life, in the little hamlet of Hylo, Alberta.

Russ taught the adults Sunday school; two Key Way Tin students and I taught the children's classes. Even Sheryl taught a class of the youngest



KBI students assist at Hylo Sunday School



Christmas program at Hylo Sunday School

children. I was in charge of the Christmas programs and we were renowned for our programs. On the night of the Christmas program there was usually a full house. Each year I drew a background of the town of Bethlehem or other appropriate visual aids and Russell built a manger or other aids required for our drama. After several years of trying to make do, finding

robes and towels for costumes, I sewed a complete set of costumes for Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the angels and three wise men.

We ministered to the people for 18 years, visiting the sick, marrying probably a dozen couples, baptizing the believers, burying the dead, and counseling the backslidden. We dealt with families getting them to reconcile when there was grave sin among family members. It was a rewarding work and we formed close friendships with these folk.

Bernard McDonald was the first of the congregation to die. He was a family man, one of three brothers who with their families attended Hylo Sunday School.

Another man at the church was Herb Juknies. He had kidney failure and had been on dialysis three times a week. The health unit set up a dialysis system in the Junkies' home so Herb's wife, Sonja, who was a Registered Nurse, could be trained to do the dialysis treatment instead of Herb having to make a trip to Edmonton three times a week. Later we learned that Herb's sister, Helen, was a perfect match as a donor kidney for Herb. Helen talked it over with her husband and they decided she would donate one of her kidneys to Herb. We sat with the families during the surgeries while brother and sister were in adjoining surgical suites. Both recovered and the kidney worked well for a number of years. Eventually Herb did pass away.

When we learned that Les Rayment had cancer, we went to visit him in the hospital. His doctor stopped by the night before surgery and Russ asked if he could pray for the Lord to guide the doctor's hand in surgery. The doctor consented. We also prayed for healing. Healing came to Les' soul, but not to his body.

When Les lay dying some months later, Russ and I were visiting him at his home. Seeing him so emaciated and near death, Russ just sat down, put his face in his hands and wept. Les was a special friend. Russ had married Les and Cindy. He had dedicated their babies. We had enjoyed our time with them in the church's activities, riding their speedboat during Sunday school picnics, being in their home, admiring his hobby of model and remote-



Les & Cindy dedicate their children to the Lord

control airplanes. They had just bought a new mobile home and the addition was not yet finished. But Russ would bury Les when he was still a young man with a wife and three young sons.

We also buried Les' Grandmother Elsie Juknies, as well as his mother Helen Rayment, over the years. These families had provided us with eggs, beef, and garden produce. We were a part of their extended family. Many events happened in the life of the congregation over those 18 years.

Russ performed a baptism in the lake over one Thanksgiving weekend and there was ice starting to form along the edges of the water, but Jackie Anderson wanted to be baptized when she was home from Bible College. Her chin quivered as she hurried to her home for the meal her family had prepared for the church folk.

Robbie McDonald had given Key Way Tin a mean steer he no longer wanted to keep in his herd. A student, Andy, went out to Hylo with Russ to butcher it. Russ feared the meat would be too tough to eat. But, Andy said he liked to put his teeth into a steak; 'put his foot up against the table and pull' in order to eat it.

One summer, and only one, I was the emergency responder for the McDonald Rodeos. Before the rodeo began, Robbie called everyone to attention and Russ opened with prayer. Although no one was hurt, the stress of possibilities was too much for me! I wouldn't do that again. As years went by the rodeo became a 'big thing' and lost its Christian atmosphere.

Another outreach ministry I had for at least one year was to conduct a Bible club in a Métis home in Lac La Biche. Russ and a couple students had visited homes in a back section of the town of Lac La Biche, knocking on doors and speaking to the parents of some children they had met on the road, telling them who they were and what they wanted to do. God opened one home so that each week that winter, Laura and I taught a Good News club with about a dozen children. Those children are now grown and even years later they greet me when we meet.

Besides working in the hospital on a casual basis, I was also an attendant for the ambulance company. I had taken an Emergency Medical Technician course, and was employed as an EMT for the ambulance as well as a RN from the hospital. Even though it might be an emergency call out at any time of the day or night, I thoroughly enjoyed the work and found the thrill of a 3:00 a.m. call exciting. I never knew in advance what a call might be. But someone needed me. I did local calls as well as ambulance transfers from Lac La Biche to Edmonton Hospitals.

It was exciting to fly in a small plane and within 45 minutes after takeoff in Lac La Biche, land in the Edmonton city airport. While some were air flights, others were transfers by ground ambulance. On one occasion as the ground ambulance sped through the night, I asked the driver to pull to the side of the road so I could deliver the baby who wasn't waiting for the hospital to be born. The baby didn't realize he was a high-risk delivery! Mother, baby and nurse were doing well when we arrived at the hospital.

Another time I looked at the 25 year old Native man who had tried to commit suicide. His arm was mangled and he appeared in shock from blood loss. He had a self-inflicted gunshot wound to his upper chest. I leaned over and asked him, "If you should die, do you know where you would spend eternity?" The Lord had prepared his heart and as I shared with him how he could be sure to go to heaven, he prayed and asked the Lord to forgive him of his sin and create a clean heart within him. Although he lost his arm, he did recover and after that he and his wife attended the Gospel chapel at Kikino, where some of our fellow staff and students were ministering. His wife had made an earlier commitment to the Lord but had not been living for Him. Now they began a walk with the Lord.

Another time as Mr. McFarland lay on the stretcher in the ambulance with scarcely a palpable pulse, I knelt beside him and leaning close to his ear recited the 23rd Psalm to him. I thought if these were to be his last moments on earth that would be what he would want to hear. Only days later he was back home with a pace maker making his heart tick like a clock.

Another practical work ministry I was involved with was supervising students on visitation in the Seniors Lodge. One Christ-



Fruit plates for 40 Seniors

mas I asked my children if they would help me to prepare and deliver fruit plates to 10 of the residents I knew best in the nursing home. My children didn't understand why I would only give to 10, when there were 40 seniors. In shame I agreed to their suggestion that we give to all 40. So Steven, Glen, Sheryl and I went to the grocery store to shop. At home we set 40 paper plates on the living room floor. On each plate we placed an apple, an orange, a banana, a bunch of grapes and a few candies. We covered each plate with plastic wrap and a colorful bow. Thus we celebrated a Christmas my children still remember as one of the best they ever had; when we delivered 40 plates of fruit to 40 residents of the Lacalta Lodge.

I attended the students with their medical needs. Fred and Charlotte's girls had diarrhea for days on end. They were admitted to the local hospital several times, and the diarrhea stopped after each admission. When they went home it started up again. When the medical personnel couldn't figure out the problem, I began stopping by their house at various times of the day to see if I might locate what may be causing the problem. One day the visit paid off. Fred told me they were giving their daughters a tea made from Senna. It was 'Native medicine', they said. Now I knew Senokot, made from Senna, was a laxative. So I explained this information to them and they stopped the tea. There was no further problem with diarrhea.

When Martha went into labor, we had to transport her to an awaiting car. She said she couldn't walk. We moved her onto a quilt and dragged her to the car over tree roots and rocks. That was no small feat and actually thinking back on it, I'm sure the entire ordeal looked quite humorous.

Another time Karen, a younger sister to several of the students, was hit by a motorcycle operated by a staff kid on the Bible school grounds. We moved her onto a 4' x 8' sheet of plywood and transported her into town to the hospital. Another time seven year old Sheila, daughter of one of the single Mom students, broke her arm while tobogganing. It required surgery with a metal plate.

Our daughter, Sheryl, was mowing the lawn when the lawnmower picked up a piece of wire, chopped it into bits and implanted two pieces of wire into the calf of her leg within seconds. She had to go to Edmonton to have the wire removed under fluoroscopy to avoid damage to the muscle because it was imbedded so deep.

A neighbor's dog somehow wandered onto the campus and bit one of our student's children in the face. After seeing to the medical needs of the child, we went with the student to tell the neighbor about the attack. We were afraid of what might transpire between the two parties, but it was a

congenial response. They asked forgiveness for their dog having bit the child. The dog never came on campus again.

When Gabe burned his hand with boiling water, I was changing the dressing every day. I finished the dressing change one afternoon when in all seriousness Gabe asked, "Mrs. Mueller, when this heals up, will I be able to play the piano?" "I don't know why not," I replied, to which his response was, "That's good, because I never could before."

Florida had been teaching a class to the student wives every second week regarding the role of the pastor's wife. I started a class on health on the alternate weeks. On occasion we even held a Well Baby Clinic with the Public Health nurse coming out to give baby vaccinations. Irene Haglund, a retired Home Economics teacher, came out to teach some Homemaking classes one year.

A special joy to us was having some Key Way Tin alumni join our staff. Among them were Gary Quequish, Donna Anderson, Terry Lakey, Ken and Heide Ditchburn and Kene and Millie Jackson. There were others in the years after we had moved on from the school, but these worked with us in our time there. At various times other NCEM missionaries joined the staff. Dale and Peggy Gordon (son of former staff Jack and Florida Gordon), as well as Lyle and Rita Anderson, Leigh and Terry Wolverton (daughter of Bud and Marge Elford), Les and Stella Shiel (returned missionaries from Peru), Dave and Dorlene Petkau (who actually stayed the longest of any staff), Phil and Carol Ford, Jack and Darlene Coy, Agatha Harder, and



Homemakers' class making toys



Virgie teaching in the classroom

Larry and Bernice Jaycox. There were also volunteers who worked for a winter or up to several years.

After Florida moved away Darlene Coy and I organized a class for the student wives that met weekly where we did a variety of crafts, sewing, making toys, cooking and baking as well as having a Bible study on the lives of Bible women. I also taught

Health and child care. When the KBI Executive saw what we ladies were doing, they were impressed. It was decided that I should also teach a class in the classroom to all the student women on being a pastor's wife. I taught from the curriculum of "The Pastor's Wife" class I had taken at Grace Bible Institute many years before. Each topic was still relevant, except for one rule: "The pastor's wife must always wear a hat." That didn't seem to be the norm in my culture anymore and it certainly wasn't the practice in the Native culture either; although many of the older women cover their heads with a scarf when the Bible is read or when praying.

We all saw this class as being very important as a wife can make or break her husband in the ministry. I enjoyed teaching these classes weekly for one semester each school year for a number of years.

I wrote a monthly newsletter, first for the students and then later it



Above: Key Way Tin Contact goes from press to the public



Right: Students enjoy reading Contact

was sent to our supporting public regarding everyday life at KBI and news about our alumni. I wrote updates to put on the bulletin board weekly featuring an alumnus telling what they were doing since graduation. I also wrote several articles for the Northern Lights magazine which was the official publication of the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission. In addition, I wrote the narrative for the Public Relations video 'The KBI Story'. I was happy to have found a niche where I could serve the Lord at Key Way Tin Bible Institute.

Russ took the pictures and Terry Wolverton and I framed the pictures of the graduates each year with the theme the class had chosen. These were hung in the hallway outside of the classrooms for all to see and be reminded to pray for the graduates of KBI.

While Russ was involved with the Ministerial Association in 1983 he was asked to be chairman of a city wide, week-long Barry Moore Crusade. Some of the churches opted not to participate, so the Evangelical Free Church and Key Way Tin Bible Institute carried the bulk of the responsibility for the project. One hundred and twenty one people made decisions for Christ, of which 49 were first time decisions to accept Christ. A number of these joined the Evangelical Free Church and have remained steadfast since that time.

One of those who accepted the Lord was Paul, a RN with whom I occasionally worked. On duty one day he came out of a patient's room and was agitated because he said, "There is a man going room to room talking to the people about the Bible." He thought we should 'throw the guy out'. I said, "You mean the man in Room 244? That's my husband." Paul was just a little embarrassed. When I told Russ about what Paul had said, Russ said he had noticed the nurse peeking around the curtain in several rooms but assumed he was just checking on the patients. During the Crusade Paul and his wife Elsie, also a RN, both accepted the Lord.

One KBI student at the crusade had tears in his eyes. Russ took him to the counseling room. He said he had learned 'to talk the talk and walk the walk', but he had never accepted Christ as his Savior. Russ asked, "Would you like to receive Christ now?" His response was, "I'll think about it." That's the war going on in the hearts of Native people who are hesitant to step out for the Lord for a variety of reasons. It wasn't an easy step to take and we realized it.

On one occasion we were approached by a lady asking if we could go visit her nephew and his wife. They were having disturbances in their home. Their bed was shaking at night and keeping them from sleeping. She said

dishes were flying out of the cabinets, kids toys were flying around and other items were banging around and doors were slamming shut. Russ drove out to the home where this young couple lived on a farm. The nephew was non-Native and his wife was Native. On the way before he got there, Russ stopped beside the road to ask the Lord what he should do or say once he'd get there. The Lord directed him to Ephesians 4 about "giving place to the devil." He felt he was to read these verses with them, as it gives several reasons why these things might be happening in their house.

When he arrived, they sat down and he asked the couple to tell him what the problem was. They explained briefly and then Russ turned to the Bible to seek what it had to say. The uncle and aunt were there with the couple and each had a Bible and together they started reading the 4th chapter of Ephesians, each reading a verse aloud. By the time they got to verse 31, it was the wife's turn to read, but before she had finished she broke into tears and began weeping. When her weeping ceased, Russ asked her, "Why are you crying?" She told them she had bitterness toward her mother-in-law. Russ explained that when we are unrepentant of known sin in our lives, we are leaving the door open for evil spirits to cause disturbances. She said she really wanted to be free from this sin in her life. She prayed asking the Lord to forgive her and committed herself to go to her mother-in-law the next morning. They then walked from room to room and cleansed it dedicating it to the Lord. Russ told them if there were any strange activities in the house following this, they should immediately call out the name "Jesus" and pray against the devil's devices.

The next Sunday Russ asked them how things were that night and they said only once had they been awakened with the bed shaking. As they had called out the name "Jesus", it stopped and didn't happen again. The wife said the morning following Russell's visit, she had driven to her mother-in-law's house and even as she got out of the car to walk toward the house, the mother-in-law came out the door with open arms to receive her. They asked forgiveness of one another and were reconciled. Later that year they each shared their testimony before the church and were baptized. The young couple was glowing. The young man's parents came and thanked Russell for the help he had given them. The father said, "I don't know what you did, but it made such a change in their lives." We knew it was God that made the change.

Years later, after we had moved from Lac La Biche and were there to attend a funeral, the young man came and gave Russell a hug. He said, "Without you helping us, we probably wouldn't even be married today. God

has done wonderful things in our lives and we remember what you told us that day.”

We had met Tom Claus and his wife Elfrieda in the mid 1960’s when we were attending a Missionary Conference in Oklahoma City. Tom and Elfrieda brought the music at the service and we were so overcome with emotion to see Native believers singing and sharing about the Lord. At that time, we had just spent several years in a barren mission field and wondered if there would ever be Native believers. We went to talk to them after the service and they invited us to their home the following day. We had dinner with them and they gave us gifts. They said, “If an Indian likes you, they give you a gift.” Even though they weren’t Kickapoo they were ministering on the Kickapoo reservation in Oklahoma and took us out to meet the people. We maintained a friendship with them long after that.

In later years Russell also took on the responsibility as the Canadian secretary/treasurer for CHIEF (Christian Hope Indian Eskimo Fellowship) of which Tom Claus is the founder. Vincent Yellow Old Woman, from Calgary, also joined the Canadian CHIEF executive and did PR work for CHIEF.

Chapter 45

The School Year

“And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” 2 Timothy 2:2

As part of their training, individual staff took several students out during the school year on weekends to various areas and presented the work of the school at churches. Also, after the school year was over, a number of students with a staff member went out for several weeks to various settlements and churches. We found this beneficial for student recruitment as well as the experience it gave the students in ministering publicly. And it raised funds for the school.



Students ministering with music

There were some annoying times when the students wanted us to stop frequently to let them buy junk food. For sure, not ‘far down the road’, they needed a pit stop, at which time they again bought more pop and snacks and the cycle continued. It seemed immediately upon getting into the car; Lila curled up to go to sleep. Russ told her to sit up and look around. She shouldn’t just sleep all the time. Lila said, “There’s nothing to see.” But Russ insisted she was missing out on lots of things. He told her to look around and then write down everything she saw. Lila was amazed. She hadn’t realized there was so much to see.

On one occasion as we were arriving at a church at Willow River, BC shortly before the service was to start, Russell was backing up and didn’t see



Student Body



KBI graduates 1981

the ditch and ended up with one back wheel dangling over the culvert in the ditch. I couldn't help but laugh along with the students while Russell didn't think it was one bit funny. We even had to snicker as we proceeded with the program.

In the fall of 1976 there were 22 students enrolled in KBI. By 1980 there were 40 students. Some of these were couples with children, so the campus was buzzing. The spring of 1981 there were 10 graduates in their royal blue robes with gold sashes and blue caps with gold tassels. Parents, extended family, missionaries and friends came from afar to attend the graduation weekend activities. Everyone shared the joy of hearing these graduates give their testimonies of how they had grown in the Lord and how God had met their needs during their three years at KBI. We honored the grads at a banquet allowing them to invite family or special friends as their guests. One year the banquet was held in a room in back of a restaurant, but we found by decorating the Quonset dining hall we had a much better atmosphere for a banquet.

On one of the earliest outreach trips as Russ was brushing his teeth, Gabe stood watching him. Then he asked Russ what he was doing. Surprised that Gabe wouldn't know, Russ explained. Gabe asked if he could borrow Russ' toothbrush so he could brush his teeth as well. Russ said, "No, a toothbrush is something personal. You need to get your own toothbrush."

On their way to attend KBI one fall, a young couple, who had been corresponding with Russ for three years about attending school, was tragically killed. We were saddened. There is no limit to what the enemy will do to hinder God working in the lives of the Native believers. In 1986 one of our alumni was stabbed to death, leaving a young family behind.

One of our students complained of abdominal pain. Since it didn't seem to go away, he went to the doctor who x-rayed his abdomen. What a surprise when a glass rectal thermometer was located in his abdomen having no doubt been there for many years since he was a baby. It must have worked its way from the rectum into the abdomen. He had surgery to remove it.

Two student families arrived at KBI from their isolated village with no money. They were going to trust the Lord to provide for them. We would trust the Lord with them. Several days after arriving at Lac La Biche, one of their toddlers became seriously ill. The doctor sent the child to Edmonton for tests. The diagnosis was TB so all of us on campus had to be tested. Sarah* said, "I wish we'd never come. We caused all this trouble to everyone." We told her perhaps this had been God's way of bringing her baby to a place where medical care was available thus sparing her baby's life. Another time two of the students' children were suspected of having hepatitis. The Public Health nurse came to investigate.

Bursaries were given to students who exhibited a genuine desire to learn and were maintaining passing grade averages. They had to be living a consistent walk with the Lord. Money came to the school for such assistance and a goodly number of bursaries were awarded at each graduation toward the next year's tuition. My Mother, Martha Harms, gave \$10,000 for student aid. It was decided that the money she gave would be invested and only the interest be given as bursaries. (This was when interest rates were 18%.) Besides the money that went for several bursaries, 10% of the interest was reinvested creating a larger principle. Many students were helped this way over many years with her financial investment in the school.

One year bed bugs invaded the girls' dorm. One girl complained she had been bitten. Russ informed the dean of women, but she insisted surely that was not true. Several staff men examined the dorm rooms and located

the bed bugs hidden behind the baseboards. They caught some in a jar and took them to the health unit and when confirmed they were bed bugs, the fumigation process began. That was something else and no one would want to repeat that. At the end of the school term when the staff were doing a year end cleaning of the buildings, Terry and I opened the third floor window and tossed out several chesterfields resulting in their destruction. (It was rather fun). The Executive had no alternative except to replace them and we insisted on new instead of used ones.

Then there was the 'love bug'. It affected the secretaries on our campus over the years. It also invaded the kitchen when Rea Rempel came as a single lady cook, then gave her heart to student Robert Young. Later Lorena Gerbrandt, another single cook married a student, Wayne Favel. Staff wives were filling in various times between cooks before a permanent cook could be located. We were fortunate when George and Delores Dunn came to serve as cooks. They were with us for a longer time and Delores enriched our lives with the talent God had given her in music.



Morning chapel

Each school day began with a short chapel period. Occasionally there were also guests representing various mission organizations as well as NCEM missionaries. But on a routine basis, staff and occasionally third year students took turns leading the chapel periods. There were also special seminars with guests like Tom Claus representing CHIEF and Clair Schnupp teaching Northern Youth Seminars, Chuck and Gail Colette with Whole Life Counseling and Rev. Vic Nickel in a Deeper Life conference, plus others. Dewayne Harder, a Christian counselor came for a week of sessions for a number of years teaching subjects dealing with emotional



Student sharing



Student Outreach Ministry



KBI choir

issues such as self-worth, depression, abuse, forgiveness, etc. and teaching us to identify spiritual attacks by the enemy. He offered counseling to those who wished extra help. We staff benefited from his lectures in our personal

lives and in aiding us for further counseling with the students after Mr. Harder was gone.

It was a special blessing to have seasoned Native leaders like Navajo missionary, Herman Williams from Arizona, serving with CHIEF, as our closing conference and graduation speaker one year. He had words of wisdom most of us didn't know about the practices of Native traditional religion. Some of us did 'housecleaning' of knick knacks and jewelry after he shared with us about items he would never have in his house.

Although we scattered for various ministries on Sunday mornings, our Sunday evening services were held on campus. Every second week was 'Sharing Night'. Nothing was scheduled and the evening was open for volunteer special music or sharing of testimonies. In the boys dorm guitars had been passed around with almost everyone learning to play the guitar. Most students took a turn at singing and playing songs or testifying at the Sharing Night services. Students were learning to get up before a group to talk and sing and that strengthened their faith. Wednesday evenings we

had a short Bible Study and shared prayer requests. The remainder of the evening we were divided into small groups and prayed for pertinent prayer requests. One evening a student stood up and said, "Pray for my wife as she is backslidden." She was sitting there beside him! It wasn't long before she was restored to fellowship with the Lord. The Native believers are more open to share their prayer requests or acknowledge their spiritual struggles than we non-Natives are. At one prayer meeting it was mentioned that several missionaries had been kidnapped by Guerrillas in one particular country. Our young son, Glen, was so touched by this that he too prayed for



KBI student girls on trip to town in bus

the missionaries that had been captured by the 'Apes'! I'm sure God understands the prayers of a child.

On Saturdays the students piled into the little bus we had brought with us from Cumberland House. The little bus took students to town to do laundry and grocery and other shopping. It was also used in outreach ministries. It was a



Student family Jerry & Edna Quequish

good break from the routine of classes and just a fun time for everyone when they could go to town. They weren't free to go to town just anytime they might wish. There were also certain businesses that were off limits to students as well as staff. Students were required to do gratis work on Saturdays, like cleaning the floors in the school building and dorms, mowing the grounds, or helping in the kitchen, etc. They were each required to do 10 hours of gratis work each week, whatever was needed and was assigned to them. They worked under the supervision of staff. This was to encourage a good work ethic. For the most part, everyone worked willingly.

Students were hosted once a year to a special occasion the staff called 'Restaurant Night'. Staff cooked an ethnic meal once a year and dressed in costumes representing that culture or chosen theme and entertained the students providing hilarious entertainment. It shed a different light on the staff. Every one of the staff put on quite a show and the students loved it. Soon the students reciprocated and entertained the staff with a similar evening. That event continued from year to year, each different than the other.



Yearbook committee & Russ

Early on Russ served on a yearbook committee and took mug shots for the year book. Hidden artistic talent among the students came to the forefront. Their art work was mingled among individual pictures of students with testimonies and pictures of activities that took place on campus. Many

Native people are very gifted artistically as seen in their beadwork and other handicrafts. They had to be creative in order to survive in the wilderness in days gone by.

After the Christmas banquet one year, everyone bundled up and went downtown to sing carols on the street corner by The Bay. It was so cold that there were few shoppers on the streets, so we ended up going to the hospital to sing to the patients instead. They were a captive audience, and enjoyed the students coming and singing very much. Many Caucasian people had never seen Native young people in such a positive light. Misinformation and lack of information has caused a lot of problems between the various cultures. We were proud of the change God had done in the lives of the Native students. School wasn't all work though. We had some fun times as well.

One night as student Lillian was leaving the house, she turned to her husband, Gordon Cook, and said, "Be sure to make a good supper for the kids." "Don't worry," Gordon said, "I've been a Cook all my life." The students had a good sense of humor and joked readily.

In the early years, snow was cleared on the frozen lake close to shore to make a skating rink. One year the ice was so clear our children could actually see fish swimming under the ice. Our children were so excited to tell us this when they came back to the house. They said they had even skated across the ice all the way to Churchill Island (about two miles). Later



Outdoor skating rink on frozen lake

on, a skating rink was built on the campus with a fence surrounding it and a warm-up shack with a wood burning stove for skaters to go to warm up. The rink was flooded and became a favorite hangout. Staff and students also played broom ball on the rink as a Tuesday afternoon activity. While playing broomball, one sunshiny cold day, Mr. Shiel fell flat on his back; hitting his head on the ice. He recovered just fine; although at first we were afraid he would be more "dizzy" than usual, ☺ from the blow to his head.

As part of their second and third year classes, the students were divided into teams and assigned to various mission stations under the

supervision of resident missionaries for 10 days to get 'on hand missionary training'. They came back with reports like:

"I can't forget that man."

"I saw the need in that area. I felt sorry for them."



Students Gilbert & Laura Bekkatla & family



Eric Constant, Arnold Flett, Lila Shackelly between classes in foyer

“I saw the need for more workers for the Lord.”

“I was deeply moved in the Spirit when I saw sin rampant in their lives. Prayer is the greatest weapon to use to reach these people.”

“I discovered I still need to learn more.”

One girl came back with a new hairdo while another girl said, “It sure is nice having running water again”. It had certainly impacted all of their lives in one way or another.

Fred came to our house after having spent 10 days on a reserve in Alberta. He said his children’s sleep had been disturbed since returning home. Russell asked him what he had brought home with him from the reserve where they had been. Fred said, “Only this necklace a man gave me.” Russ looked at the wide choker bone and bear tooth necklace and immediately he felt a prickly sensation on his neck. He suggested Fred throw the necklace into the burning barrel as evil spirits were probably attached to it. Natives practicing traditional religion often assign evil spirits to their crafts and unsuspecting tourists buy these crafts. Fred removed the necklace at once and laid it on the shelf while he put on his boots to go home.

That night our children’s sleep was disturbed. In the morning as Russ was getting ready to go to school he reached onto the shelf to get his hat. He felt the necklace which Fred had accidentally left lying on the shelf. Then we understood why there had been restlessness in our house that night. Russell talked to Fred at school later that morning and asked how things had been at their house the previous night? Fred said everything was fine and the children had slept well. Russ told Fred, “Well, it wasn’t fine at our house. Our children’s sleep was disturbed. Come at noon and remove the necklace and throw it into the fire in the burning barrel; as did the new believers in the Acts of the Apostles when they threw their magic objects and books into the fire after coming to believe in Jesus.” After Fred discarded the necklace, the problem was gone for both our families.

Chapter 46

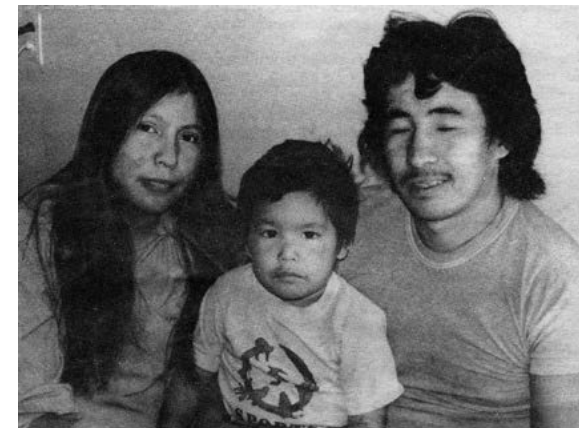
The Miracle

“The whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen.” Luke 19:37b

The new school year had begun; it was 1982. New students, Leslie and Victoria Easter from The Pas, Manitoba had made the move and enrolled as first year students at Key Way Tin.

On September 21, just weeks after their arrival at Lac La Biche, their three year old son, Trevor, was playing on the dock at the lake with his four year old brother, Henry, and another friend. The mothers were visiting in the Easter home, when Henry came running to the house saying Trevor was in the water and had drowned.

Rushing to the lake the women found Trevor floating face down, a bulky winter jacket he was wearing, holding the upper part of his body at the surface of the water.



Leslie & Victoria Easter & Trevor

Victoria dragged her son to the shore and a staff member, Agatha, heard the commotion and came quickly to the scene. She began administering mouth to mouth resuscitation, but Trevor did not respond. Victoria said later that she believed her son was dead. His body was cold, and there was no heartbeat. No

one knew how long Trevor had been in the water. Someone ran for help and a man on staff, Jack, brought a van down to the shore; and the boy, his mother and the first aider were transported to the Lac La Biche hospital while the resuscitation attempts continued and the staff and students prayed. At the hospital an electronic tracer registered no heartbeat.

As it was over the noon hour two doctors were in the hospital attending to their duties regarding medical records, etc. They probably wouldn't ordinarily have been there at that time. They responded immediately to the 'Code' and after assessing the situation administered an injection of Adrenalin directly into the heart of Trevor and his heart responded! His lungs were drained of the lake water and a tube was placed in his mouth to supply oxygen to the lungs. He was put on intravenous fluids.

After being treated and stabilized at the hospital for about three hours, Trevor was picked up by a special team of a doctor and nurses and transported by plane to the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton. The parents said in Edmonton the doctors were amazed at Trevor's rate of recovery. He was discharged home after one week. There didn't seem to be any brain damage; although it is believed Trevor was in the water for 10-15 minutes and not breathing on his own for another 10 minutes. Later they noticed patches of hair were coming out, probably due to the extreme trauma his body went through.

The only difference the parents noticed in their son's behavior, is that Trevor would sometimes sit absolutely still, staring out of the kitchen window at the sky. He would say, "I see Jesus."

Speaking about the incident Lesley said, "Everything stopped. He was dead." Both parents believed that, "God gave him back to us, because everyone at the school was praying for God to bring him back." Everyone began praising God for performing this miracle. Really it worked a miracle in everyone's hearts, to see firsthand what God could do. It was so touching, not only to us at the school, but many others. Even the local newspaper printed a picture and article about the incident on its front page.

Chapter 47

The Homefront

"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6

While all these exciting things were happening at the school, things were happening at home too. Changes were taking place.

The NCEM had changed their policy regarding missionaries owning their own homes. Whereas once we were told we could not own our own home, now the policy was changed and missionaries were expected to own their homes. We were some of the last of the missionaries to make the transition from rental to ownership. New missionaries knew from the beginning they had to provide their own housing; but we were 17 year veterans.



*Russ & Virgie Mueller family
- Sheryl, Glen & Steve*

At the time we were renting a house on campus at an economical rate and just hadn't taken steps to owning our own house. But in 1978-79 for the sake of our family life, we began searching in earnest for property to buy on which to build a house. We discussed this with our supporters and they responded enthusiastically. They said they were happy to see us build up equity in a home instead of pouring money into old rental houses and having nothing in the end.

We prayed that God would show us what we should do. We wanted to be within 10 miles of Key Way Tin, but land was hard to find. We did find a 17 acre piece of treed property to the west of Lac La Biche along Highway 55, and while we were considering this, the Realtor, who had said he would hold the property for us for the weekend while we made our final decision, sold it to his cousin. Almost as if on the rebound we purchased the other 133 acres across the highway, which really didn't make much sense. We didn't need 17 acres of treed property, much less 133 acres. But we believed this was what God wanted us to do.

Now we had to locate a spot on which to build between the muskeg and the highway. It was an enormous task to clear the building site of the trees and brush, bring in the power (which meant clearing the brush with a chain saw along the highway to bring the electrical lines from the corner of the section to our property about a quarter of a mile), bring in gas, drill a well near the site of the house and pipe water into the house, and put in a septic tank and disposal system.

We had barely taken possession of the property when a

gas company called to ask if they could come onto our property and cut a 25' wide cutline across our property to where later they would do a test drill for gas. They would pay us \$25.00 for each fence they cut. Property owners did not own royalty rights. They owned only surface rights so Russell agreed, but insisted they were to enter the property from the side of the acreage and not in any way disturb our building site. They assured us the cutline would be 800 feet east of our building site. We had chosen this site because of the beauty of the trees surrounding it and its location near the highway. We had already received a building permit, cleared the site and built up a driveway. They



Glen clearing brush on building site

agreed to these stipulations but on the day they moved onto our land, the caterpillar drove right down our driveway and cut a 25' wide swatch of trees through our building site destroying our backyard. We were upset and asked the Lord, "Now what?"

The next day Russ went to the gas company office (who had sub-contracted to the land clearing company) to file a protest regarding their not keeping to the agreement. The man in charge said, "Yes, we made a mistake. The surveyor failed to observe a correction line which would have moved the cutline over by 800 feet to the east."

Russ contacted a lawyer to learn if any others had similar experiences. We learned that we weren't the only ones and that the gas company had little regard for the property owners on whose land they drilled. The lawyer said we should contact a tree restoration company in Edmonton to come out and give an estimate of what it would cost to restore the area with trees. The estimate was \$40,000.00. We knew it wouldn't ever be possible to restore the damages to the mature trees. Our lawyer contacted the gas company to begin negotiations. It took three meetings with the gas company lawyers before Russ told his lawyer to settle for \$10,000.00 rather



First load of lumber

than go to court, which could have taken two years to settle. (Besides we needed that amount for a load of lumber being shipped the next week.) The Executive took out his check book and wrote a check for \$10,000.00.

When the first load of lumber came to start building the framework of our house it cost exactly

\$10,000.00! God had provided in an unexpected way; although we never did get the trees replaced. NCEM calculated the money we had put into mission housing over the years and repaid us a lump sum. I don't remember how much it was, but we had not expected that. We borrowed \$3000.00 against Russ' life insurance policy. Various supporters contributed money as well. With the Lord's help, we paid for materials as we built.

We took the summer off from our missionary work to devote ourselves to the construction of our home. I went to work full time at the hospital to earn some extra money. The previous winter Russell had drawn a blueprint on graph paper down to each inch of the future house.

All three of our children helped with the work that summer. Steve

drove the caterpillar and backhoe. Russell and our sons set up borrowed forms from Cadieux Construction for the basement walls. Our sons were working for Cadieux Construction at that time. Sheryl and I levelled cement and cleaned the forms before returning them after use. We all worked together. One day, Glen was up on the trusses moving them into place when about eight trusses fell over before they were securely nailed in place. God spared Russell, Steve and Glen from harm.



Steve did digging with the backhoe



Trusses going up on house

My nephew, Randie Harms, flew up from Oklahoma and helped nail the roofing on the house. I was helping nail roofing and of course I had taken my thermos onto the roof with me. Accidentally it started to roll down the roof, so I let out a cry. Russ looked to see if it was me falling, but it was just my thermos that rolled to the ground!

Wesley Kroeker offered that he could give us \$7000.00, or if we preferred, he'd send two of his small planes from his commercial airlines up with a dozen men who would be willing to donate their time to help with the construction. Which would we prefer? Realizing the summer would go quickly and even with volunteer help from a number of friends and co-workers around Lac La Biche, it would be an insurmountable task to get the house ready to move into by the time school started in the fall. We chose to have Wesley send the workers. Most were men we knew from our home church in Oklahoma, except one was a young fellow from Switzerland,



Men from Enid, Oklahoma came in 2 planes



Early morning fishermen



Leland Unruh, carpenter

who had been working for Wesley. He stayed a couple of weeks after the other men left and helped further with plumbing, etc.

Wesley had instructed Russ to have the materials on hand and be ready to keep the men busy during their week with us. No time was to be wasted. Could Russ do that? Yes. Russ worked hard to line everything up and even when the men were working he was busy getting things ready for them to proceed with the next task.

Those who wanted to go fishing managed an early hour on the lake, but they really didn't care if they got any fish or not, they became so absorbed in the building project.

Sheryl cooked

for the men and during my lunch breaks from the hospital work; I drove the meal out to the men on the acreage. Sheryl even baked the bread I had started before going to work. The men were so impressed with her, as a 13 year old, taking



Sheryl cooked for the building crew

responsibility for cooking the meals; they took a collection of their pocket money and gave her over \$200.

The men made a lot of headways. The windows and doors were put into place, the cedar siding was added, a wood fireplace and chimney was put in with a box frame built around it, and insulation packed in between the studs; placed by home church Pastor Wilfred Ulrich himself. Several were professional carpenters. An electrician was among them and completed the elec-



Progress being made on the house



Enid volunteers by our house after 1 week's work

trical wiring Russ and Allen Wall had begun earlier. The drywall was hung and stairway to the basement built. We couldn't thank them enough for all they did.

That spring on one of our trips representing the Bible school, we had gone to Fox Creek, AB. At the church where we were presenting a program with some students, we met Dave Heyer, a plumber who had previously helped a fellow missionary with plumbing his house. Dave offered to do the plumbing in our house. So in between other jobs he flew his small plane to Lac La Biche to install our furnaces, duct work and plumbing. He also installed the pump into the water well.

Bud Elford came with his spray gun and spray painted the entire interior of the house in short order.

During missionary training camp that summer, while I was campus nurse, Mark Arnold, one of the trainees received a torn retina when a ball hit him in the eye. I stabilized his head to prevent further damage and escorted him to the emergency room; then accompanied him by ambulance to Edmonton where he received treatment for the injury. When we bought the carpet for our house, we ordered it from the company Mr. Arnold worked for in Wetaskawin. Mark's parents were so grateful for my care of Mark, that Mr. Arnold and his helper came and installed our carpet for us without charge. The men also helped move our furniture and household things into the new house.

Over and over we saw God's provision. We were so blessed. It was God providing 30, 60, and 100 % of anything we had given up for Him.



A sunshiny day on our completed home

When school began in September the students carried in the cupboards. The rest would be done as time permitted. God had provided a house for us above anything we could ever have expected. Besides being a wonderful, comfortable home for us, it was used for many special events with the students and staff, and our Hylo congregation.

Recently the daughter of two alumni of the school was getting married and they wanted Russell to perform the wedding. The father of the bride reminded us of the times when they were students, I had frequently served them Bambinos (Pizza buns) when they came to our house years ago. He hadn't forgotten.



The Mueller family

to work for it. It didn't come for free. Glen learned about hard work as a 12 year old picking up rocks in a farmers' field for \$20.00 a day. He wondered why there weren't more such jobs for a 12 year old to do.

Sheryl worked as a 'candy striper' at the local hospital, not realizing it could possibly spark her interest in pursuing nursing as a career. Early on she developed an interest in singing and played several musical instruments.

Steve went to plant trees in BC at 10 cents a tree for a reforestation company after

Our children were growing up. As young teenagers both of our sons worked for Cadieux Cement Construction Co. This was hard work and very dirty work. But the boys learned good work ethics. If you wanted money, you had



Sheryl – a future nurse



Steve tree planting

high school. My 'mother heart' felt so sorry for him that I wanted to call him to come home because it was so hard; but Russell said, "No, once you commit to do a job, you stay with it till you're done." The first year they didn't get paid until after the season was over so they had to foot the bill for their living expenses themselves. I thought that a bit unfair.

Steve went back the next year and the next year. Glen joined him after he finished high school. They earned the money required to attend Bible College. But what backbreaking work that was. They cooked their oatmeal, and other food like macaroni on a Coleman stove set on the tailgate of the truck. Meat and extra food was buried to keep it cool and to keep the bears from helping themselves. They lived in the back of that pickup. They slept in the truck box regardless of the weather. Actually they also worked regardless of the weather. They were always wearing wet shoes and wet clothes, and the mosquitoes and black flies were terrible. Later when Steve became a foreman and hired his own planters, he always had a shotgun loaded with slugs handy, in case a black bear came threatening the planters. Bears often came into camp looking for food and he shot more than one. In fact, he shot eight bear one summer.

It required one step forward, push in the spade, while reaching into the canvas pack slung over their shoulder to remove a seedling tree about 10" tall. Put the seedling into the hole, let the spade close the hole and then step on the area to remove any air pockets and leave the tree to grow. The seedlings were to be planted upright and an exact space apart. There was also an official tree checker who would randomly show up to check their

work. If the work was found to be shoddy, the entire crew could be required to replant the entire section, thus losing one or more day's wages. That happened only a few times as each began overseeing the work done by their crew members. Ten cents a tree didn't add up very fast. Glen became a 'high baller' (moving at high speed) when he planted 1000 trees in one day. His last year he figured how many trees it would take to rent an apartment, how many trees he needed to plant to buy groceries, etc. as he was planning to get married.

Our children each went to a Christian high school at Caronport, Saskatchewan for their 11th and 12th grades. Glen went for his 10th grade as well. We felt they needed that extra nurturing having grown up in some pretty deplorable conditions. We wanted them to get a broader perspective of life in general and the Christian life in particular. And having had only their parents as their teachers in the faith, we thought it would be helpful for them to hear it from others, not just from us. It was extremely hard to let them go and every time we said good-bye, I sat down on the deck steps and cried as they drove away.

Steve graduated from high school at Caronport; then after taking a year off to work he returned to attend four and half years at Briercrest Bible College graduating with a B.A. He went on to attend Regent College in Vancouver part time for four and half years. He worked at Pacific Theatre and also did volunteer work at the Writers' Festival. One evening while working at the Festival, he had a hair-raising experience. A volunteer was attacked during the intermission and Steve went to rescue him. He wrestled the deranged attacker and got the knife from him. An ambulance transported the young volunteer to the hospital where he died from stab wounds shortly after. For his bravery, Steve received a certificate of Valor from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with the Mayor of Vancouver in attendance at the ceremony. Steve worked at a number of jobs, but eventually made his way back into the forestry industry in supervisory positions, eventually starting his own consulting company in Health and Safety in



Steve & Deb, Hannah & Caleb in 2009

Forestry. He was commissioned to write a manual for operating a specific machine to be operated on the sides of steep mountains. He worked as Business Manager at A Rocha, a Christian Environmental Stewardship program. He married a sweet girl, Deborah Eichler, and their home has been blessed with two children: Hannah and Caleb. They reside in British Columbia.

The year following Glen's grade 12 graduation from Caronport, he went back and then graduated from the three year diploma program at Briercrest Bible College. While there he met a lovely girl, Cindy Kroeker, and after graduation they were married and began a Christian home,



Glen & Cindy, Graeme, Tyler, Colton & Stephanie in 2009

eventually blessed with four children: Tyler, Stephanie, Graeme and Colton. Glen made his career in Corrections, then Fire Fighting and obtained his status as a Captain. He worked at a sideline in construction, helping not only his sons to have summer jobs, but writing the exam and gaining his Master Carpenter Certification. They have lived in Prince George, BC since their marriage.

Glen and Cindy's daughter Stephanie and her husband Joel Baerg presented us with our first great grandchild, Atticus Eli, in January, 2013. When he was only three months old, the little family moved to Asia as International Workers with 'Asia Connect'. They are studying the Mandarin language and making friendships on a one on one basis in their efforts to reach the people for Christ. Our second great grandchild, Mishael Graeme Mueller, was born September 2, 2014 to Glen and Cindy's son Graeme and his wife Karynn. Then Stephanie and Joel's second child, Evelyn Annalie, was born September 21, 2014 giving us great-grandbaby #3.

Sheryl and Nat's daughter, Rashel and her husband Grady Pilon, are expecting a baby in February, 2015.

Sheryl also attended Caronport high school. At first she was a little homesick and she wrote, "Please send me a care package. Even if it's an empty box, please send something." We sent her a birthday cake by

Greyhound Bus and it arrived with the frosting and candles still intact! After graduation she went back to Briercrest for one year of Bible school training. Then she went to Fort McMurray to attend nurses' training. Even though she came home as often as she could, she missed her special friend, Nat Giesbrecht. They wanted to get married. Promising to finish her last year of nurses' training Sheryl married the boy 'down the road' midway through her



Sheryl & Nat, Rashel & Joel in 2009

training. The Lord blessed their home with two children: Rashel and Joel. Sheryl has excelled in her profession as a registered nurse; especially enjoying working in Obstetrics. She obtained her USA citizenship enabling them to make their home in Arizona and now in Hawaii. Sheryl and Nat's daughter, Rashel and her husband Grady Pilon, are expecting a baby in February, 2015, making them grandparents and giving us great-grandbaby #4. We have been blessed not only to see our children's children, but their grandchildren as well. God is so good.

We realized Canada was our adopted home. We realized we were now more Northern than Southern. We no longer belonged in the USA and never would on a permanent basis. In 1981, Russell and I and Steven became Canadian citizens. Glen and Sheryl were born in Canada and had natural citizenship. In 2009 we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary.



Our 50th wedding anniversary in 2009

Chapter 48

The Principal

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." 2 Corinthians 9:8

Russell had been feeling the need to refresh his education. Our children said, "How can you teach when you haven't been to school yourself in 20 years?" So he enrolled in Briercrest Bible Seminary in the Pastoral Studies Department, in their newly developed Masters' Program. However, Russ had not been given the assignment beforehand that he needed to know the Hebrew alphabet as well as 10 words in Hebrew prior to beginning classes. A test was given the first day. He was overwhelmed. That same day he went to talk to the teacher, who advised him to go talk to Don Moore, who had set up the Masters' program. When Don talked with Russell he asked what ministry Russ was presently involved in and what he hoped to gain from the course. The Academic Dean suggested perhaps



Russell with Adelbert Chalifoux

Russell was enrolled in the wrong program. As they considered all angles, it became apparent that the Administrative Leadership program would be more beneficial for the work Russell was doing. Russell could now see not only was he gifted in teaching but also in administration. Russ made the switch of programs and God blessed his endeavors.

In the summer of 1983 Russ

began attending classes at the Seminary, continuing for the following four summers. Graduating with a Masters' degree in 1987, he was also given the Proficiency and Excellence award in Administration. He was valedictorian of the class of 13 students and gave the speech at the graduation exercises. Our first grandson, Tyler, attended Russ' graduation as a babe in arms.

The responsibility of being principal at Key Way Tin was heavy on Bill. Although Russ had been serving as a teacher, Christian service director, academic dean, registrar and vice principal of the school, Bill felt his load was wearing him down. He felt he must resign before he had a breakdown.

So Russell was asked to become the principal. Realizing the tremendous responsibility, he said he would pray about it. One thing he would insist on was 100% backing of the other staff. He couldn't work if there was division in the camp. He received the vote of confidence and when he was installed officially by the NCEM



Russell becomes principal of KBI



Peak enrollment of students in 1982/83

Executive in 1982, there were 49 students at KBI. The following year, the school reached its peak enrollment of 52 students.

There were two students who had come from our former station of Thicket Portage and four or more who had come from Cumberland House during our time at the Bible school. By now even the son of the lay reader had accepted the Lord and come to Bible school. It took one generation for them to make the break. A KBI graduate went to Cumberland House as the pastor of the little church where we had ministered. Others came from villages we had visited, like Moose Factory.

Perhaps in our enthusiasm to add to our numbers, we didn't screen our student applicants carefully enough. Missionaries were also eager to get their converts out of the villages and away from their friends so they encouraged them to attend Key Way Tin hoping the school would reform them or at least help them on the right path. It's hard to say why some students didn't turn out well. It happens in all Bible schools. For the sincere students it worked well to come to Bible school. They grew in the Lord and became fruitful. Russell felt that when he was busy dealing with repeat problem students, time was being taken away from students who were there to learn. It was better to ask the problem students to leave until such a time they were committed to the Lord and wanted to be at the school. However, we did what we could, and trusted that what we had done would be of help to them even though they could not remain at school.

Arriving at the school one new student was already pregnant and had to be sent home. Another day word came to Russell that Carl* was 'running away'. Russ got into the car and drove down the long driveway and stopped Carl who was carrying a suitcase. Russ asked, "Why are you leaving? Are you running away from school?" After a lengthy one sided conversation by Russ, Carl admitted that he had not been honest with the school when he applied. He had, in fact, smoked his last 'joint' on the bus coming to KBI. He was in withdrawal and miserable. He returned and fellow students and staff prayed with him numerous times seeking the Lord with him to break the addictions he wanted to be rid of. He stayed at school, graduated and married one of the single lady students. He continued further education and later took a job on his home reservation.

Several single ladies were found in the bar, not only once but several times. They weren't repentant so were told they would have to leave. It just broke our hearts. They had such a promising future. Two of the girls called later to apologize and eventually did return to school. The third girl hasn't done well in her spiritual life; although her parents are strong Christians.



Russ teaching in classroom

One afternoon Russell had just finished teaching a class and returned to check what assignments he had written on the chalkboard. It was strange to find the door locked but he unlocked it and walked in. He stopped at the piano and was leaning on it to write down the assignments on a piece of paper; when he saw movement and as he looked down a student stood up. Russ asked, "What's going on here?" "Oh, I fell asleep," Harry* said, as he brushed his hair back into place. Then as Russ took a second look behind the piano he saw a girl student. Russ told them to come to his office. He wanted to talk to them. He admonished them and told them if they didn't want to live by the Biblical standards of the school, they shouldn't return after the Christmas break. Harry wrote back an apology and later was allowed to return to the school and graduated.

Russell had a vision of how he saw the school should be. He believed that for the Indian Band offices to acknowledge them as worthy of the Band's financial support, the school needed to teach courses comparable to other accredited Bible colleges. Their education had to be equivalent if KBI graduates were to be accepted by other schools for accreditation toward degrees. This then would enable the graduates of the school to be more effective in leader-



Russell had a vision for the school



Russ presenting diplomas at ceremony

ship in their churches, or to be effective in the secular world. It would cause them to be recognized for the education they received. To accomplish this Russ had all the teaching staff write a syllabus of what materials they were teaching in each course. He forwarded these to several other schools requesting a transfer from our program so KBI graduates could graduate with a degree. Briercrest Bible Institute, Millar Bible Institute, and Prairie Bible Institute accepted our courses toward their degree programs. A number of students did go on to further their education and receive degrees.

It seemed only last year that Venus had been in Russ' office crying because she wanted to quit school. There was no particular reason. She just wanted to quit. Many Native youth find it difficult to stay with anything long. They try something for a while, then give up and move to something else. So Venus wanted to go home. Russell prayed with her and tried to encourage her to stay the course. This happened several times. Venus did continue and finished the three years and graduated. She has faithfully



Graduate Venus Cote



Graduates Gary & Christy Quequish

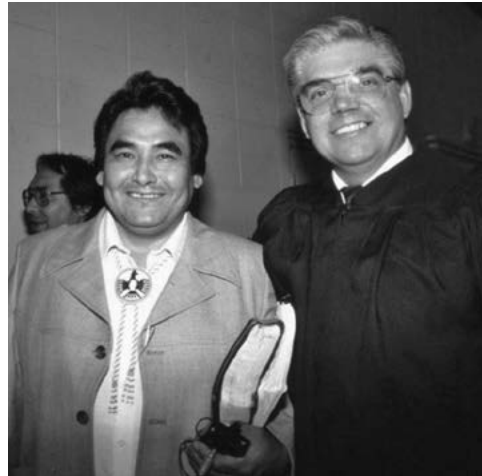
served as a missionary in the Maritimes for many years in a place far from her home reservation with a tribe entirely different than her own.

Other of KBI graduates have also gone on to attain great things. We tell people that it is what the Lord has done in their lives. That's the answer to problems all youth face, regardless of their culture or upbringing.

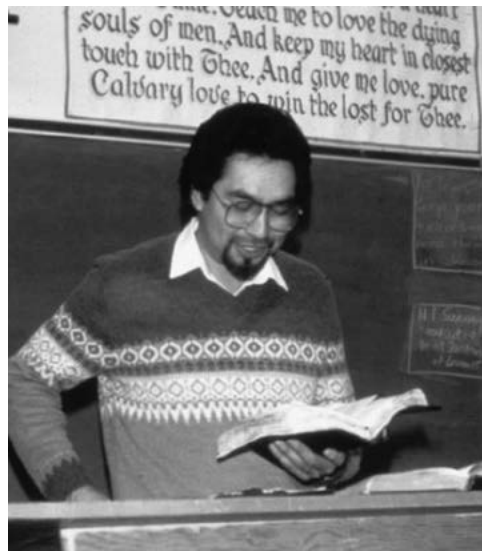
At times students would stop by the office with problems. Russ asked if they had prayed about the problem. Most of the time they said they had not prayed about the problem. Russ said they had to learn to take their problems to the Lord in prayer first; struggle through it in prayer; then if the problem persisted he would be willing to discuss it with them two days later. He would not always be around to solve their problems, but the Lord would always be available. Usually the students found God had answered their prayers and they didn't need to discuss it anymore.

As part of maturing in Christ, students needed to learn to live with and mingle daily with non-Natives and people from other tribes. One fellow stood up in chapel at his graduation and said, "It wasn't hard to give up liquor when I became a Christian. But prejudice against the white man, even against Métis people, was the last and hardest sin I had to let go of." At one point there were 14 different tribes represented among the student body. We were all one in the Spirit and needed to grow as one.

Students came from Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC, NWT, Montana and even from New Brunswick. The Simon



Brothers in Christ, Fred Evans & Russell



Gary Quequish teaching in the school from which he graduated

family had packed up everything they owned and for an entire week traveled across Canada pulling a U Haul trailer to come to Bible school with their three adolescent children. Tim had been a police officer prior to his salvation.

Russell enjoyed his work as principal and excelled in it for eight years. He thoroughly enjoyed it and we were surprised when we began to realize the Lord was leading us out of this work and leading us into something different. It was difficult to imagine what God might want us to do; but we knew He had been faithful to us for 30 years in Native ministry and He would surely continue to lead us in the future.



Closing conference at KBI

As we stood on the stage at the farewell service, Leigh said, "I never thought I'd see this day." We hadn't either. We thought we'd be here for the rest of our working days. But our time was complete.

The director of NCEM asked if there were other positions we would consider, but we said, "No." We were going to take that year's leave of absence we had requested 22 years ago, to see what God would have us do next.

Even though we eventually decided to resign from the original Mission that had brought us to Canada, we embraced the many mission fields God has led us to within Canada. We still have a heart for Native ministry and a love for the people.

We were made Honorary Missionaries of NCEM because of the 30 years we had served.

Within the following years the Lord granted us several new and exciting ministries we never expected to have. We served as Pastor to the Yellowknife Alliance Church, Head Elder and Seniors Coordinator in the

Lac La Biche Evangelical Free Church, and Pastor of the Senior Adult Ministries in the Spruce Grove Alliance Church. Each of these positions was different, with multi-cultural people in varied settings. We thoroughly enjoyed the next 22 years till our retirement the end of March, 2014. The Alliance Western District office has given him a lifetime Worker Emeritus License.

Epilogue

“Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.” Psalm 40:5

Recently when we were going to the USA for a visit, we handed our Canadian passports to the USA border agent. He could see we were born in the USA, but now claimed citizenship in Canada.

His question to us was, “Why did you leave us?”

Russell said, “Do you want the long version or the short version? The short version is, we left our homeland to come share Jesus Christ with the Aboriginal people of Canada.”

The long version meant going to a place where the gospel had never been presented. Then going to those lost in rampant sin. We went to children to teach them the way to God before they started down the road to destruction. The highlight of our 30 years in Native ministry had been to teach Native believers to stand fast in the Lord and go out and preach the gospel to their own people. They are able to reach more Native people than we ever could.

We have taught the Word of God to the young believers. We have ministered to and counselled them in practical living as well as in spiritual things. We thank God for the privilege of having a part in the training of hundreds of Native believers. Their lives have blessed us so many times. We have been moved to tears to hear the testimonies of how God has worked in their lives. We love the Native people especially the Native believers.

At the time we left Key Way Tin Bible Institute in 1992, there were 105 graduates of the three year program. Since then these graduates have become:

- Pastors of Native churches and fellowships groups, some are pastors' wives
- Itinerant evangelists with their wives
- Speakers on Native Gospel radio broadcasts
- 'Tribal Trails' Native Gospel TV broadcast hosts and hostesses
- Speakers and musicians on 'Tribal Trails' TV broadcasts
- Gospel Musical Teams
- Translators of scriptures: the New Testament in Ojibway and some books of the Bible into Dene
- Missionaries stationed in Native villages
- Urban missionaries doing a street ministry
- A group went with 'Venture Teams International in Canada' and the Philippines for one year
- One went to the Africa with 'Literature Crusades'
- Some are working in their local churches as elders, and Sunday school teachers
- Some have become Chief and Counsellors and workers in Band Offices
- Several formed 'Rising Above Christian Counselling' for victims of abuse and addictions
- Several have been on the Executive of the 'Native Evangelical Fellowship of Canada'
- One is Director of the organization
- Some are missionaries with 'Native Evangelical Fellowship'
- Some are missionaries with 'Northern Canada Evangelical Mission'
- Several are serving as missionaries with 'Indian Life Ministries'
- Some have taken 'Northern Missionary Training Camp'
- Some have worked at Bible camps and done youth ministries
- Some have furthered their education received degrees in counselling, pastoral studies, or teaching certificates
- Many have taken jobs in a variety of secular fields
- Some are public school teachers
- Some have returned to Key Way Tin as teachers, dean of women or dean of men

- Most have established Christian families and years later are still living for the Lord
- Many have served the Lord for 20 to 30 years
- Some have attained heights we can't imagine or aren't even aware of.

"That's why we left our homeland and came to Canada."

"All glory to Him who alone is God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are His before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen." Jude 25

Acknowledgements

A number of years ago, our children suggested I write a book about our missionary experiences. They kept prodding me until the thoughts began to formulate in my mind; but it took years before I actually got around to putting anything down on paper, then on computer.

My Mother had saved a suitcase full of all the letters I had written to her over the years till her death. I had saved annual field reports we had written to the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission. I had also saved prayer letters, *Key Way Tin Kontakt* newsletters, *Northern Lights* magazines, newspaper articles, testimonies and miscellaneous memoirs.

I have reread these articles I had saved. Some things I probably never would have remembered, anyway not in such detail. Some names (which I have identified with an *) have been changed to protect persons involved. These situations are not the same in every location and I do not want to generalize; but to the best of my ability I have accurately recalled people and events as we experienced them. These are just representative accounts of many events. Forgive me for any mistakes I have recorded or oversight of any persons I should have included. It certainly wasn't my intention.

I have been blessed and encouraged as I thought about and prayed for the various people, who have all had input into our lives and ministry.

I thank the Lord for my husband Russell, and that we could share this journey. Russ has been a strong, yet gentle and bold partner. He has edited every page of this story and added every picture to these pages. Together we have been reminded of just how faithful God has been to us.

I want to thank Chuck Clement for digitizing hundreds of slides of our missionary experiences. We tried to get a varied representation of people and our ministry.

I thank Dennis Siemens at NCEM Mission Press for formatting the book.

I thank our son, Steve who chose the picture for the front cover.

I thank our son, Glen, for his technical assistance, back cover biography and picture.

I thank our daughter, Sheryl, who spent many hours proof reading this book.

I thank the Lord Jesus Christ most of all, for saving me, then calling me and putting within me the desire to go where He would send me. I thank Him for protecting, sustaining and keeping Russell and me, and our family.

The story isn't over!

Eternity will reveal the far reaching effects of what's been done for God's honor and glory.

All scripture verses are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.