Living in the Way

The Pilgrimage of Jake & Trudie Unrau

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by

Jake Unrau

with

Johann D. Funk

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Jake Unrau
Winnipeg, Manitoba
August 1996

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Preface

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not be about on it. . . . But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return (Isaiah 35:8). *See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland* (Isaiah 43:19). *Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take* (Jeremiah 31:21).

Again and again the scriptures talk about the high way, the narrow way, the only way. Again and again we have seen our parents follow this Way of Holiness and set out the signposts along this road for others to follow. Therefore, it is significant that this journey of their life is set out as a pilgrimage along the Way. It is a joint story, and we walked large chunks of it with them; other parts we have only heard about. This setting down of the facts lends credibility to the tales we have heard all our lives. Dad documented much of his life in diaries and journals dating back to January 1, 1943, the year Mom and Dad got married. Many of the personal stories come from there; others are details that we remembered. The Mission added accuracy to the events that it considered of major significance. The Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives filled in gaps that otherwise would have remained a mystery.

As children we read many biographies of missionaries—from Mary Slessor and David Livingstone to Adoniram Judson. Often I wondered why there were no modern-day missionary stories to read and inspire. We hope this story will become one of those, not only to us, Jake and Trudie's children and grandchildren, but also to many others. I will cherish this story always. May you be inspired and challenged as you read of what God can and will do with a farm boy and his wife when they commit themselves to God' service.

Pat Settee

Foreword

Fifty years ago the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba began a ministry with the sweeping mandate, "to spread the Gospel to all as the Lord shall lead." The new organization was given a somewhat less assuming title, Mennonite Pioneer Mission (MPM).

The first work was located among the Tarahumara Indians of Creel, Mexico. With the disappointing collapse of that venture and upon the encouragement of Second World War conscientious objector teachers, who had worked in northern Native communities during the war years, MPM redirected its focus to northern Manitoba.

Actual involvement in this area began in 1948 when, after negotiations were completed, MPM appointed Jake and Trudie Unrau to begin a ministry in Matheson Island, some 150 miles north of Winnipeg. In subsequent years MPM commitments increased, eventually including nearly a dozen northern communities as well as Selkirk and Winnipeg by the mid-1960s. In 1960 MPM ministries were merged under the larger constituency support of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. MPM's name was changed to Native Ministries. The new name appeared to reflect a definite direction which the ministry had taken in the first 15 years of its history.

Jake and Trudie Unrau are unquestionably an important part of the overall direction in that ministry. They are of the earliest trail blazers among Mennonite missioners of the north. Born and raised in rural southern Manitoba, they incorporated the best that their home communities could offer in formal training and experience in preparation for the task. They combined a strong spiritual ministry with an equally sensitive compulsion to help meet the physical needs of a community. To this day the trail markings of the Unraus can be felt, if not "seen," in the communities in which they served: Matheson Island, Manigotagan-Hole River, Selkirk, Winnipeg, and as far south as Hammon, Oklahoma, and Cuauhtemoc, Mexico.

Now in their retirement and in this book, *Living in the Way,* Jake has undertaken to give the reader some very personal and detailed, often rough-hewn, glimpses of the thinking, people and events connected with each of the trail markings that point the Way of their long mission

statesmanship. This book carries the sense of responsibility which an elder has for his people and where the direction for the future is critical. Here is a challenge to be as frank in admitting weakness in the spirit of 2 Corinthians 12:9 with its emphasis on God's strength made perfect in weakness, as strong in the full completion of a call and task, as willing to accept the changes involved, or as humble as to acknowledge a prior and God-given spirituality discovered among the people along the Way.

To all of us, the invitation and the imperative of an earlier elder:

"If the very old will remember,
the very young will listen." — Chief Dan George

Isaac Froese
May 1996

The early Anabaptists believed that scripture demanded more than the Protestants' Way claimed, that it also called believers to practice what they preach. It was not enough to baptize children to ensure their salvation. People needed to practice their faith seven days a week, not only on Sundays, Holy Communion days, their wedding day or on special holy days.

1

The Way
Rooted in a Pilgrim People

On the occasion of the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Anabaptist movement I summarized its roots in the introduction to a sermon entitled, "What does the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of January 21, 1525, of the Anabaptist Mennonite Church mean?" The sermon focussed on current expressions of Anabaptist beliefs and practice. The brief historical account went like this.

> Walter Klaassen, in his book *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (1973), and Kenneth Roland Davis, a non-Mennonite, in *Anabaptism and Asceticism* (1974), agree the Anabaptist movement is a unique expression of the Christian way. These scholars help explain how the Mennonite church came into being and outline its distinctive theology. January 21, 1975, marks the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of what is considered by many to be the beginning of the Anabaptist movement out of which the Mennonite church as we know it today came. During this time of reformation in Europe, groups of Christian lay persons in Switzerland and South Germany were meeting in Bible study groups, a practice which had been unheard of until then. Reading and interpreting scripture had been restricted to the priesthood. Zwingli and Luther encouraged their followers to become literate in the Bible.
>
> The early Anabaptists believed that scripture demanded more than the Protestants' Way claimed. It also called believers to practice what they preach. It was not enough to baptize children to ensure their salvation. People needed to practice their faith seven days a week, not just on Sundays, Holy Communion days, their wedding day or on special holy

days. This is where the Anabaptists took scripture one step further than the reformers, such as Zwingli, Luther and their followers.

The Anabaptists were not a close-knit group but were located here and there in the lower part of Germany and Switzerland. The main documented Anabaptist group started on January 21, 1525, when Felix Manz and George Blaurock took the decisive step of renouncing child baptism and baptizing each other and those gathered on the confession of their faith. They had been meeting for Bible study as usual and came to the conclusion that if they really believed what they were reading, they were compelled to practice it. They did this knowing full well they would be opposed by the other reformers. They risked possible deportation, criminal prosecution or even death. And suffer they did.

Why do I talk about these things today? Why should we think about these past events? We need to be reminded that our forebears went through nine jubilee periods—a jubilee is 50 years. We need to remember our spiritual heritage and the Mennonite predecessors who endured four hundred and fifty years of pilgrim wanderings around the globe to pass on to us the faith of the first Anabaptists.

We may want to deny some of their stories. There were some black sheep among them such as the Münsterites in Northern Germany. They created a kind of a millennium for themselves by taking over a town, fortifying its walls and gathering an army to defend their newfound faith. We would consider their interpretation of scripture too radical. Their own ideals of a community of goods and ecstatic expressions of the faith soon spelled their doom at the hands of local authorities. We should not assume the Anabaptist movement did not produce its misfits in the process of experimenting with alternatives to the repressive society around them. However, there were also leaders such as Menno Simons and others who recognized the risks within the movement, tried to curb excesses and worked to put the movement on a more solid theological foundation. They understood that living in the Way is a constant struggle to integrate belief and practice into everyday life.

You may be wondering what this history has to do with writing my autobiography. As I recall my family background and over 50 years of married life with Trudie, my hope is that you will begin to appreciate the historical and religious context in which our life and vision for mission was nurtured. My prayer is that you will also catch glimpses of the historical Anabaptist movement in our attempts to understand and live the Christian Way as they did. I trust you will sense our struggle and that of the Mennonite churches to integrate beliefs and practices according to scripture in the Canadian context. Celebrate our sometimes awkward and difficult learning experiences as we gave expression to the Mennonite churches' attempts to engage in missions. Celebrate as well

the pioneering spirit as Trudie and I explored new possibilities for ministry during our lifetime. We recognize that the church also exercised faith in our ability to blaze new trails into unfamiliar territory. It will be for you to judge whether we met the standards set by the early Anabaptist movement. I trust you will recognize our pilgrimage along the Way as drawing on the resources of this historical tradition.

Let me begin the story by recalling my family's history in southern Manitoba, experiences that ultimately shaped my life and later ministry. My parents were born to Russian Mennonite immigrants who were quite young when their families emigrated to Canada. They were part of a movement which resisted the government's attempts to absorb them into Russian society by removing the conditions under which their ancestors had first settled in Ukraine. Grandfather Albert Unrau was 26 when he arrived in Canada in 1884 with his widowed mother and sister Helena and husband Franz Kliewer. The story is told that Grandfather Albert came to Canada as a single man. On his way to Saskatchewan he stopped at Gretna and got to know and married a young woman by the name of Margarethe Schellenberg. Before they moved on to Rosthern, David, Jacob, Lena and Peter were born in the village of Neuanlage near Gretna. Aganetha was born in Saskatchewan. Because of Grandfather

My paternal grandparents Albert (1858–1899) and Margarethe (Schellenberg) (1865–1943) Unrau (later Friesen) with son David in 1887.

Albert's ill health the family moved back to Neuanlage in the summer of 1898. On October 15 that same year my father John was born. Records show Grandfather Albert died three months later in early 1899 and was buried in Neuanlage. Shortly after Grandmother Unrau married Heinrich Friesen from the village of Neubergthal near Altona, seven miles northeast of Gretna, and moved to his farm there with her six children. He had five children and together they had three more, making a total of 14 children.

My father, John, was only a year old when Grandmother married Grandfather Friesen. At first Father was known as John Friesen; however, when he entered public school he discovered he was an Unrau and insisted on being called John Unrau.

I remember very little about Grandfather Friesen. He died in 1926 when I was six years old. I recall that my father carried me on his shoulders so I could have a better view of the funeral procession and the actual burial in the Neubergthal cemetery next to the public school in the centre of the village.

Following is Father's account of how he found his life's partner.

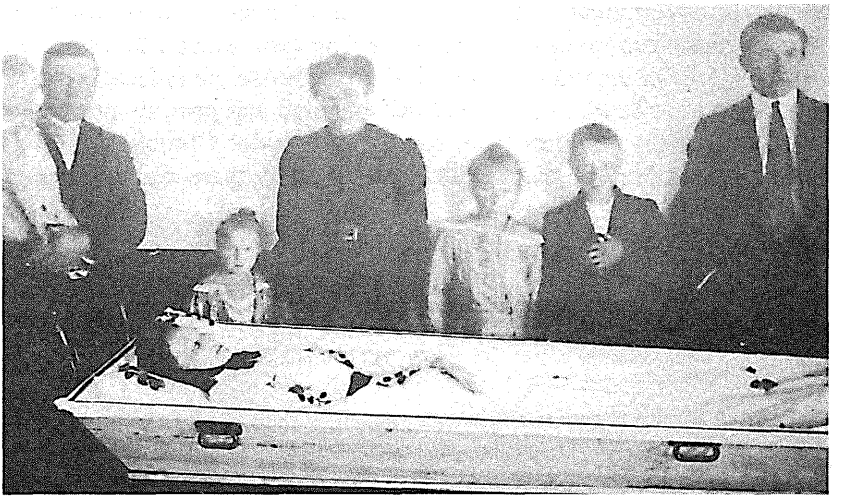
> I was teaching in Neuhorst private school when I made it a habit of going to the Sommerfelder Church on Sundays. During this time I asked God to send me a life partner. One Sunday as I sat in the last pew on the men's side of the church I prayed, "Lord, help me to see the third person coming through the church door as the life partner I can ask to marry me." The third person in the door was Helena Martens (1895–1931), the woman I married who became the mother of the first seven children in our household.

Helena Martens, born on June 7, 1895, was the daughter of Jacob and Helena (Nickel) Martens. The latter came to Canada as a six-year-old child with her parents Peter (1846–1897) and Maria (Sawatzky, b. 1848) Martens. Mother was born into a farming family of four boys and three girls. Two of the boys who died at birth had been given the name Peter after their father, as was the custom. Grandmother Martens was sick for several years and Mother, at age 19 or 20, looked after her until she died of tuberculosis in October 1918, two years before I was born.

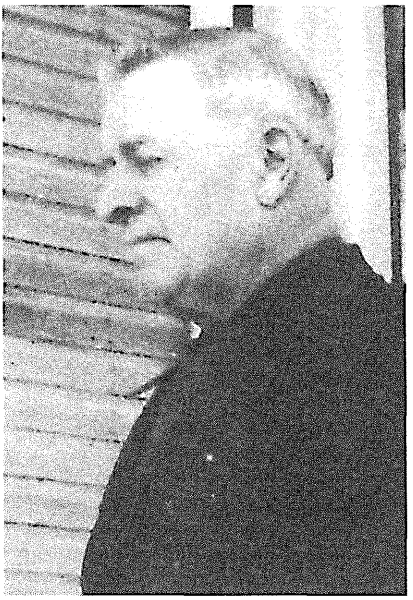
Grandfather Martens' house was one-and-a-half stories high and had many rooms for children and grandchildren. He had been a widower for 22 years when he died in 1940 at the age of 72. Grandfather was always interested in how his grandchildren were doing in school. I stayed at his house overnight from time to time but never heard him talk about his arrival in Canada as a child. I was probably too naive to ask questions about his past. The topic that seemed uppermost in his conversation had

My maternal grandparents Helena (Nickel) (1872–1918) and Jacob (1868–1940) Martens with children Helena, my mother, and Jacob in 1902.

to do with solving the public school issue. An air of apprehension permeated the community when the Department of Education imposed English instruction and only allowed German and religion to be taught before and after regular school hours. Clearly, the Unrau, Martens and



Grandmother Martens in coffin (l to r): Grandfather J.P. H. Martens with Nettie, Mary, Helena (my mother), Catherine, John and Jacob.



Grandpa Martens at age 72, one month before he died in 1940.

Friesen families were not ready to adopt the new public school system.

My grandparents on both sides and my parents belonged to the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church, who thought the English language would take children away from the church and cause them to lose their Christian faith. In fact, it was at this time that the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church sought to have their original contract with the Canadian government reaffirmed. Among other things they had been promised freedom to run their own school system. Since education fell under provincial jurisdiction, this was one promise the federal government could not keep. When negotiations failed and protests prompted jail terms, many families from the Sommerfelder Church moved to Paraguay and Mexico during the 1920s. Among them was my Uncle Peter.

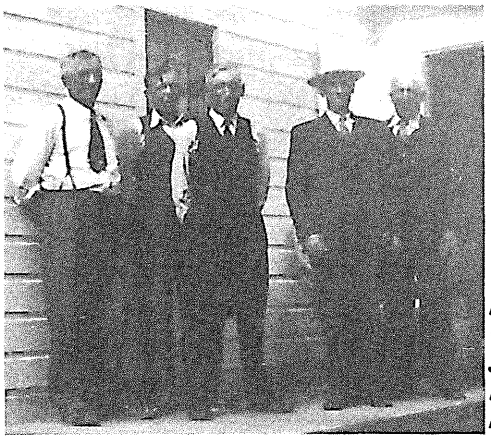
One day in my late teens I attended a service where Rev. John Schellenberg, a missionary to Africa, was speaking. In response to his invitation I accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord. I was among the first group of 28 young people to receive catechism instruction from Rev. William Heinrichs. Shortly thereafter in 1939 I was baptized by Rev. David Schulz and was accepted into the church at Spencer. . . . These events represented a public commitment to living in the Way as understood by our Anabaptist forebears. I had no idea where this commitment would lead but resolved to put all my energy into discovering and living in the Way.

2

Finding the Way
Growing up Mennonite

I was born to John A. and Helena (Martens) Unrau on January 19, 1920, on Grandfather Martens' farm in Silberfeld, five miles from Gretna. I was the oldest of the seven children in Father's first marriage: Jacob, Margaret, Helen, Mary, Agnes, John and Albert. We arrived within a span of ten years. When I was born, Father was one of the last private Mennonite school teachers in the Silberfeld and Halbstadt school districts in Manitoba. My earliest recollection of him was as an ardent church attender who sat with the *Vorsänger* (song leaders). He loved to sing.

When we lived on a homestead belonging to Grandfather Martens, Mother would take along the three-and-four-year-old children to the 160-acre Pieper farm which Father operated. The farm was over a mile away from our place. Farming required a lot of manual labour and Father could use all the help he could get during harvest. When the horse-drawn binder made a pass, the sheaves had to be put into stooks to shelter the grain from possible rains and to ensure that the grain was uniformly dry in preparation for threshing. Three weeks were spent preparing the crops for the threshing crew which moved from farm to



Father (John A. Unrau) at left with (l to r): his brother-in-law John Janzen and his brothers Peter, Jacob and David Unrau in the late 1940s.

farm. Their arrival was an exciting annual event all over southern Manitoba.

Father followed his brothers' footsteps and became a teacher in the Sommerfelder school system which ran for part of every year. He began his teaching career in the private school in the Schoenhorst District from which Mother originally came. Rev. H.H. Ewert, principal of Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) in Gretna, who was a school inspector appointed by the Province of Manitoba, visited Father's classroom to evaluate his English instruction. Apparently, he recommended that Father pursue further education in English to assist his instruction in the classroom. This meant taking upgrading classes in the MCI to meet Department of Education requirements. Father told me that Grandmother Unrau-Friesen reminded him that she had brought him up to be a farmer, not a school teacher.

In 1924–1925 Father was forced to leave teaching and take up farming full-time to provide for his family of five. Teaching was not the status profession it is today, and wages in the private school system were meagre. Mr. Pieper, who was the businessman in Gretna for whom Father had worked earlier, offered him a 200-acre farm with buildings on a crop-share basis. This farm was two-and-one half miles northwest of Gretna. Mother was always sickly and had her hands more than full looking after a growing number of small children. To supplement his income and to provide for his family, Father sold groceries door to door using a "Democrat" buggy pulled by two horses. The merchandise was stored in a box behind the driver's seat. Occasionally, I got to go along on these trips through the countryside.

I have a few early memories of changes and events that occurred at

about this time. One was that the Great Northern Railway, which ran northwest from Gretna to Plum Coulee—the track crossed our rented land and could be seen from the window of our house—was being torn up. This must have been between 1925 and 1927. The second memory was when I was old enough to go to school and lived with Grandfather Martens for part of my first year. The following year my sister Margaret was old enough to attend school and we caught a ride with Kate Klassen of Gretna, who came to teach in our local public school. As I recall, this was her first teaching assignment and she tried hard to impress the school trustees that she was giving us the half-hour German instruction which the Manitoba Department of Education allowed outside of regular hours. One morning Kate was going overtime with her German class when the front door opened unexpectedly. She was relieved to find it was a late student and not a surprise visit from the inspector. Later we moved back to Silberfeld School District and rented the Peter Voth farmyard which had many large trees. There father took over 80 acres of Grandmother Unrau-Friesen's land about one-and-one-half miles northeast of our rented farmyard.

During the summer of 1930 Mother's chronic health problems became serious and she spent much of her time in bed. It turned out she had contracted tuberculosis from her mother. When she became too ill to run the household Margaret Janzen, an older cousin, came to help with chores like baking and laundry. I always liked to learn, but found memorizing the German catechism difficult. During the time Mother was bedridden, she coached and encouraged me to learn the questions and answers because, as she said, "They will help you live a God-fearing life."

Mother's condition continued to deteriorate rapidly. In January 1931 my parents took the horse and sleigh to see Doctor Simpson in Gretna. His diagnosis was that Mother had advanced tuberculosis and should be sent to the sanatorium at Ninette. Initially she went to the Winnipeg Clinic next to the Winnipeg General Hospital. During her hospitalization Father was unable to meet all his farming and family responsibilities. To free him to support Mother in Winnipeg he gave up the farm during this upsetting time for our family. All seven children were "farmed out" to aunts, uncles and neighbours. Initially I was taken in by my uncle Jake Martens and spent most of the next four months away from home. Later I stayed with Father at Grandmother Unrau-Friesen's home for a short period of time. At age 10 I was taken out of school and earned my keep as a babysitter for the Ben Friesens in the Weidenfeld School District. Oh, how I pushed the baby carriage with their small

children, Ben and Margaret, up and down the driveway to get the children to sleep.

Mother stayed in the Winnipeg Clinic for over two months. When she returned she lived with the Siemens' sisters who operated a nursing home in Altona. She died on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1931, at age 35. I remember how difficult it was for Father with the seven children scattered among relatives and neighbours. He often expressed the desire to bring the family together again.

One day—I think it could have been in July 1931—Father asked me as his eldest son of seven children what I would think if he married Grandmother Unrau-Friesen's maid. Karoline Bansen had emigrated from Ukraine with the Krueger family a few years earlier. She was 31 years old and hoped to earn enough money to bring her family to Canada. As one of the grandchildren of the Unrau-Friesen household, I had learned to know her and was favourably impressed. She always seemed to have time for us. My cousins also thought of her as a very kind and caring person. Sure enough, Father proposed to her and set about making the necessary preparations for their wedding in the Sommerfelder Church. Unfortunately, the timing was awkward. This was July or August of 1931 so the Sommerfelder ministers asked him to postpone the wedding until the spring of 1932. This would allow Karoline, our prospective mother, to attend the regular catechism classes and, upon successful completion, participate in the baptismal service at Pentecost the following year. Once she had been accepted as

At Mother's (Helena Martens Unrau) coffin on April 5, 1931 (l to r): Helen, I, Agnes, Mary, Margaret, John and Father with Albert.

a full member in the church, they would be free to marry.

Father was desperately trying to bring his seven children under one roof sooner than the Sommerfelder process would allow, but what could he do about the matter? Rev. David D. Klassen, a young minister in the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Halbstadt, offered his services. He was somewhat related to us—dad was a cousin uncle—and was sympathetic to Father's plight. He offered to give Karoline Bansen private catechism instruction in Grandmother Unrau-Friesen's home. I remember sitting and listening to these special sessions. When she had demonstrated her understanding of doctrine and made a public profession of faith she was accepted as a candidate for baptism. A private baptism was performed at Grandmother's home soon after, making way for the wedding to follow.

On September 11, 1931, Father and Karoline Bansen were married and accepted as members in the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Altona with Rev. D.D. Klassen as officiating minister. After the ceremony Father and our new mother were driven by automobile to the reception at the Konantz residence at the north end of Gretna. I was given the task of driving the horse and buggy the seven miles to Gretna where our new home was to be.

The happily married couple came with a ready-made family of seven children. I was only 11 years old and did not foresee the problems which a large family could bring to the John and Karoline Unrau household. Truly, there were trying times while the new couple adjusted to each other but, when Henry and Paul arrived a few years later, new life and happiness came to the entire family. Karoline, whom we soon called Mother, was a very loving, caring and hard-working person. She helped the family survive the very lean years during the Depression.

The 1930s were dry years and a very difficult time for everyone in southern Manitoba. An extreme infestation of grasshoppers continued for several years. When the "critters" had finished stripping the last blades in the field they descended on the gardens. The price of wheat, our main cash crop, dropped as low as 35 cents a bushel. People had little cash and instead of selling their wheat they scorched it and ground it into a coffee substitute called "Prips," a common drink during the Depression. Most farm families in southern Manitoba had potatoes and "Prips" for dinner and "Prips" and potatoes for supper.

Our family had an additional handicap. We didn't own any land and depended on renting land or hiring out as farm labourers. Also, we had few independent financial resources to support a large family—in those years there was no such thing as family allowance. Whatever we needed

Father and Karoline Banson Unrau, our second mother, at their silver wedding in 1956.

we had to work for. As I reflect on it now, we were living on a starvation diet yet never thought of ourselves as poor when wages fell to three dollars a month. During one of the very lean winters our family lived on 98 pounds of flour for 10 days. We had a home and some bush land but a dry well. Consequently, we had to melt snow for our household use and for the livestock. In spring we planted vegetables such as potatoes and corn.The potatoes were our staple and the corn was stored as winter feed for the cattle.

Everyone was expected to help support the family by whatever means they could. This meant that the oldest children had to leave school and work. I started working for wages at age 14 and never completed my public school education. The first six months I earned 20 dollars which went to Father to meet household expenses. This was considered a great help for a large family with few cash resources. While I was away, the family moved to the Peter Driedger farm two-and-one-half miles northwest of Gretna, which had a house large enough to house our family. This was the old Pieper farm where we had lived from 1925–1929. As the eldest I looked after the Driedger cattle during the winter of 1934–1935 in return for reduced rent.

After April 1934 I worked as labourer on the following farms: Henry Klippensteins in Bergthal 1934; Jacob Kehlers in Weidenfeld south of Plum Coulee 1935; Ben Sawatzkys in Gnadenfeld 1936–1937; Grandmother Friesen-Unraus 1937; Jacob Funks 1938–1939; Jacob

Hieberts in Gnadenfeld 1940. All were small operations with little mechanization. For the most part manual labour and horsepower were used to do the work whether it was cleaning the barn, plowing, seeding, cutting feed or hauling fodder. Horses also provided the main means of transportation to pick up the mail, shop for household necessities, attend school or church. Modern machinery was just being introduced to southern Manitoba. Jacob Kehlers had a Model A Ford with which they used to go to church. Occasionally they drove all the way to Winnipeg instead of taking the train as other people did. Jacob Hiebert owned a heavy tractor which was used to power the threshing machine during grain harvest.

I was 16 years old when I worked at the Ben Sawatzky farm which was located on the so-called Telephone Line Road two-and-one-half miles south of Altona. This was a model farm in the community. It had shorthorn beef cattle and a flock of leghorn chickens that supplied the local hatchery with eggs to improve the flocks on surrounding farms.

Much of my spare time was spent with the village youth in the Gnadenfeld School District. In summer the farm kept me busy and I had little time for socializing; but when winter came we gathered to party, dance and goof off. I drifted along with my peer group during this time and allowed myself to be drawn into their activities without giving it much serious thought. The partying, smoking and drinking occupied much of my leisure time. It took an effort to get to church from the country; also it was not customary for youth to attend church until it

As a 15-year-old near Gretna in 1935

Our home near Grunthal in 1941 with (l to r): my brother John, Ben Friesen, and brothers Diedrich, Albert and Henry.

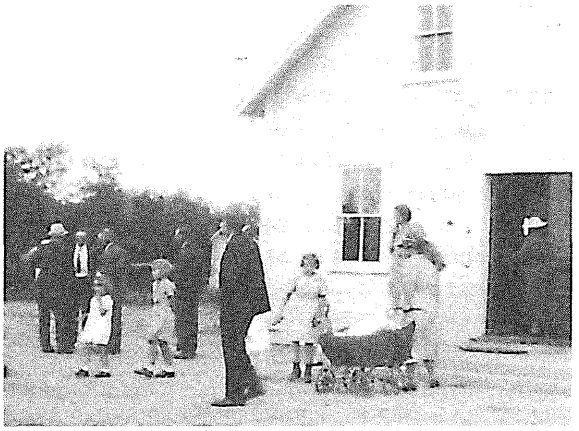
came time for catechism and baptism prior to marriage. Baptism marked the passage into adulthood and full membership in the Mennonite community organized around the church. I gave little attention to Bible reading, praying, going to church, visiting my parents and connecting with former Christian friends until July 1937 when I went to work on Grandmother Unrau-Friesen's farm. There I was reunited with my school friends and encouraged by Grandmother to attend church. This exposure to the Gospel was further cultivated when I joined my family who had moved to Spencer, a farming area south of Grunthal and east of the Red River.

Spencer was a new settlement which attracted returning Mennonites from Paraguay and landless Mennonites like my parents from southern Manitoba. The Paraguayan Mennonites had left Manitoba over the school issue and had attempted to settle in the Chaco region of Paraguay. They returned to Manitoba penniless when their efforts under the harshest of conditions failed. They had spent their resources in the attempt and now had to settle on lighter, cheaper land where they could start farming all over again. The early Spencer settlers came as large families to escape dependence on government relief payments. They were determined to show that they could support themselves even if they were forced to carve a farm out of virgin bush land. They also did

not want to neglect worshipping together. At Spencer there was a fairly large group that was like-minded, spoke the same language and shared a common history. The Friesen and Wedel families, who were Mennonite Brethren, already lived in the district and were meeting in the school. They quickly added their efforts to those of the new arrivals by holding Sunday morning and evening services together. This gave opportunity for children to attend Sunday school and young people to participate in Christian Endeavour *(Jugendverein)* programs. When the settlement became more established, they invited Rev. William Heinrichs from Lowe Farm to assist in the formation of a church.

One day in my late teens I attended a service where Rev. John Schellenberg, a missionary to Africa was speaking. In response to his invitation I accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord. I was among the first group of 28 young people to receive catechism instruction from Rev. William Heinrichs. Shortly thereafter in 1939 I was baptized by Rev. David Schulz and was accepted into the church at Spencer. The group rented the Grunthal Elim Mennonite Church for a baptismal and communion service. The Mennonite Brethren differed in their mode of baptism but supported the work of Rev. Heinrichs. These events represented a public commitment to living in the Way as understood by our Anabaptist forebears. I had no idea where this commitment would lead but resolved to put all my energy into discovering and living in the Way.

The baptism of so many young people was encouraging to the group and convinced them of the need to build their own place of worship. If they were to become an established church, the Spencer Mennonites



Spencer Mennonite Church in 1940, a year after I joined the church.

needed all the assistance they could get since most families were struggling to reestablish themselves in farming on marginal land. The Lowe Farm Mennonite Church together with the Bergthaler Mennonite Church headquartered in Altona and the Mennonite Brethren came to their assistance. Not only did they provide some of the finances to build a church, they also encouraged Rev. Heinrichs to move to Spencer and helped establish him in farming since ministers were not salaried at the time.

Before the actual construction of the church building, a group from the Bible School in Steinbach came through to recruit students for the classes they held for five winter months every year. A year after the church was completed, Bishop Schulz from Altona officiated at a communion service and announced the opening of Elim Bible School in Altona for the winter of 1940–1941. The Spencer Bergthaler Mennonite Church indicated support for the school. Although I was one of the first students from there, later a number of my brothers and sisters and others from Spencer also attended Elim.

During this time I worked at a number of different jobs to help the family. One of the longer periods of employment was on the farm of the Rev. Jacob Funk family near Grunthal. For 13 months of work I received a salary of 156 dollars. This included free room and board which was the practice for farm labour. My father received 144 dollars of my salary in advance and purchased the 80-acre Peter Friesen farm four-and-one-half miles due south of Grunthal. I also worked for a farmer cutting firewood into four-foot lengths. Once it was seasoned the wood was sold for about $4.55 per cord to truckers who were in the fuel business in Winnipeg. I was able to cut a cord a day for which I received one dollar. I must have cut about 30 cords of wood during the winter of 1939.

Our economic fortunes began to improve when new jobs became available with the Manitoba Sugar Company. The company had built a large sugar refinery in Fort Garry south of Winnipeg which provided new employment for many people from early spring to late fall. At the time the sugar industry was very labour intensive. Seeding, hoeing, thinning and harvesting were all done by hand. Initially the company leased hundreds of acres of land around Dufrost to grow sugar beets for the refinery. We lived about 15 miles east of Dufrost and commuted daily in cars or in the back of pickup trucks. Work at the refinery increased our cash flow considerably. We could do some piece work which allowed us to earn more than the average wage of a carpenter at the time. Our financial situation improved to the point where we could

Hoeing sugar beets in 1940: my sister Helen with Father; Abram Friesen in foreground.

trade our horse-drawn buggy for a second-hand automobile. The car made it much easier to get around. We put an addition onto the house and covered the exterior with new siding. These improvements more adequately met the needs of our large family. In 1940 we saved enough money to have an extra deep well dug on our yard so we no longer had to melt snow or haul water from the neighbours half a mile away. In retrospect, these were hard times but at the time we did not realize how difficult they were. We enjoyed life and tried to do the best we could with what we had. The Lord was with us and gave purpose to our life.

As the inevitability of my own registration for military service drew closer, I went through a time of soul searching. Other young people had already been called up, had answered for their faith and received CO status. I wondered, "How would I fare?" Our tradition of seeking peace, not war, dated back to the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. . . . If only I would have known that I was worthy to stand up and be counted when put to the test. I did not want to let down the martyrs who once stood their ground for their faith.

3

Stops along the Way
The CO Years 1939–1945

> In the summer of 1941 the conscientious objectors (COs) were called to service. Mr. Hon. James G. Gardiner, Minister of National War Services, announced the first call for alternative service workers. Alternative service work was to be three to four months in lieu of military service. . . . The COs would report to the camp for work. Those who neglected to work at the camps were dealt with as deserters. On June 15, 1941 the camps began to work.—Lawrence Klippenstein, ed, *That There Be Peace,* 1978, p. 20.

As the inevitability of my own registration for military service drew closer, I went through a time of soul searching. Other young people had already been called up, had answered for their faith and received CO status. I wondered, "How would I fare?" Our tradition of seeking peace, not war, dated back to the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. Menno Simons (1496–1561) wrote,

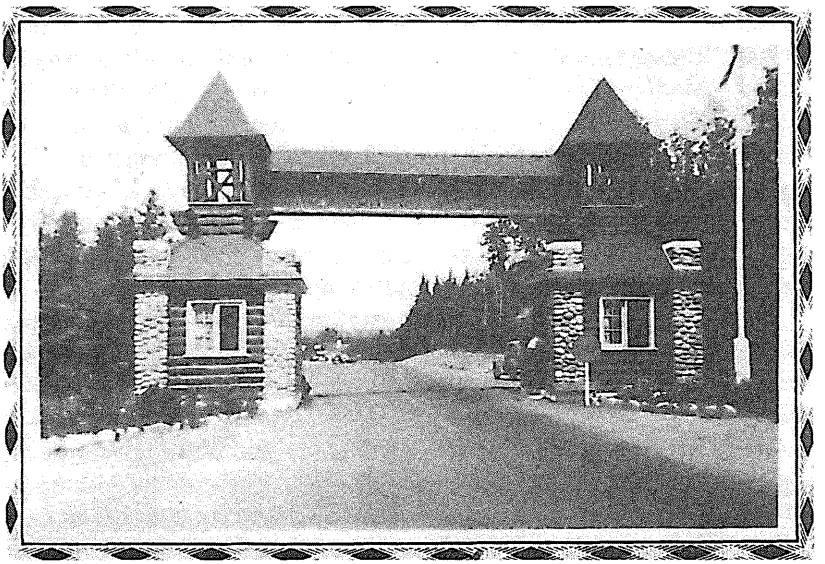
> But as to the flesh, we teach and exhort to obedience to the emperor, king, lords, magistrates, yea, to all in authority in all temporal affairs, and civil regulations in so far as they are not contrary to the Word of God (Romans 13:1–3).—*The Complete Writings of Menno Simons,* 1984, p. 200.

He based his rejection of military service on scriptural grounds. Verses such as: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matthew 5:9); "Do not resist one who is evil" (Matthew 5:39); "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13) convinced him that war was against scripture and outside the will of God. Therefore, Christians could legitimately reject the authority of the state and refuse service in the military. If only I would have known that I was worthy to stand up and be counted when put to the test. I did not want to let down the martyrs who once stood their ground for their faith.

In March 1941 I received my conscription notice. The first step in the process was a medical examination. Dr. Breidenbach in Altona gave me a clean bill of health. Then I wrote a letter to the Selective Service Board to request CO status. I explained that my religious beliefs prohibited me from participating in the army and training to kill. My request was processed and I was summoned to appear at the courthouse in Steinbach along with others who also had asked for exemption from military service. On May 7, 1941, we faced Judge Adamson. After my examination by the judge I was granted CO status, assigned to alternative service in Canada and ordered to make contributions to the Canadian Red Cross. In total I spent about 32 months as a CO doing various jobs as directed by the Canadian Selective Service Board.

On June 27 I found myself on the way to Riding Mountain National Park with a busload of young fellows. We were all 21 years old and

In June 1941 as a 21-year-old at CO camp in Riding Mountain National Park.



The south gate into Riding Mountain National Park in September 1941.

came from Grunthal, Kleefeld, Steinbach, Giroux and St. Anne. The bus ride was a first for most of us. The 200-mile trip took all day. Many of us had never been this far away from home before. At Riding Mountain National Park we did a four-month stint from June 27 to October 27, 1941. This alternative service assignment was to take the place of basic training which other able-bodied young men took when they entered military service. Our first accommodations were tents set up at three different camp sites. About 200 COs worked in the park, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists and Mennonites from eight different conferences.

During our four months at Riding Mountain we did a variety of jobs. The first was to clean up and beautify the public beaches at Wasagaming. Some of us built a dam to raise the level of the lake so it could be stocked for sports fishermen and tourists. Some of our men looked after a herd of buffalo in the park by making and stacking hay for winter feed. We also worked on a bypass road around Wasagaming and placed rocks on the shale banks so the water could not wash the mud onto the road during heavy rains. Others constructed a mesh fence around the park's golf course so the elk and mule deer couldn't wander onto the course and damage the groomed fairways and greens. We were also involved in brushing and cleaning the ditches to make the park look tidy and attractive.

CO life in Riding Mountain National Park was not all work. We dammed a small creek near the east entrance of the park to make a swimming hole. Since we came from a musical tradition we formed quartets and practiced singing close harmony for our own and the camp's enjoyment. There was time for reading and group Bible study. Since a minister from southern Manitoba had accompanied us, regular church services were held in the open air and later in the bunk house for those who lived in the town of Wasagaming. Writing letters to friends and parents at home or to sweethearts was also a good pastime for many since first-class mail cost only three cents. The park offered a number of trails or we could walk along the road that passed by the camp when we needed solitude. At night, when everything was quiet, we could hear the timber wolves howling in the distance and imagined them chasing down an elk or a mule deer. That sound reminded me of my parents' farm in Grunthal. Along with the hard work, good companionship and fresh air, the four months offered a variety of new opportunities and forged new friendships. It passed almost too quickly.

In the winter of 1943 the Selective Service Board required all able-bodied men of draft age to be involved in projects of national interest. COs were urged to apply for winter work with the Kapuskasing Pulp and Paper Company in Ontario instead of returning to camps in Riding Mountain National Park. The Board made it known that those who did not volunteer would be assigned to duties in mental hospitals or national parks. The pulp and paper industry was important if for no other reason than to keep the economy of our country going. I decided to go to Kapuskasing, 700 miles east of Winnipeg in the Canadian Shield, with the understanding that I would be permitted to return to working on a farm once the pulp cutting season was over.

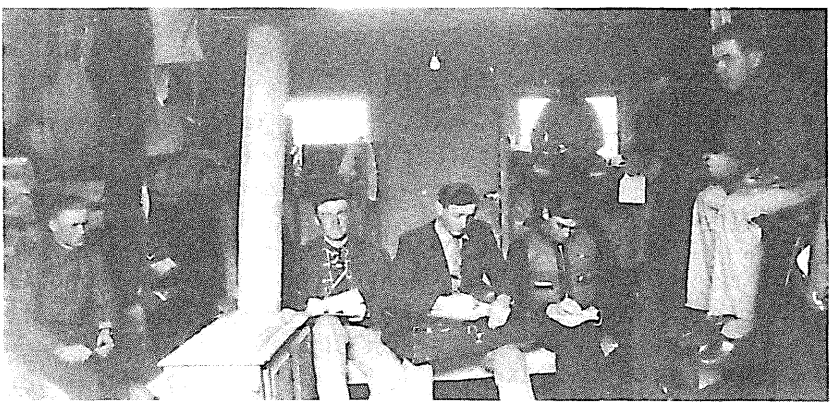
A number of us COs were attending Elim Bible School when the call came. After we left, Elim virtually became a girls' school. One of the leading ministers stated half seriously that training women was important so that when the men returned they would have good life partners to choose from. The *Ältesten Komitee* represented by Rev. Barkman bade us goodbye as we left the CNR station around midnight in January 1943. At Armstrong, Ontario, 23 men out of 100 got off the train to work in the bush camps there; the rest of us continued on until we reached Kapuskasing, a pulp and paper town. Ben Hoeppner from Altona was one of my partners. He was an ardent student of the Bible and later became a teacher at Steinbach Bible School. Another was a Klippenstein. George Kroeker, who later became a doctor, was also in our camp. With his grade 12 education, he was soon promoted and kept

At bush camp in Kapuskasing responding to the dinner bell on a Sunday in 1943. I am fourth in line.

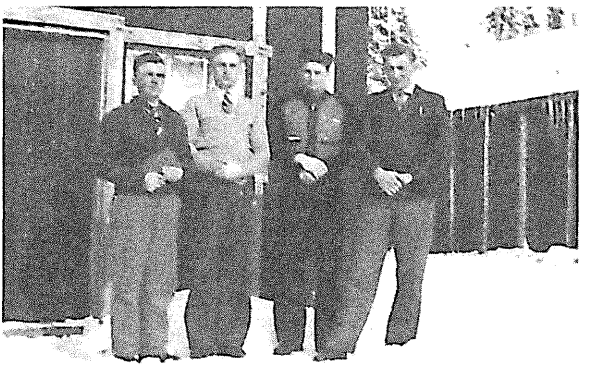
books for the Kapuskasing Paper Company at Camp 22A.

We did piece work which meant we were paid according to the amount of pulp we cut. We chopped down and limbed the trees, cut them into 16-foot lengths, then skidded them onto the frozen river. During spring thaw the logs were floated to the pulp mill which was 60 miles downstream. If we cut and skidded 30 logs in a day (about two cords each), we felt we had done well. It depended somewhat on the stand of timber we were given to cut. In total my partner Ben and I cut 55 cords in 16 days and were pleased with our efforts.

The cutting and swamping were hard work even for strapping farm



The Mennonite COs in my cabin at Camp 36 (foreground, l to r): Unidentified camper, Pete Giesbrecht, I, Ben Hoeppner and Ben Braun.



The quartet that sang together at camp (l to r): Pete Giesbrecht, John N. Braun, Ben Hoeppner and I.

boys. We walked the two miles to work and back each day. We also packed our own lunch box which needed to be thawed over an open fire when lunch time came. Toasted and barbecued sandwiches washed down with tea was our daily noon fare. We spent many long and lonely nights that winter, writing letters to every friend we could think of. More than half of mine were to Trudie Giesbrecht with whom I had struck up a relationship at Elim Bible School. Mail service was good except in late March when the winter roads began breaking up. Many evenings we sang, read, studied and witnessed to the friends around us. Actually, Pete Giesbrecht, John N. Braun, Ben Hoeppner, Ben Braun and I had already begun singing together on the train to Kapuskasing in January.

In the bush camps we worked alongside French Canadians from Quebec for whom pulp cutting provided seasonal employment. Since none of us spoke French and they couldn't speak English or German there was little communication between us. It was as though we were two different camps. Things might have been different if we had been there longer. One incident I remember involved camp food. The cook was so inept he couldn't prepare edible rolled oats. The French segment of the camp literally threw him into a snow bank with orders not to return to the kitchen. This caused such a stir that all the women working in the kitchen walked out and left us to make our own meals for several days. It took almost a week before the management could restore order to the camp. Thanks to the French workers the food improved for all of us. I don't think any of the Mennonite boys would have dreamt of being involved in such a protest.

One afternoon when Ben Hoeppner and I were skidding logs along the river bank our horse fell into waist deep snow. No matter what we

tried we couldn't get it to stand up—not even prayer helped. The snow was so soft that the horse couldn't get its footing. It just kept rolling over in the snow. Eventually we gave up trying and while we busied ourselves with other things the horse stood up of its own accord. In total we had wasted an hour and had just enough time to get back to camp in time for supper. I was quite embarrassed about the whole incident and refused to talk about it to anyone. We farm boys had our pride.

For a few days the skidders were asked to help the swampers get logs out of the bush before spring breakup. The haulers used heavy bob-sleighs loaded four feet high with logs. Our job was to load the sleighs in the bush and unload them on the ice using pulp hooks. While working I accidentally drove one of the hooks into my leg just below the knee. It was somewhat painful but I kept on working. At noon, I noticed blood had oozed through my breeches. I finished the day but could not go back in the morning. There were signs of infection so I went to see Doctor McTavish at the Zensenbrenner Hospital in Kapuskasing 70 miles away by winter road. I made the trip by taxi. My case was not considered serious, so I stayed at the Commercial Hotel and reported to the doctor when necessary. While there, I met other COs who were working in camps. Reverend H.P. Loepp from Hurst, Ontario, called on me at least once while I was there. When my condition improved I returned to camp. I was only back for three months when spring breakup forced a halt to work in the bush. The time had come to return to Manitoba. We were told the prairies had experienced an early

Hauling up to six cords of pulpwood with two horses along an icy road (l to r): John N. Braun, Ben Braun and I.

spring and our services were needed on the farms in southern Manitoba.

We received our financial statements at Camp 36 and on April 6 hitched a ride to Kapuskasing to pick up our cheques and bonuses and to catch the train. When we arrived in town it was 1:15 a.m. The policeman on patrol offered us free lodging in the local jail. He checked out our background, wartime registration and our destination. Then we were given a small blanket and a pillow and taken to cells with spotless, painted cement floors but no beds. When the warden took us down the hall we went through a series of clanging steel doors which gave us an eerie feeling and left us wondering whether we would get out in the morning. There were two prisoners locked in cells for whom this wasn't even a possibility. Later we regretted having taken the offer, largely because it was nearly 9:00 a.m. before the warden finally released us. We hurriedly had our breakfast and met the other men who had arrived by truck during the night. It was afternoon before we finally got our cheques. At 7:00 p.m. we caught the train and were on our way back to Manitoba. At sunrise on April 7 we reached the Manitoba border. I had decided to see my parents first because I knew my mother was sick. By the time I got to Altona it was too late to meet Trudie at her Grandfather Giesbrecht's. I spent the first night in Manitoba at A.D. Friesens.

The story of my CO experience would not be complete without mentioning the contributions we were ordered to make to the Canadian Red Cross. As COs we could support this organization with a clear conscience because its purpose was to alleviate the suffering of refugees and other victims of war. From the spring of 1943 to the fall of 1945 I contributed 15 dollars per month for about 16 months, then seven dollars and three dollars for the remaining months. Since my work needed to be approved by the Selective Service Board the contributions were written into my employment contracts and paid by payroll deductions. These were not always easy times in my life but well worthwhile. I am thankful to God and to our Canadian government for allowing me to follow my conscience in the matter of military service.

. . . Father said he had nothing against studying the Bible, but that I should give up my plans to go to Africa—he had not forgotten our conversation after the service in the Bergfeld School when I was seven years old. He said there were a lot of Indian people up north in our own country who had not heard God's word. He would support me with his prayers if that was where I would go. You can see from Jake's writing that is precisely where the Lord led us and blessed us. I will never regret our life of service.—Trudie Giesbrecht

4

A Companion for the Way
Courtship and Family Life

The experiences as a CO interrupted the flow of my life but did not deter me from the objective of attending Bible school and preparing for Christian service. During the CO years I fell in love with Trudie Giesbrecht who became my partner in exploring and living in the Way. This relationship changed my life as we together shaped our pilgrimage under God.

In 1940 I had decided to attend Elim Bible School in Altona. When the day came for me to find a way to get to school opening for October 27 it so happened that Bishop Schulz had come to Spencer to serve the Lord's Supper that Sunday. My parents asked him if I could have a ride to Altona. I couldn't have had much more baggage than an apple box full of clothing to take along. My intentions were to register for the full five-month course, but I did not have enough money for both tuition and room and board. I asked Henry and Agatha Friesen ("Dray Friesens" who were related to me from the Martens' side) for a loan of $12.50 a month until January 1941 when I was to receive my inheritance from the Jacob Martens estate. I felt it would be a good investment to use this money for a Bible school education. The executor of the estate must have felt the same since he hand-delivered the cheque at the school soon after I turned 21. The inheritance amounted to 213 dollars. This paid for

room and board, tuition of 30 dollars and the books I would need. I even had 20 dollars left over for a Sunday suit with two pairs of pants and a vest, a suit I wore on our wedding day several years later.

The teachers and students made quite an impact on me during my first year at Elim Bible School. Instruction was in German except for one course in English composition. Besides academic studies students were expected to teach Sunday school in southern Manitoba Mennonite churches. The second year I was also able to attend Elim for the complete semester from October 1941 to April 1942.

During that time I had known Trudie as a fellow student. When we said our goodbyes after the closing program the second year I sensed something had changed between us. Somehow we knew we would keep in touch between semesters. We went our separate ways and did not see each other for some time. In April 1942 I went directly to my parents in Grunthal and Trudie left for Homewood. The attraction I had felt for her didn't pass, so I wrote a letter explaining my feelings and asked if we could make our relationship more permanent. She got my first letter at Homewood but took it to Edenburg near Gretna where Wanda Buhr, one of her favourite girl friends, lived. There she finally opened my letter. It wasn't long before she wrote back.

Her letter reached me at the Schrag dairy farm in Arnaud where I had found summer employment. I remember I was busy feeding the cows when I was handed Trudie's letter. I recognized the handwriting but thought I should finish my job first, so I stuck the envelope into my pocket. When I had a moment I skimmed its contents and got the impression that Trudie was not interested in my advances. This left me discouraged to the point of despair. At noon I read the letter again. She had written her letter in the Gothic script which I found hard to read. When I read the letter more carefully I found she was happy that someone cared for her and our feelings were mutual. She invited me to come to her sisters' double wedding on May 17, 1942. I wasn't sure I could get there even though I very much wanted to accept her invitation. Homewood was 50 miles away. True, I had a bicycle but what could I do on those muddy roads? Cars could hardly make it on the roads out of Arnaud which weren't even gravelled.

However, my situation changed after I was given permission to leave the Schrag farm because the work was taking its toll on me physically. That same day I found work at the neighbouring Voth farm which had many acres of land. There the job was not as stressful and hard for my back. The Voths needed a worker only for spring seeding. I had the privilege of working with a John Deere tractor, harrowing, cultivating

and preparing a good seed bed. I worked the land with their oldest son who was my age. Mr. Voth was an elder in the Mennonite Brethren Church in Arnaud, Manitoba. The whole family treated me with respect and made up for the hard time I had had at the previous employer. After seeding time was over Mr. Voth and some of his family took me home to my parents near Grunthal. This gave me the opportunity to introduce them to my family before saying goodbye.

Not many weeks later my parents made a trip to Altona. I tagged along in hopes of seeing Trudie who was working for the Bishop David Schulz family at Weidenfeld. I had worked for Jake Hiebert, whose farm was next to the village of Gnadenfeld three-and-one-half miles south of Altona, once before and had a standing invitation to return for harvest time. It was easy to accept his offer of 60 dollars a month and the chance to live within easy cycling distance (10 miles) of Trudie. I was their hired man during harvest of 1942. While I was there my work included doing the summer fallow, stooking green sweet clover and harvesting the mature grain crops for threshing. I also helped build the huge round haystacks used for winter fodder for the cattle. At Hieberts I always had Sundays and some evenings free and took every opportunity to visit Trudie. She and I knew that we were in love but found it hard to persuade the David Schulz boys on our initial visit in Weidenfeld. This first visit helped us get to know each other better in a large group of young people on the farm. However, on the second visit we were able to spend some time alone. On one such visit I remember we sat by ourselves in the back seat of Bishop Schulz's car because all the rooms in the house were taken up by visitors.

Our love for each other grew. On one of my many visits during the summer none of the Schulz family was at home so we had the place to ourselves. We spent some time singing around the pump organ in the living room. The Christian gospel songs made me feel right at home with Trudie. It was at this organ that I got the courage to ask Trudie if she would give me her hand so that we might walk through life together. I don't think there was any hesitation. Her answer was, "Yes!" It was not a total surprise because we had talked about our future together before.

I could find my way around with a bicycle and felt I was lucky to have a girlfriend who was not too demanding. We did a lot of walking, taking rides with friends and by train or bus as our budget allowed. Later that summer we hired David Klassen, who was the custodian at Elim and had a car, to take us to Homewood. He told us that he had the car, gasoline ration tickets but no money to buy the gas. If we would

pay for the gasoline he would take us to visit Trudie's parents. When we arrived Mr. Giesbrecht was at the neighbours. Mrs. Giesbrecht told Trudie's brother Ed, "Go tell Dad to come home. We have company."

Ed asked, "Who shall I say is here?"

Mother answered, "Say Trudie's bush rabbit, and he will know."

Another Sunday we hired Bill Rempel, a good friend who owned a Nash car, to take us to my parents.

During the summer Trudie and I found time to teach Daily Vacation Bible School. Trudie's friend, Nettie Isaac from the Weidenfeld School Division, Henry Klassen and I made up the team assigned to the Neufeld School District four miles north of Lowe Farm.

In the fall of 1942 I returned to Elim Bible School for my second year. At Christmas all the students except me went to their respective homes. Since Trudie had not attended the fall semester I decided to head for Homewood instead of going to my parents near Grunthal. I got a ride with the Abram A. Braun family who lived nine miles south of Sperling. They had come to Altona with a horse-drawn bob sleigh and were returning home. We got to their farm late in the afternoon so I

Trudie (back row, centre) with her Daily Vacation Bible School students in 1942 at the Weidenfeld School.

stayed overnight. It was another 19 miles to the Giesbrecht farm near Homewood. George Braun ribbed me about their maid whose name was also Gertrude (Trudie) Giesbrecht. I saw her once but she bore no resemblance to my Trudie. Next morning the Brauns went to pick up their mail in town and gave me a lift as far as Sperling. I started to walk, hoping I could catch a ride from a passing car. Finally, a car stopped and gave me a ride to the Homewood corner. I had not gone more than a mile when George Unger came along and took me right into the Giesbrecht yard since he was hauling wheat for my future father-in-law. Mr. Giesbrecht gave me a hearty welcome. That evening Trudie and I had a long visit. It must have been after midnight by the time we decided to go to bed. As I came down the stairs, I broke the lamp chimney and woke the whole household. I expected to be teased about that incident later, but no one ever mentioned it.

In the new year I went back to Altona to complete my term but, as noted in the last chapter, it was not to be. Instead I ended up in a pulp cutting camp near Kapuskasing, Ontario. During my time in the camps most of the correspondence I sent and received involved my relationship with Trudie. When I returned to Manitoba from Kapuskasing, I went right to Trudie's grandfather John Giesbrecht because I knew Trudie would be there. On my first day back we decided to visit old friends and acquaintances to announce our wedding plans. Bishop David Schulz, Rev. Peter Kehler and Rev. A.A. Teichroeb supported our decision. Rev. George Braun thought we should postpone our plans since we were living in troubled times with Canada at war. Despite this caution we began planning our wedding in earnest.

This was also a time of singing, reading and meditating together even though our future was uncertain. For me the reality of the big day of public announcement and marriage seemed like a dream coming true. Gertrude (Trudie) Giesbrecht would become my life's partner. We wrote a letter to Trudie's parents to inform them of our plans to get married as soon as possible. Through our correspondence I had learned to know Trudie quite well and to appreciate her for the person she was. I also found out we had a similar desire to be involved in missions. Trudie tells her own story before we met better than I can.

> My parents, Cornelius W. Giesbrecht and Aganetha Penner, were married December 12, 1912. Father had just turned 19 on November 24 and asked Grandfather Penner if he could marry his daughter Aganetha. Grandfather said, "Don't you think you are a bit young to get married?" to which father had replied, "Don't you think I will get older after I am married?" So the date was set for the wedding. On December 27 Mother

Trudie's maternal grandparents Aganetha and Henry Penner.

Trudie's paternal grandparents Aganetha and John Giesbrecht.

turned 19. They started their married life in Steinreich and certainly did get older. They were married for 72 years and raised eight girls. The ninth child was a girl who died at four months. The tenth child was a boy. This completed the family.

We had a happy family life and did a lot of laughing in our home. When our parents were away we would play by jumping on their bed since it had springs and ours didn't. Once we bounced so hard the clock fell from its shelf. We also had a big yellow dog which we let into the house for entertainment. We would play Dad's little accordion to set off his howling. My, that dog could howl! If our parents weren't home when we returned from school we would make a fire in the stove, heat some milk, add a bit of sugar and a few drops of vanilla before we took off our coats. Ho, it tasted so good!

When I was six or seven, Mr. Lenzman, a missionary from Africa, was having services at the Bergfeld School. One of the daughters of Peter Heinrichs who attended the Steinreich School invited us to attend the meetings. Even though Father thought it was too far to go in the dark he finally agreed to take us on the last Friday evening of the meetings. We really enjoyed the evening. I was so impressed that I promptly informed my parents I would become a missionary when I got older. Father told me it was out of the question and to get such ideas out of my head.

For Christmas we would always go to our grandparents and recite the

little pieces we had memorized for the school program. This particular year I thought of preaching a message on being ready if God calls us today. I knew my uncles were not Christians. I still remember the message I prepared but never delivered.

Until this time my parents had lived on their own in the Steinreich School District. From 1929–1930 we moved in with our Penner grandparents even though another son and his wife, as well as three unmarried children, were also living under the same roof. These were hard times and everyone made do with what they had. My three older sisters worked as domestics to help feed the rest of us. Even I got involved at the John Epp household during harvest or when Mrs. Epp needed help during her pregnancies. When I was 16 the Epps wanted to go to Saskatchewan to visit her parents and acquaintances. They asked whether I would look after the farm while they were away. At the time I gave little thought to the fact that this was really a job for an experienced farmer so I accepted. Being Christian I had my devotions every night. I read the Bible, sang from the *Evangeliums Liederbuch* and prayed before going to bed. I managed to keep up with the work but began to get very lonely after the first week on my own. One morning while getting the cows from the pasture I remember I told God of my longing to be with Him. You might smile at this, as Jake does, but God spoke to me in a very clear voice, "My child, think of your Grandmother Giesbrecht who is very sick. Ask me to take her home. I have a lot of work for you to do." I asked God to forgive me for feeling sorry for myself and to relieve Grandmother from her suffering.

That night as I was having my devotions Father came by to inform me that Grandmother Giesbrecht had gone to be with the Lord. I knew then that God had heard my prayer. After that I began to give more thought to preparing for God's work. It took several more years before I could see the possibility of attending Bible school which was then held on the second floor of the old Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna. In 1937 my family moved to Homewood. From there my parents took me to Gretna to attend Bible school. On the way, Father said he had nothing against studying the Bible, but that I should give up my plans to go to Africa—he had not forgotten our conversation after the service in the Bergfeld School when I was seven years old. He said there were a lot of Indian people up north in our own country who had not heard God's word. He would support me with his prayers if that was where I would go. You can see from Jake's writing that is precisely where the Lord led us and blessed us. I will never regret our life of service. I had little of my own money but simply went on faith that my needs would be met. God always provided. Those two winters in Gretna and the final two years in Altona were great years—Elim had moved to Altona in 1940 between my second and third year.

In 1954 my parents settled in Carman and in 1975 went into

Trudie's parents, Cornelius W. (1893–1985) & Aganetha (Penner 1893–1984) Giesbrecht in 1960.

Parkview Manor Seniors' Home. They were both hospitalized on May 29, 1984, where Mother went to be with the Lord on June 10. Father was transferred to the Boyn Lodge in Carman where he died on July 20, 1985.

The better I got to know Trudie the more I realized we shared a similar vision and passion for ministry. Trudie had carried the vision since she was seven years old and together we felt called into mission service and prepared for it as best we could given our circumstances. The immediate plans included preparing for the wedding and finding employment. When I returned from Kapuskasing I received permission from the Selective Service Board to work at the Theodore Schroeder farm near St. Adolphe about 20 miles south of Winnipeg. My contract was that I would work there and pay 15 dollars every month to the Canadian Red Cross. My wages were set at 60 dollars per month which meant we had 45 dollars left to pay for food, house payments and travel expenses. We would also need to finish building a house before winter when we would also have heating costs. When I think about all this, I must have had a lot of trust in God.

I started work at the Theodore Schroeder farm in mid April. At that 300-acre mixed farm cereal and other crops were grown. The farm also had a dairy herd of 20 cows, heifers, horses, pigs and chickens that had to be cared for. Theodore was willing to give me an advance so we could build a house which was the size of a granary (12 feet by 14 feet). He could always use the building if our arrangement did not work out.

April 25, 1943, Easter Sunday dawned a very nice day—our *Felafniss* (public engagement day)! My parents came to wish us well at

Trudie's parents' home in Homewood where the celebration took place. Many people came to celebrate the day with us. Mennonite custom dictated that we spend the next few weeks visiting and becoming acquainted with relatives. As we got to know each other's families, aunts and uncles could show their support in the new-found life of the bride and the groom and encourage us in our endeavour. Some showed their support practically by helping us build our house. Together we made slow but sure progress.

Our wedding was planned for Sunday May 23, 1943, on the Giesbrecht farmyard. The previous Friday we accompanied Trudie's father on a visit to Mrs. Kehler, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Giesbrecht and grandparents Penner in Bergfeld, south of Plum Coulee. We returned home with the big tent we had picked up at Giesbrechts. On the way the four-wheeled trailer unhooked and tipped into the ditch twice, but I was too excited about our wedding to be discouraged. Since my prospective father-in-law was with us, things were soon under control and we arrived home safely. On Saturday easterly winds picked up and toward evening the sky turned cloudy. By Sunday morning, when we were about to erect that all important tent, it started to rain. The wedding tent was placed several yards from the back door of the house and held the 150 guests quite well. All the food had been prepared ahead of time and many relatives, neighbours and church friends came to help us pray for God's blessing. Trudie surprised everyone by reciting a poem she had memorized for the exchange of vows, her last act as a single person. It had been written especially for the occasion by a local poet. Besides "I do," all I remember saying was, "I am happy to be here." We were thankful for the many visitors that came despite the rain and muddy roads. Rev. David Schulz's wedding text was Colossians 2:6–7; 3:18–19. Along with a reading from the Psalms, Rev. J. N. Hoeppner extended congratulations. Elim students had prepared a short program.

The rain continued into Monday, and many guests had to stay over until the next day. As my parents and other guests began to leave, their cars had to be dragged along the grade by tractor all the way to Highway #3 which was gravelled. In the midst of the muddy mess we lowered the tent to keep it from being shredded by the wind and rain. The sky brightened on May 27 so Trudie and I went to change her registration card at the Homewood Post Office. Because our home in St Adolphe was not ready, I took the bus to Winnipeg and Trudie stayed with her parents until I could finish the house to the point where it could be occupied.

On Sunday, June 6, I was still alone at Schroeders. Peter J. M.

Our wedding May 23, 1943.

Klassen had helped me erect the roof and Theodore, my employer, found time to help finish the shingling. I was beginning to work on the inside when I phoned the Jacob Dycks in Carman and left a message for Trudie, saying that I was coming with Theodore and his truck to move her belongings to our new home. On Monday afternoon, Theodore and I left for Homewood even though the door of the house had not been installed. By Tuesday afternoon we were back. It started to rain again but we were happy in our little place. Home sweet home! Trudie and I finished the interior with insulating wall board and linoleum flooring. We considered these expenses an asset and also our first major investment.

The 16 months on the Schroeder farm were filled with hard work. Sixteen cows had to be milked at 6 a.m. so that the milk could be cooled somewhat before the transfer truck picked it up at 9 a.m. for delivery to Modern Dairies in Winnipeg. We had a gasoline-powered compressor that was used to operate the milking machines. When all went smoothly, it took about two hours in the morning and evening. In addition the cows needed to be fed and the barns had to be cleaned regularly. Theodore would be around to assist but often he was busy attending to

other things. We got a day off every other weekend from the Sunday morning milking until Monday morning. I took this assignment at the dairy farm very seriously. Even when there was no field work to do in winter the farm routine kept me occupied: up at 6 to feed and milk the cows; breakfast at 8, dinner at 12, *Faspa* at 4, supper at 7. During the spring and summer there was sweet clover to harvest with a horse-drawn binder, then when it was dry to stack by hand. The Schroeder farm also had horses that needed looking after. Trudie got her exercise by walking out to the straw pile where I worked or to the barn where I spent a lot of time. When the 12-hour day was over I didn't have the time or energy for much more activity.

Writing letters seemed to be a large part of our evenings' entertainment. Sometimes we practiced spelling or sang together. Trudie spent some time preparing tracts from Western Tract Mission for mailing. We often listened to ministers on the radio at Klassens and studied Bible questions to stay informed. How hard it was to concentrate on Romans with my head on Trudie's lap while she darned my socks.

So the days passed. In late winter of our first year together, I remember hitching the horses so the Schroeder girls could go sleigh riding and musing over doing the same for our own children in the future. One Sunday we took the bus and street car to spend the day with friends in Winnipeg. Trudie stayed there with her sister Susie and I returned home at 11 o'clock to be ready for work in the morning. On this occasion Trudie came home with a 25-cent wedding ring. She had always felt uncomfortable shopping in St. Adolphe and feeling conspicuous because she was pregnant and not wearing a ring. Strangers might get the impression she was not married.

While we lived on Schroeder's yard, Trudie looked after the small house but also helped along wherever she could even though she wasn't paid. She had her own garden and worked at the neighbour's market garden about a mile away. In those years we did not have a car but walked, hitchhiked, hired a taxi, took the train, rode buses and travelled by street car within Winnipeg city limits. Today it surprises us that we could do all those things on 60 dollars a month. Throughout the winter we had not been to church often but once spring arrived we attended more regularly. We held a small prayer meeting at our place one evening a week and went to church in Niverville on our Sundays off. It was good to hear the testimonies of young baptismal candidates and attend their baptism on *Himmelfahrt* (Ascension Day) in 1944. We had received instruction in the basic doctrines of the Mennonite church, been baptized as adults several years earlier and we rejoiced to see

others take similar steps of faith.

May 31, 1944, started out like any other day but, because our first baby was due any time, I worked in the field near the house. In the early afternoon Trudie began labour in earnest so we rushed her to Concordia Hospital. Soon after, Patricia Faith was born. The Lord had truly blessed us. People say that the name a child receives at birth will affect the outcome of its life. I wondered what this child would become! How different would she be if we had named her Nettie, Susie, Marie or Tina? But we named her an outlandish name like Patricia after a heroine in a novel Trudie had read, and Faith for our faith which she would also have some day.

Life on the farm continued as before but with a new twist. Trudie tended her vegetable garden, which included 111 tomato plants and other vegetables like cucumbers, besides giving attention to the baby's needs. She also continued sending out tracts for the Western Tract Mission. We found this involvement gratifying and in the process memorized many important scripture passages.

On September 10, 1944, my brother-in-law, Jake Derksen, Trudie's sister Susie's husband, offered me a job in his blacksmith shop in St. Germain. After much prayer, on October 8 I notified Theodore of my new opportunity and intention to terminate employment with him. Then we went to visit our parents in Homewood. Canada was still at war so I also needed to see Mr. Thomson, the Selective Service manager in Winnipeg, to transfer my contract from Theodore Schroeder to Jake Derksen. The new contract reduced my obligation to the Canadian Red Cross to 10 dollars, later three dollars per month.

On my last day of work for Theodore Schroeder, we started taking our house off its foundation at 3:30 p.m. We loaded it onto a wagon and moved it with a tractor to Jake and Susie Derksen's yard at 172 St. Mary's Road in Winnipeg. The whole operation took about five hours. Early the next morning we moved the house into place, and next morning I began working at the blacksmith shop. After work I went back to Schroeders to pick up our shanty and other things we had left behind. Once the shanty had been attached to the house we felt we had arrived. Trudie set about painting our little house and trying to make it more livable. During the week she had also seen Dr. Oelkers and discovered she was pregnant again. When World War II ended, we were anticipating the birth of our second child. She arrived on May 27, 1945. We named her Hedwig (Hedy) Trudie after her mother.

In December 1945, we looked for a piano accordion which we felt could be helpful in our ministry. When we finally purchased one just

before Christmas, we began practising in earnest, hoping to use it to accompany the singing at the Christmas program. I beat time on the floor with an old broom handle and Trudie played until she was in tears with frustration while the children wailed their own accompaniment. Even though we were convinced it would be an asset to the work for which we were preparing, for a time I seriously wondered if Trudie would ever master the instrument. Eventually she did.

At the time financial and family concerns preoccupied our minds and kept us from continuing the education we knew we needed in preparation for service. The family was growing and Trudie needed dental work. The purchase of a car was also becoming a pressing necessity. Eventually we did buy a 1932 two-door, Model B Ford, for 400 dollars from Peter Bueckert in Gretna. Fortunately, we were able to sell it a half year later for the same price when we needed the cash. With a wife and two growing girls to look after, it was getting harder to arrange to go back to school. This did not mean we were idle. We continued mailing tracts for Western Tract Mission and teaching a Sunday school we had started in our home with neighbourhood children. We also anticipated holding services in St. Vital but the necessities of daily life seemed to press in on us.

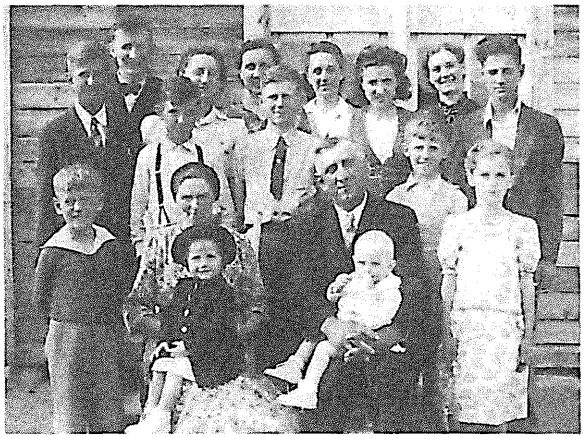
We were faced with several options. I could stay at my interesting job, continue developing our land which had potential and finish the construction of a new house. This would permit us to continue with the Sunday school outreach in St. Germain or south St. Vital. In fact, Canadian Mennonite Bible College supported students interested in an outreach project in the area. Peter Falk from Morden, later missionary in Zaire, provided leadership for the group which grew into the Sterling Church. In the end we chose the less practical option of returning to Elim to complete our earlier program of studies.

Trudie practicing on the accordian with Patricia and Hedwig beside her.

Several factors played into our decision. Until this time Elim had been our main supporting body and had nurtured our vision for full-time ministry. Practically, it was made possible because I had a gifted and faithful life partner in Trudie. Without her sense of humour and ability to manage the household on the barest necessities, our return to Elim would have been impossible. For the 1946–1947 school year we rented a two-room suite in a red barn on the back of a lot in Altona. We had to pay our own heating costs for the coal-burning kitchen stove. Trudie melted snow to wash our clothes. We were quite happy living in the barn. More than that, we learned to trust God for all our needs. We prayed for anything and everything. Our children taught us to pray for eggs. The morning after they had asked God for eggs, J.N. Braun came to the door and offered us some cracked ones he could not sell. Town people also supported us. Trudie's aunt, Tena Giesbrecht, lent us the kitchen stove, Bernhard Klippenstein cancelled our coal bill, Dr. Toni treated Hedy for the onset of rickets and the David Schulz family allowed us to butcher a pig on their farm. Because we were also raising a family, these Bible school years taught us to rely heavily on the extended family for meals, transportation, guidance and support and to use our resources wisely. During Christmas week in 1946 I worked six full days and earned 48 dollars at Universal Machine Shop. This went a long way to covering expenses for the spring semester.

At the school we were among 63 other students. Our teachers were Rev. A.A. Teichroeb, Rev. Jake N. Hoeppner, Rev. George Braun and Rev. P.A. Rempel. There were a few other married couples but most of the students were 10 years younger than we were. We sensed that the married students always had their families in mind and were more goal-

Elim Bible School teachers and their spouses in 1946–1947 (l to r): A.A. and Tina Teichroeb, J.N. and Susan Hoeppner, Susanna and P.A. Rempel, Nettie and George Braun.



The J.A. Unrau family in 1946: Trudie and I in the back row (left) with our children, Patricia and Hedwig, on Grandma and Grandpa's lap.

oriented, therefore also more serious about their studies than the single students. Trudie and I had the advantage of having tested some areas of church work in St. Vital and earlier in St. Germain. We were committed to our marriage and living for God in whatever community we found ourselves.

The curriculum at the school included the usual classes in Bible outline, homiletics, doctrine, church history, missions, singing, German grammar and English. Until then I had had very little formal exposure to English. In the 1946–1947 school year the school had a particularly strong emphasis on foreign missions. We were introduced to a number of visiting missionaries representing Go Ye Missions, China Inland Mission, Belgium Congo Inland Mission and Mennonite Pioneer Mission (MPM) in Mexico. The Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church also held annual mission conferences. At these we asked ourselves whether God was calling us into foreign mission work. Somehow I felt we were mature enough to choose wisely and not be influenced by faith missions at the expense of our own Conference's efforts.

During the 1947–1948 school year Trudie and I took the fourth year at Elim. Our two- and three-year-old daughters stayed with my parents who lived in Gretna at the time. We lived in the school and did janitorial work for our rent. We graduated from the four-year program at Elim on March 26, 1948. My parents and sisters and brothers attended the service. This finished our training and we felt prepared to tackle any offer of Christian ministry which would come our way. Before we left Altona we were approached by one of the MPM board members. We also went to see J.N. Hoeppner and J.W. Schmidt who

At our graduation from Elim Bible School on March 26, 1948.

were on the board, but both of these men were not home. In the evening we returned to Gretna to begin packing to return to Winnipeg.

Our girls were very happy to go back to St. Vital. First Trudie and they made a train trip to Carman to visit the other grandparents while I made arrangements with the transfer company to ship our belongings. I travelled to Winnipeg by bus to prepare our house for occupancy. After a period of uncertainty I was able to return to my job at Universal Machine. The industry was experiencing a lull and the shop was contemplating laying off a number of employees. However, things improved enough for them to keep all their employees and rehire me. In fact, I even got a raise of nine cents an hour.

During the summer after graduation, I wrote a letter to Northern Canada Evangelical Mission to see if they had a place for us. We weren't giving up on MPM but wanted to explore other options. While we were waiting we supported the work of Mr. Unger, a travelling evangelist, by singing and reading scripture at his services. We also conducted our own Sunday school and DVBS with material from the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba and Elim Bible School.

We discovered later that the call from Matheson Island to Mennonite Pioneer Mission came via the United Church. Rev. Herman Neufeld, who had a son-in-law teaching at Berens River, prompted the MPM board to investigate possibilities for ministry at Matheson. In July 1948

Rev. J.W. Schmidt, chairman of the board, and Rev. D.H. Loewen made an exploratory trip. On a subsequent visit they held a church service on the Island where the idea of placing a resident missionary was agreed to by the local residents. A recommendation was made and adopted by the MPM board to open a station at Matheson Island. No pastoral work was being done there at the time, so there was an open door and the island was in a central location for visiting other communities. We were oblivious of the decisions being made by the board.

One afternoon in mid-September 1948, soon after the decision had been made by the board, two men came to call at the machine shop where I was employed. Jacob W. Schmidt and Abram Klassen from the MPM board wanted to speak to me privately. After I got permission to leave work, we made our way to the house so Trudie could also be part of the conversation. Before they could initiate any discussion, I told them I had a good idea why they had come and told them that our answer would be in the affirmative. Indeed, they had come to offer us a one-year term at Matheson Island. We didn't know where it was or what going there would entail, but we were prepared to accept their offer. We felt they were messengers from God. Certainly, there was little time to plan if we were to get to Matheson Island before freeze-up. We had been hoping and praying for such an opportunity, but when it came it caught us completely by surprise.

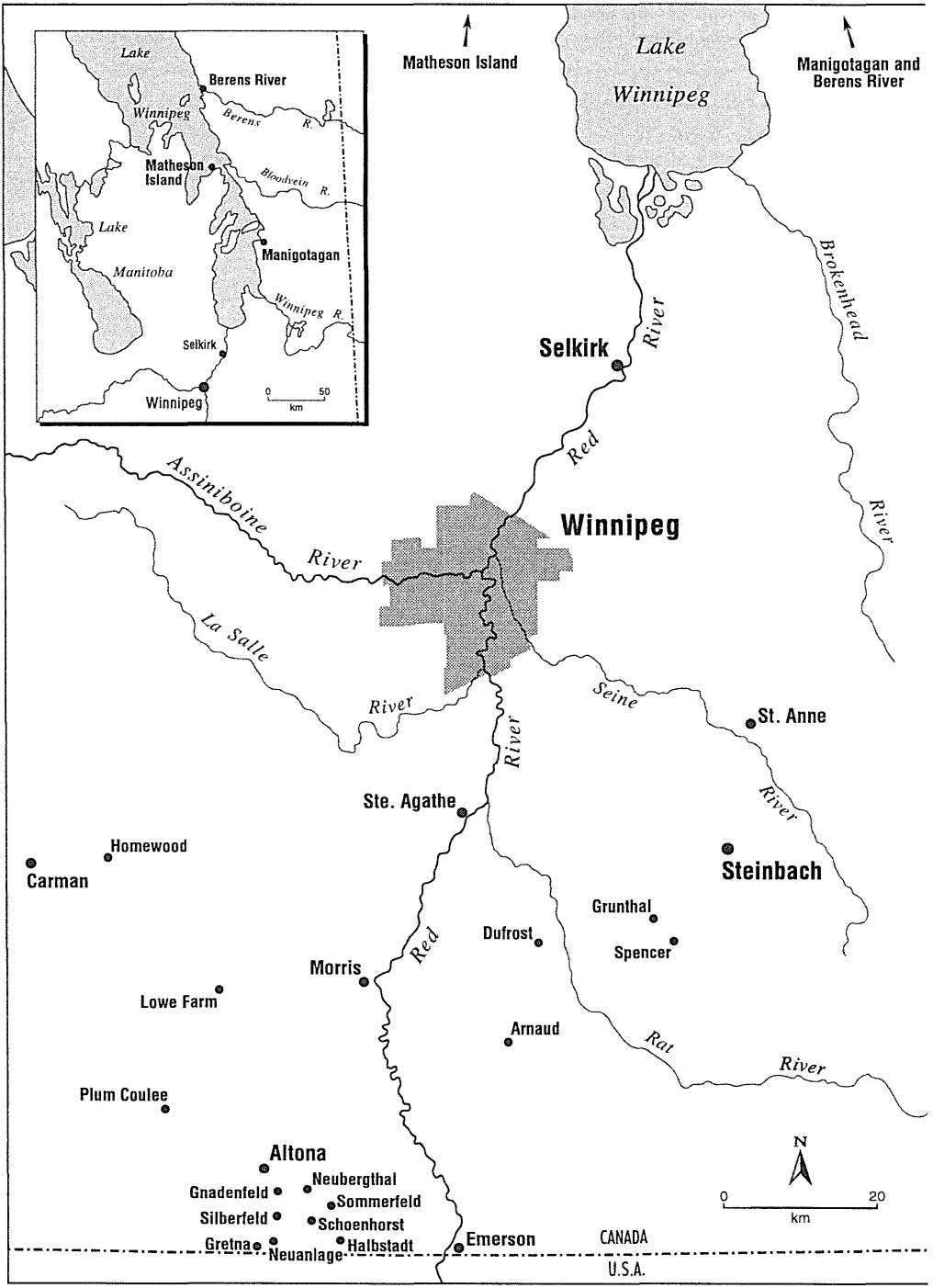
We had not given up on pursuing further education but thought it would be a burden on our family. The wages MPM was prepared to pay were not high. Our starting salary would be 100 dollars a month with the proviso that the mission would not do deficit spending; that is, we would have to absorb any shortfall in revenues the mission might have. I can truthfully say, we never suffered financially. That is not to say we were never short but our basic needs were always taken care of.

Our decision was not without reservations. Grandfather John Giesbrecht wanted to know, "Do you have some loose screws? Why would you want to take your wife and children north to live among American Indians?" Other comments and questions were, "What will you do on Lake Winnipeg?" "You are not qualified to teach school." "There is nothing up there but water, rocks, bush, wildlife and scattered Indians." In reality, we were ill prepared to go north, but we believed we were called and so put forth our best efforts.

Leaving the financial security of Universal Machine and our home was also difficult. My employers could not understand our decision. They questioned giving up our house and three-and-one half acres, which undoubtedly would become prime development property, and the

security of a job in an expanding industry for the insecurity of missions. They also pointed out that the foundry was an important peace symbol because it literally converted weapons of war into useful items. Beyond that they felt there was opportunity for ministry in St. Vital which might go undone if we left. We had not hesitated in accepting the call from Mennonite Pioneer Mission, but we knew not everyone would understand our commitment. We remained confident we had made the only logical decision we could in light of our strong sense of calling and years of preparation.

Province of Manitoba



When we boarded the S.S. Keenora in 1948 I noticed a group of Indians on the riverbank leisurely going about preparing their lunch. . . . The culture was strange to me and I didn't know whether I could fit in. I also had some struggles with aboriginal spirituality. . . . At the time I had little appreciation for other religious expressions. Now I can acknowledge freely that Indian values, spirituality and lifestyles have had a profound influence on my own spiritual formation.

5

Home on Lake Winnipeg
Matheson Island 1948–1956

Rev. J. N. Hoeppner phoned us around 11 o'clock on Saturday, October 2, 1948, to begin preparing for immediate departure for Matheson Island. This left us less than two weeks to get our equipment and supplies together for the last sailing of the S.S. Keenora before freeze-up. The wait from April until October had seemed long but now that we were actually packing, time was quickly running out. Before we left for Matheson Island, we attended the annual missions conference at the Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church held on Thanksgiving Sunday, October 3. The Mennonite Pioneer Mission board took this opportunity to commission us as their first missionary couple to northern Manitoba.

On the Monday following we returned to Winnipeg in time to place an order at the Hudson's Bay Company store to buy appropriate winter clothing for the whole family. I also purchased insulboard, hydrated lime, storm windows, windowpanes and carpet for the house we were to occupy at Matheson Island. The Board had given us 200 dollars to outfit ourselves and our family for life in the north. It turned out to be a generous and wise investment.

Time was of the essence because if we missed the last sailing of the S.S. Keenora we would have to wait until Christmas when traffic by caterpillar tractor train and bombardier made the journey over the ice. Trudie sewed new outfits for the girls and, because we were expecting

our next baby in February 1949, we made sure she visited Dr. Neufeld at Concordia General Hospital. By Saturday our baggage and materials were sitting on the dock near the Redwood Bridge, but departure was delayed until the following Thursday. Rather than becoming impatient we took the opportunity to do some additional work on the house and extend our farewells to family and friends. Despite the reservations expressed earlier, they encouraged us by expressing an interest in missions and supporting our decision. We were overwhelmed by the promises to keep us in their prayers. They also must have opened their wallets because we always received our full salary and the mission never incurred a deficit.

Thursday afternoon, October 14, a group of well-wishers gathered on the Redwood dock to see us off. Among them were Trudie's parents, Susie and Jake Derksen (Trudie's sister) with their three daughters, Hilda (another sister) and Margaret Brown (another sister) with her daughters Sharon and Tina. The board was represented by Ben Hoeppner, Pete Hoeppner and Mrs. D.H. Loewen. Theodore Groening accompanied us on our initial trip to help with any repairs our house would require. We prayed together and they wished us God's blessing. We praised God! Our dream had come true! At 2:30 p.m. we were finally on the way to Matheson Island and our first mission assignment.

By supper the 98-foot S.S. Keenora had steamed steadily north on the Red River, cleared the locks at Lockport and made a brief stop at the government wharf in Selkirk. During the night we encountered a storm with high waves which accompanied us all the way to Matheson Island. Trudie and Patsy had a touch of seasickness but God protected them from the worst. In the morning we passed Hecla Island and by breakfast we were in Gull Harbour. We had the wind at our backs and had made good progress plying steadily north. By noon we landed in the sheltered bay at Pine Dock so we could eat our dinner in peace. We arrived at Matheson Island that afternoon with no letup in weather conditions.

The S.S. Keenora landed at the Manitoba Fish Company dock since the government dock had suffered severe damage in the storm. The gang planks to the shore had washed away. The S.S. Keenora tied up to an anchored crib (a dock filled with rocks) and unloaded our cargo, about a ton-and-a-half of groceries and household goods. The first Island resident on the scene was Bill Whiteway who quickly took charge of the operation. Without saying who he was, he made us feel welcome by taking Trudie, Patricia and Hedwig to his house while we men moved our belongings and set up the stove to heat the house we were to occupy. With the help of Percy Oigg and Tommy Mowat, Bill

The S.S. Keenora in 1957 docking at the wharf at Matheson Island midst all the fishing boats.

arranged to ferry our belongings to shore in fishing yawls (20-foot fishing boats). For the final one hundred yards to the house we hired Walter Bennett's horse and a stone boat to move the bigger items. Lighter things were simply carried up the bank. Fortunately, the job was finished before dark when it began to rain. We praised God for a safe arrival.

The first night we slept on the floor on mattresses and quilts which could easily be unpacked. Bill Whiteway brought enough wood to last the night. We were all exhausted and soon fell asleep. I knew one of my first chores would be getting a wood supply for the winter. On Saturday morning we woke to a ten-inch blanket of snow. Soon after Harold Bennett, a local teenager, arrived with a toboggan full of seasoned firewood. Our first concern was to make the old log school house livable for a family of four. It was so drafty that the wind whistled right through, chilling everyone to the bone. Theodore got busy repairing the windows and storm windows and nailing insulboard to the ceiling for added insulation. We chinked the cracks with hydrated lime and whitewashed the entire interior. The one-room school was quickly

The one-room public school which became our first home at Matheson Island.

partitioned into living and sleeping quarters. Across the back wall we built a closet which doubled as a bedroom for the girls when we had company. Our girls then slept on the floor in the coolest part of the house.

The front room had a wooden table with chairs in the middle of the room. To one side stood the wood cook-stove which also heated the house. Wooden crates piled on the floor or nailed to the wall served as cupboards. The room also had a stretcher with a mattress which served as a sofa during the day and as an extra bed at night when we had company. Between the sofa and the stove was a large wooden box. In the middle of the floor of the front room was a door to a cellar below which provided easy passage for mice into our living quarters.

In the sleeping room we had two beds: a double 48-inch bed and a *Schlop Benkj* (collapsible sleeping bench) which followed us around for many years. It had a wooden top and could be used for sitting on in the daytime; at night it converted into a comfortable bed for Patsy and Hedy. We lived in the old school house on the school yard for three winters. It was probably built in the late 1920s or early 1930s. The new school house had been built by the Department of Education in the 1940s and was a one-room school for the elementary grades.

By Sunday morning 16 inches of snow had fallen and the weather continued to be uncomfortably cold. We were awakened by a knock on the door. When we opened it the prettiest little dark-haired girl in a red dress against a background of white stood framed in the doorway. She held an empty cup and wanted to borrow some sugar. Eleven children aged four to eighteen came to Sunday school the first Sunday morning. The Bible stories appeared to be quite new to the children, and they listened with ears, eyes and mouths wide open. The number swelled to 22 in the evening—our first services in this location! We had another service on Monday evening led by Theodore Groening. By the next Sunday 20 children were present in the morning and between 30 and 40 people, young and old, for the evening service.

Theodore stayed with us until Wednesday evening. The day dawned sunny and warm so that the fresh snow soon disappeared. Theodore and I cut about a half cord of wood and brought it home with the help of Walter Bennett's horse. That afternoon, Theodore inquired about passage on the Purvis, another lake freighter scheduled to leave Matheson Island at 10 p.m. However, the S.S. Keenora came back from the north before the Purvis left and he decided to take her instead. Now we were truly on our own with the people of the Island!

Matheson Island bore little resemblance to the flat farm land of

southern Manitoba. The Island is situated on the western shore of Lake Winnipeg just north of the narrows and on the western edge of the Canadian Shield. It is composed mainly of limestone shale. The people's lifestyle revolved around the lake with fishing as the main occupation. I was impressed with how the fishermen could read the wave patterns which included changing cross currents in the narrows depending on the direction of the wind. I watched them bob up and down in their yawls near Big Bullhead, rhythmically pulling fish out of their nets on the coldest and windiest days. Would I ever master the art of lake travel? I also remember hearing the howling and reverberating echo that seemed to come from all over the Island. The dogs did this every time the S.S. Keenora blew its dull steam horn. Their howling reminded me of the wolves at Grunthal.

When we first arrived the Islanders had definite expectations of us which made us immediately feel wanted and included in Island life. It was customary to hold church services at the end of the fishing season. At the time a Winnipeg-based boat, the "Calvary Temple Gospel Messenger," visited the fishing camps on the shores of Lake Winnipeg during the fishing season. Members of the crew held gospel services for the fishermen on the fishing grounds up and down the lake. The crew included the captain, Jake Fehr. Matheson Island was one of the boat's regular stops so when we arrived near the end of the fishing season, people simply asked when we would be holding services in the public school. They assumed that was the purpose of our coming. Although they had evening services in mind, when we suggested we also could provide Sunday school for the children in the morning, this was readily accepted.

It did not take long for us to get to know all the Island residents by name. For the most part they were Christians but had never had a minister living among them. Itinerant ministers and priests from various denominations visited the Island from time to time and often baptized children born since the last visit of a member of the clergy. Ed Kirkness had come from Fisher River which had a Christian church. After he married Edna Settee, he became a permanent resident at Matheson Island and brought his witness with him. He often sang "A Volunteer for Jesus" to his family. Then Eva, who had an Anglican Church upbringing, arrived as a permit teacher from Woodlands. For a while she taught Sunday school. She married Gilbert Settee and raised a family on Matheson Island. Apparently she had asked for help from her church, but somehow this had never materialized. The Roman Catholic Church had a building in the community but no regular priest. When the

Mennonite Pioneer Mission board members came to investigate in August 1948 they had received a favourable response to their offer to place a resident worker.

We were also encouraged by the support we received from the teacher on the Island. (Donald) Bruce Sealy, who is a professor at the University of Manitoba, was the permit teacher at the time. He asked us to give the children religious instruction in the school. Other teachers who followed him taught Sunday school or picked up a group of children with tractor and trailer. During a special drive one teacher picked up children from Black Bear Island which was two miles away by boat.

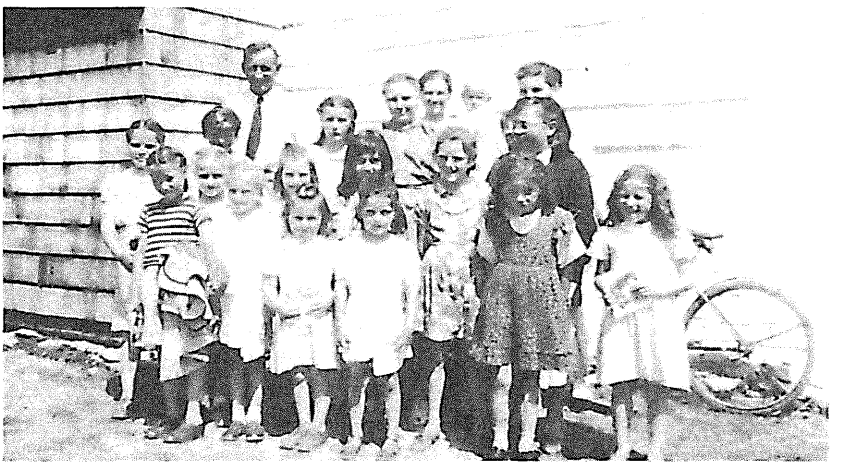
An excerpt of a letter we wrote to our constituency on November 30, 1948, described our feelings.

> In the past month we have visited all the homes on Matheson Island. "Sehr verschieden haben wir es angetroffen" (we have found things very different here) yet we have been welcomed everywhere. There is only one Catholic home here that will not send its children to our Sunday school. In three other families one spouse or the other is Catholic and these are golden opportunities to share the gospel.
>
> Let me tell you of one woman in particular to give you a glimpse of how some of these people live. She is separated from her husband and goes from home to home as a washer woman to earn money for herself and her three children who do not go to school, consequently are extremely shy. Her house is 10 feet by 14 feet and has room only for a hard board bed, a little table, a bench, a pair of boxes and two small tin stoves. They are as poor in their souls as they are in their body. They will not come to Sunday school either. They say, "We do not have a clock, so we do not know when to come." It gives us much joy to visit such a home and share the gospel with them in word and song.
>
> Percy Oigg, another of our acquaintances, is from Birch Point and a father of five. He has invited us to visit them there as soon as possible. About twenty children live there but there is no school. This is another outreach opportunity.
>
> Ed Kirkness was another of the people we met early in our stay at the Island. He was very helpful with bringing sand and a trowel for us to chink the old school house. He runs one of the stores on the Island and is married to one of the Settee girls, the Settees being a prominent family here. He promised to get his wireless telegraph system going before winter. We hope this is true. . . .
>
> On October 22 we took a walk to the general store and invited Mr. Jack Spence to our services. He says he needs lots of time to consider the gospel of Jesus Christ. He and his wife do listen to the Word when it is preached over the radio. They need to learn to know the Lord Jesus.

Another person we met at the store was Mr. Alex Sutherland. He says he is not going to heaven. All he wants us to do is leave him alone and try and teach the smaller children something better.

Then there is the Settee family. They had homesteaded here many years ago so that their children could attend school and get an education. The old man, Charles Settee, died in 1944 and his wife has since left the Island and remarried, but most of their children remain. It has taken us a while to get them all sorted out. There is Martha, Mrs. Walter Bennett, the people with the horses and cattle. There is Edna, Mrs. Ed Kirkness, the bombardier and wireless telegraph people. There is Gilbert, who asked me to help him on a part-time basis and taught me about winter fishing. There is Leonard, who hauled wood from the bush for us with his caterpillar tractor. There are also Charlie, Clifford, Lawrence and Frank. These all live on the Island at this time. Then there were the sisters that have married and moved away: Florence (Mrs. Don Wortman); Mary (Mrs. Hector Monkman); Ruth (Mrs. Percy Monkman); and Mae (Mrs. Eddie Thomas). Some of these were back for Christmas that first year but it took a long time to sort out the individual families. Many of these people's children became good friends and rivals of our children.

One afternoon we took a walk to the north end of Matheson Island and visited Mr. and Mrs. Sam Sigurdson. They seemed to be friendly people. She was a lady of small stature, in big boots, of amusing dress, disillusioned with the church. A former Salvation Army lass, she performed all the funerals in the district when no ministers were around. Her husband, known locally as "Sailboat Sam" for obvious reasons, had



Among our ministries at Matheson Island were the Sunday school and Daily Vacation Bible School classes.

a raucous sense of humour.

Another family whose children come to Sunday school are the Donald Thomases. Their eldest daughter took ill in November and hasn't gone to school since. She is not wasting her time, however, as she is learning Bible verses from the gospel of St. John with the intent of going to Gimli Bible Camp next summer. By Christmas she knew more than 51 verses. Trudie has been visiting her frequently.

On November 2, 1948, I went along with the "Audrey" which was taking three Indian families down to Bloodvein Indian Reserve. All the people were very drunk and don't know the Lord Jesus. I hope to be able to go down that way some more. I pray that their children might grow up to learn something better in Christ Jesus.

The Keenora made its last trip of the season this week as well, and we met Isaac Wesley from Fox Island who came visiting today. Fishing season ended on November 1 and the men are coming home now. By November 7 the school was packed to capacity for the evening service. Attendance stood at 50 persons. Bless the Lord. . . .

Jake and Trudie Unrau

When we arrived at Matheson Island we had two daughters aged three and four and were so caught up in establishing a presence on the Island that we treated them like teenagers who could fend for themselves. We would probably confront our children now if they dealt with our grandchildren in the same way. We demanded they use the outside facilities even when the temperature dipped well below zero. Since our first language was Low German and the official language of the Manitoba Mennonite churches at the time was High German, we insisted our children learn High German. We felt the German language was essential for our children to learn the Bible stories and retain the Mennonite faith. Of course we soon found out we were mistaken. Despite our efforts the girls were soon fluent in English. For them the change seemed to come naturally as they adjusted to new playmates and unfamiliar school activities. Trudie and I found it more difficult to learn new ways. Since the Islanders spoke only English and we had only limited experience with the language, every conversation in the early years was also a language lesson. When it came to Sunday school and services we were forced to translate theological terms and concepts into English. When I think about it now, I marvel at the patience the Islanders had with us.

Once freeze-up set in, Matheson Island was cut off from the outside world for at least a month. In 1948 the first freight and mail after freeze-up arrived on Christmas Eve almost two months after our arrival. Our first Christmas at Matheson Island is worth mentioning, if only

because we were on the verge of creating new traditions for ourselves and the Island. We helped children in school learn Christmas carols for a Christmas Eve program. Often they showed up at our house for additional practices. In the afternoon we decorated a tree. "Can't you hurry up with that tinsel?"

"It's got to be hung right, no more than an inch-and-a-half apart all the way up each branch. This is our first Christmas here and everything must be perfect."

"Well, I'm off to pick up the fish boxes from Mr. Kirkness to make the stage and set up extra seats for our visitors." On my return with 27 boxes I had news.

"Mr. Kirkness brought his daughter Myrna, Mrs. Thomas (Mrs. Kirkness' sister, formerly Mae Settee) and Grandmother Settee home for Christmas when he returned from taking Don Sealey to Hodgson on Wednesday, December 22."

I quickly set up the boxes and laid out the planks to create a stage. Allan Saunders came to help get the school ready for its first concert. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle, we took some time out to visit with old Mrs. Charles Settee. She wanted to know, "Why don't you want Western songs on the program?"

"We cannot serve two masters, either we cleave to the one and leave the other. We wish all people would serve the one master, Jesus Christ our Saviour," was my reply.

"So we can't have Western songs? Humph."

The children really made a success of the Christmas program. Their singing was a lot better than we had expected. Christmas morning arrived early and the girls were thrilled with their heaping plates of goodies. The Christmas parcels from family and friends had arrived in the mail just in time. Mrs. Settee sent over a chicken for our Christmas dinner. I guess she was not too upset about not singing Westerns. After all, there had been a Santa Claus.

Boxing Day fell on a Sunday. Few children came for Sunday school but the evening service was well attended. Our theme was, "There is no room for Jesus in the heart of man." On Monday Leonard Settee came to claim his planks from the stage and I returned the fish boxes to Ed Kirkness. By afternoon we were back to a normal routine, and I helped Gilbert Settee pack fish out on the ice. He seemed quite open with me and we chatted about a number of things. We brought home 32 boxes of fish.

Next day I went along with Ed Kirkness when he made a delivery of fish to Hodgson with his bombardier. On the way 14 boxes fell off the

load before we got to Fisher Bay. Having to stop and repack them delayed our arrival in Hodgson. Rev. Henry Gerbrandt from the MPM board met us there with intentions of travelling back to Matheson Island. Because Ed needed repairs done on the bombardier, we caught a ride to Dallas with the mailman the following day. From Dallas Mr. Jacobson took us to Fisher Bay and on to Matheson Island. We arrived at 8:00 p.m. and found Trudie had managed, even though I had been away 22 hours longer than expected. I didn't want to leave her alone too long since the baby was due in February.

In January, I visited most of the nearby settlements. The meetings were reasonably well attended. At one place I was told they had seen enough itinerant preachers in the last number of years to last them a lifetime. It was difficult for me to present the gospel in unfamiliar places and with a growing realization of my own inadequacies. I often travelled from place to place with a heavy heart. My encouragement came from the promise, "My Word shall not return void." Travel decisions were always difficult. Hiring a bombardier was expensive but reliable. A trip to Pine Dock cost 50 cents per double mile. I could take a tractor or horse but it would take too long and be less reliable. Dogs were practical and very efficient if one had the strength to run behind the sleigh much of the way. It took stamina to do this and arrive at a settlement fresh enough to hold a service, then return home afterwards.

Larry Leonard was born on February 26, 1949, at 12:55 a.m. I had taken Trudie to Hodgson on January 19 where she caught the train to Gretna to await the blessed event. Agnes, my sister, met us at Hodgson and came back with me to look after the girls until Trudie and the baby returned home. It didn't take Agnes long to catch on to our way of doing things and all the little tricks three- and four-year-olds can think of. We were advised of the birth of our son through a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) message service. All of northern Manitoba heard and celebrated with us.

During February 1949 a winter road was slashed between Pine Dock and Matheson Island. It later became a gravel road but at first was merely a trail. One day in March when I was half way across a one-mile stretch of muskeg on the trail I noticed what I thought was a dogteam coming toward me. When I realized it was actually a pack of timber wolves, my hair started to rise on my neck. I clapped my hands and shouted to attract their attention, but they kept on coming. As they got closer I started to panic and looked for a tree to climb. I soon realized the trees growing in the muskeg seldom reach more than seven feet in height. To my relief the wolves suddenly stopped, had a good look at

Larry (centre) who joined Patricia and Hedwig in our family in February 1949 in front of our home, an old log school built in the 1930s.

me and then moved off into the big timber beside the muskeg. I found their tracks leaving the trail but saw no sign of them after that. I had no idea whether they were watching me as I hurried on my way home.

When we first arrived on the Island, dogs provided much of the winter transportation for trappers and fishermen. It was not long before I decided dogs might prove a reliable and cheap way for me to travel as well. In the spring of 1949 I purchased a litter of four puppies from Bill Whiteway and had Audry Johnson from East Doghead on the east side of Lake Winnipeg feed them through the summer for 40 dollars. Near the end of October I picked them up by boat. It was seven miles across the lake and, when one of the dogs got seriously sea sick, the sights and smells accompanied us the rest of the way home. Back at Matheson I tied the dogs to trees near our house, made a snow shelter for them and fed them every evening. The next task was to get harnesses for the dogs so they could be trained to pull a sleigh. Doing the actual training proved to be quite an art and required considerable patience. The first step was to take one dog at a time, harness it to a sleigh and drive it down a trail while the other dogs remained tied to their individual posts. To control the dog on the homeward leg I held onto a long rope attached to the sleigh. This allowed me to slow the dog when it bolted for home. This training exercise was repeated with each of the dogs individually

Dogteam was a common means of winter transportation when we first arrived on the Island.

at first. In the second step of training, a second dog was added, then a third and, in my case, a fourth until the dogs pulled together and could be controlled. When training was complete on a bush trail I took the dogs onto the snow-covered lake and exercised them on a more open trail. When working with a team of dogs it was important to get the lead dog to listen to my commands. These included signals for start and stop as well as haw for left and gee for right. Once trained, the dogs became part of me while travelling up to 25 miles a day in very cold weather. On longer trips I always carried enough food for the dogs and a sleeping bag for myself so the team and I would be fresh enough to make the return trip the following day.

One day I had taken the dogs on an extended trip to the Jackhead Indian Reserve 25 miles north of Matheson Island and to Lake St. David, which was south toward Fisher Bay. After seeing the chief at the reserve I visited with the local missionary. I also stopped at several pulp and lumber camps on my return trip including Brown and Rutherford Camp #25, north of Fisher Bay. I then continued south along the west shore of the bay past Fisher Bay and Birch Point intending to make it home by nightfall. At Fisher Bay one of my dogs gave out altogether. I was still 20 miles away from home. The only thing I could do was put the exhausted dog onto the sleigh and continue on my way. Since there were only three dogs left to pull a heavier load I was forced to run

behind. When I reached Birch Point, I decided to spend the night. This was an old sawmill site where the Oigg family lived. In keeping with northern hospitality, the Oiggs gave me shelter and fed me. I had brought along some frozen mariah (fresh-water cod) which I fed to the dogs. I hoped to make it home the following day. The next morning the dogs seemed chipper and ready to go, but I wondered whether we could make it without mishap. After I hitched all four dogs they started off like a shot on the remaining 12 miles to Matheson Island. The trip went well. Even the exhausted dog showed no signs of weakness and pulled its full share all the way home.

The board had instructed us not to own a boat in the first years because of our inexperience with lake travel. The wisdom of that advice was reinforced for me the following fall when I borrowed Jack McLean's small skiff to get a few fish for my dogs. The wind came from a north easterly direction and made the creaky punt heave and roll. However, by then I knew enough to keep the centre of gravity as low as possible by not leaving the centre and bottom of the boat because it could easily roll over. God's hand kept me safe and I learned a valuable lesson that day.

I was quite happy to have Walter Everett from Matheson Island take us from place to place with his one-cylinder inboard motor in a fair-sized boat that travelled about six miles an hour. We regularly travelled together to Loon Straits, Pine Dock, Bloodvein and Rabbit Point. It became a standing joke on the Island, "There goes Unrau on the Queen Mary with Walter at the helm." Walter was very good to us. He seldom charged more than the price of gas. He knew the currents on the lake and the rocks at the mouth of the rivers. More importantly he knew the people well and became our guide and sponsor by making introductions and finding homes where we could hold services. From him we learned about lake travel and two years later felt confident enough to navigate the lake independently.

In 1950 Joe Monkman built the first mission yawl. It was 20 feet long, six feet wide and 26 inches deep. It had a 10-horsepower Wisconsin inboard engine with a direct drive to the propeller and never travelled more than 10 miles an hour. Most yawls on the lake had 22-horsepower outboards and travelled at 15 miles an hour. When I took the boat out, I usually stayed close to the shoreline and the fishing buoys. Occasionally, I cut a fish net with my propeller but was never able to identify whose they were. I only received one complaint in eight years of travelling the lake.

As I mentioned earlier, most of the activities on the Island revolved

around fishing. Besides spring, fall and winter fishing, men cut ice to be stored for the summer. I often helped in this activity and in return got ice for our own ice box. Most people had gardens for their own use. Gilbert Settee and Martha Bennett also had cattle at the time. We had a cow for our own needs. A number of horses were used for fishing and local hauling. However, most food staples had to be brought in. I observed how the fish companies delivered groceries, canned goods and bags of potatoes for the families of men working in the fishing camps.

I overheard one of the outfitters scolding the men, "You guys, you have so much good land here, why don't you plant potatoes so you have enough to take you through until spring when fresh potatoes are so very expensive?"

At that time potatoes cost seven cents a pound or seven dollars for 100 pounds. This gave me an idea. I knew the Island gardens grew well so we should be able to grow enough potatoes for local needs. I talked to Harold Bennett and together we ploughed an acre of grassland I had leased at the south end of the Island. In summer, Harold continued to work the soil and by fall it looked ready for next spring's planting. I mentioned our plans to a member of the board and got a terse reply, "We didn't send you there to plant potatoes." I wasn't about to go against the wishes of my board and, because Harold was not prepared to continue on his own, the potatoes were never planted on that acre.

During the winter I had visited Bloodvein River briefly when I got a ride with Ed Kirkness, the local trader, who was returning the George

Trudie (left) and Helen Willms in our new mission yawl, approaching the Roman Catholic Church, parsonage and local store at Bloodvein.

Fisher, Sr., family after fishing season. I also wanted to see Father Fred Leach at the Catholic Mission about some medicine for the family. The following incident happened when I returned to Bloodvein River after spring breakup when we had been at Matheson Island for only seven months. I had hired Stanley Sutherland to take me across the lake and intended to make a more extensive visit.

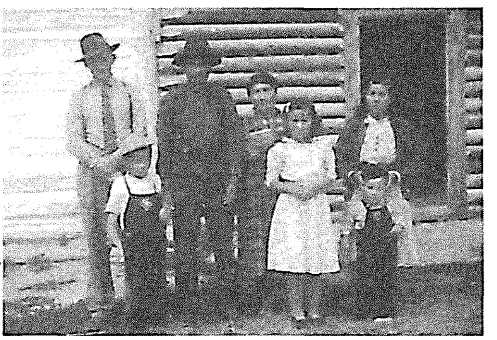
Matheson Island, Man.
May 17, 1949

Dear Beloved in the Lord!

Greetings with Psalm 96:3, "Declare His glory among the heathen, His wonders among all people."

We have only received a few letters in the past two months. One reason is for the breakup on the lake which delayed the mail four weeks; we hope the second reason is not that you have forgotten us.

I would like to tell you of my experience at Bloodvein Indian Reserve which is about 12 miles east from here. We left Matheson Island in a small skiff driven by a five-horsepower outboard motor. After travelling two hours we got there at mid day. After visiting the trader, he told me where to find the acting chief, Fred Smith. Mr. Smith is a very friendly man and he gave me permission to visit all their homes. First I went to the home of the resigned chief who had invited me by letter. There I found out that Mr. Benson had been very sick. The Bensons had moved into their tent already, and he was smoking some fish over an open fire. Sitting down on the green grass for a while I asked whether they wanted me to read a portion of scripture and have prayer with them, to which they most gladly consented. Within ten minutes I was back from the trader's house with my Bible, only to find some 20 people gathered around the tent waiting to see me. The Bensons told me they had come of their own accord. I sang a few songs like "What a Friend We Have



Making a house call in 1949 to the Henry Bensons with their daughter and three children in Bloodvein.

in Jesus" and read Matthew 11:28–30. While talking about these verses a bullet whizzed past our ears. Mr. and Mrs. Benson and family rushed into the tent thinking somebody was shooting at us. There they found their small grandson playing with a gun. The Lord gave me courage to carry right on even after this turmoil. Will you pray for more opportunity at this reserve? We already received invitations from other homes to come and visit. We got back the following day just ahead of a big storm. For all this we thank God and clearly see that He protects His own.

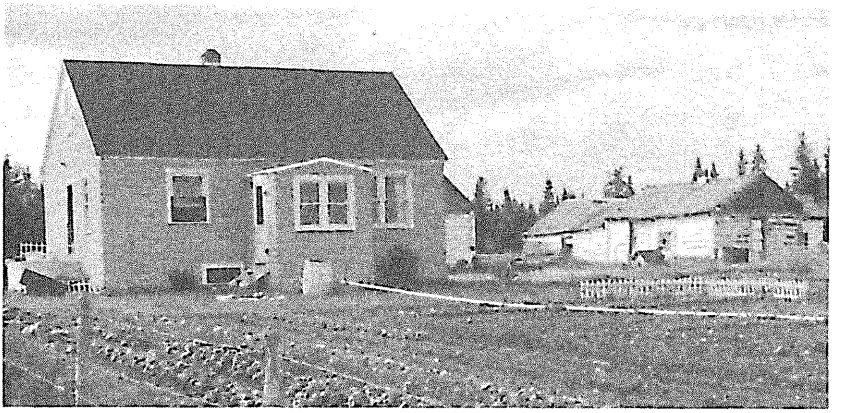
Asking to be remembered in prayer,

Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Unrau

Before the end of May I went to Bloodvein again. Because it was very windy, we got thoroughly soaked and bitterly cold before we arrived at the home of Alfred Cook, the chief, for lunch. I checked with him before beginning my visits, and again received permission to be on the reserve. I saw the Bensons again and 73-year-old John Crate who was on his deathbed. At his request I prayed with him. Wherever I went I received a warm welcome.

Our daughter Mable was born on September 19, 1950. We rejoiced even though we had been hoping for another boy. She was quite overdue and, while Trudie waited for the baby's arrival, Patsy started school in Gretna. Patsy and Hedy along with their Aunt Karoline and Uncle Nick and friends were so excited because things were taking so long, they announced the arrival of twins in advance. To this day when someone asks about "the twins," we know where the story came from and to whom they are referring.

By 1951 the board had decided to make Matheson Island a more permanent program and in summer sent a carload of carpenters from Altona to build a more adequate residence. The house was to be a storey-and-a-half structure with three bedrooms and an office. I went to Fisher River which was 25 miles by boat across Fisher Bay west of Matheson Island to pick up the men, their tools, some groceries and cameras. At the time Fisher River was the end of the road from southern Manitoba. It was an ordinary June day on Lake Winnipeg. We had met a few rain squalls crossing the bay on our way home and got drenched but the sun soon returned and the winds were warm so that everything dried out quickly. We made good progress until we came to the narrows near Birch Point. With the boat so heavily loaded, the backwash of the current was dragging the back of the boat down and threatening to swamp us. I don't think the carpenters from the flat prairies were aware of the anxious moments I had during the three minutes it took to cross



The new MPM house and our garden at Matheson Island.

the channel. I was exhausted and afraid to make for Birch Point where the current could be equally treacherous. I decided to tie up at the old Brown and Rutherford sawmill dock until the currents changed. When we proceeded several hours later my fears appeared to have been unfounded because we encountered no difficulties in crossing over to Birch Point. We made the remaining 12 miles to Matheson Island in one-and-one-half hours without incident. In my 16 years or living on Lake Winnipeg, this was the closest I came to sinking a boat. God must have seen my innocence and protected us. I found out later this was a particularly dangerous part of the lake due to water building up at the narrows and the presence of unpredictable currents. My friend Robert Settee, a commercial fisherman and experienced boatman, drowned in this channel a few years later.

The work of the church occupied our thoughts, prayers and energies from the very beginning. We felt the prayers of support from the constituency and watched God bless our work at Matheson Island and beyond. Services were well attended and opportunities to provide pastoral care were growing. People began making public commitments to faith, some for the first time in their lives. I still remember the Monday morning Bible class at the school when Jean Settee stood before her peers to declare her faith. Two weeks before Mrs. Edna Kirkness and her daughter Myrna had proclaimed their acceptance of Christ as Saviour in a Sunday evening service.

As the group grew the need for more adequate worship space became evident. The custom till then had been to hold services in the

Woodworking group in 1951 (l to r): Raymond Settee, Bobby Orvis, J. Keeper, I, Cyril Keeper, Morriseau, Bobby Scott, Donald Thomas. Part of our ministry included teaching children practical skills.

local school. By 1953 the school had been enlarged to three classrooms and holding services there was no longer always convenient. It was a constant struggle to maintain a worshipful atmosphere. The children were in their regular classrooms and would rummage through their desks during services. This was very distracting for others and those of us conducting the service. We also had the responsibility of making sure the classroom was in order for school the following morning. We talked about the matter with Gilbert Settee, Lawrence Settee, Ed Kirkness and

A church class at Matheson Island in 1956 (l to r): Walter Everett, Caroline Everett, Marion Settee, Shirley Settee, Grace Settee, Arlene Settee; in foreground, Grace Settee's daughter.

the ladies' group. Once a vision and plan was in place Percy Oigg and I went to the bush on the mainland one-and-one-half miles across from the Island and cut about 60 logs, 30 feet long and ten inches thick. Gilbert Settee, who had a good team of horses, hauled the logs onto the lake before spring thaw in 1953. When the logs arrived at the MPM property, we made quick work of peeling and setting them out to dry.

As the logs dried Ed Kirkness donated the cement and sent some of his fish shed workers to help us pour the footings. Bill Whiteway, who was skilled with an axe, notched the logs and fit them into place. The Island people collected enough money for the rough spruce subfloor but not enough for the finished floor. A women's group from southern Manitoba supplied the needed flooring.

When Henry Gerbrandt, secretary of the MPM board, heard of our building project, he wrote to ask, "What are you doing? You are building without asking us for help. We want to be in on this also."

The board supplied the shingles and doors for the completion of the church. It was a rush to get the structure closed in before winter set in. Even Trudie, who was six months pregnant with Phyllis, pitched in by handing materials to the men working on the roof. In October we were ready for a dedication. A quartet came out on the bushroad to Frog Point where we picked them up. Henry Gerbrandt and other supporters from southern Manitoba attended the dedication as well. We felt that God was in this and we were giving God all the glory.

The log church was in use for many years after we left. In the 1970s a new chapel was built on an adjacent lot and the log structure was converted into a garage. However, the people on the Island were attached to the log structure as a church and recognized it as the last remaining example of Bill Whiteway's craft. During the late 1980s Monte Robinson began restoring the structure on his own initiative. The whole Island soon pitched in with labour and cash to complete the restoration. Martha Burston (formerly Bennett) donated a piano. Neil and Edith von Gunten who provide pastoral care on the Island from their home in Riverton were encouraged to hold services in the log church again. I understand it continues to be the main place of worship on the Island to this day.

About this time there was some opposition to our involvement from an Anglican school teacher who questioned why Anglicans would attend a Mennonite church. He started a Sunday school in the public school which some families attended until the teacher left the Island. We never felt threatened by his activities. I wrote in my diary, "as God's name is [being] glorified we support it."

The log church (above), built in 1953, was later converted into a garage and was replaced with the chapel (below) converted from a net shed.

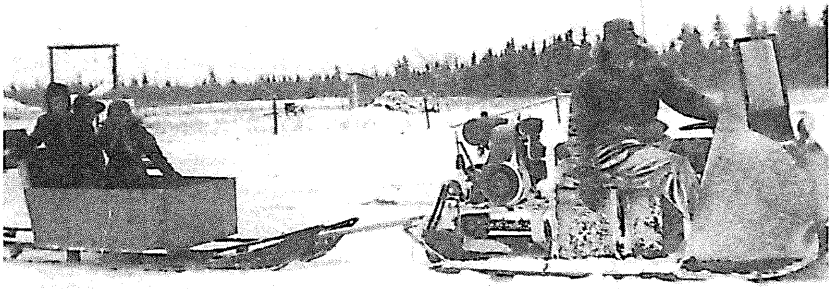
Trudie went to southern Manitoba before freezeup to wait for the birth of a baby due in November 1953. It did not arrive until December 15. Margaret Brown from Rhineland, a village south of Winkler, came to the Island to look after the children. They heard the announcement of Phyllis' birth from Martha Bennett, our neighbour, who leaned out of her upstairs window to tell them she had heard the news on the CBC. This was so close to Christmas that the whole family decided to go to Gretna and spend the holidays with grandparents, family and friends in the south. I hired a bombardier to take us to Hodgson where Grandfather Giesbrecht was to meet us with his green Pontiac. On the way the bombardier fell into a crack in the ice. This meant we had to abandon its warm interior while the driver and his helper manoeuvred the unwieldy and smelly "beast" back onto solid ice. When we finally

arrived at Hodgson, Grandfather was already waiting and the car seemed large and wonderful and safe. Trudie and baby came home with us in the new year. Soon after, the children all came down with the chicken pox. It turned out they had been exposed to the virus at the Christmas program at the Gretna public school. We were all confined to the house while they recovered.

In 1954 the board decided to extend the work at Matheson Island to include medical care. The need for a nursing station was obvious when one realized that the nearest hospital was 75 miles away and the means of transportation was unpredictable at best. Helen Willms, who later became a missionary to Taiwan, came as the first public health nurse in the region. She originated from Coaldale, Alberta, and was a qualified Registered Nurse. This new initiative meant our house needed to be rearranged. The eastern part was renovated into a dispensary and living quarters for Miss Willms. She served not only the Matheson Island people. I was visiting such points as Pine Dock, Bloodvein and Loon Straits regularly since there was no other evangelical work being done in these places. Now Miss Willms made these circuits with me. Transportation became an important issue for us if we were to be responsive to the spiritual and medical needs of the region. To keep up with the demand I progressed from using a dog team to a variety of snow machines and finally a bombardier.

By 1955 I had traded my dogs for a more modern power toboggan with a canvas chain drive held together with rivets that continually seemed to be breaking. This meant I had to stop and repair the chain before I could continue on my way. One day in March, when days were

Trudie with Helen Willms at the Bensons in Bloodvein.



By 1955 the more modern power toboggan had replaced the dogteam as a winter means of transportation.

already getting longer, I took Joe Orvis, the post master at Matheson Island, to the muskrat trapline which the Islanders called the Canoe Pass area. Twelve miles was a long way to walk even in those days. Joe knew that the men would be in camp by dusk so we planned the trip accordingly. My power toboggan had a dynamo light; therefore, as long as the motor was running, I had a well-lit trail ahead of me. Before we reached the campsite it started to snow quite heavily. I made immediate plans for the return trip to avoid getting caught in the storm. I didn't even take time to talk to the men in the cabin. On my way back, I noticed fresh timber wolf tracks in the snow ahead of me. The snow was swirling around me and I felt their eyes watching me. When I was approaching Matheson Island the motor suddenly died and I was left stranded in the pitch dark with only the flashlight I always carried for emergencies. The gas line had frozen up, starving the engine of fuel. By then I knew what to do when a Briggs and Stratton motor freezes up. I took off my parka and covered the motor for about five or ten minutes, which thawed out the carburetor from the remaining heat in the cylinder. Sure enough, when I pulled the starter cord it fired up immediately. The headlights came on and I got home without any further delays. If the canvas drive would have broken during this trip I would have been in more serious trouble. I concluded the Lord doesn't put more burdens on me than I am able to bear.

Driving a power toboggan involved more than understanding the mechanics of the machine. It also required a good knowledge of the changing environment in which they are operated. According to my diary it was already April 17 when Ruben Orvis, Bill Whiteway and I

were on the way home from Fisher Bay. It was a very warm day, about 20 degrees Celsius in Winnipeg.

As we approached the Island my companions realized what was happening to the ice and informed me, "Once we get started, we cannot stop until we reach the shore because the ice is very weak."

I sat in the sleigh with the mail, Ruben was on the power toboggan in the front and Bill with his dog team took up the rear. When I looked back I could see the candled ice popping and bending as the toboggan travelled over it. I had visions of falling through the ice but the experience of Ruben and Bill paid off and we made it to shore safely. It was another mile to our house and we decided to put the toboggan on a stone boat and pulled it the remaining way with a small tractor.

The first winter we had the bombardier Trudie and I were on our way to Bloodvein in March 1956 when we hit a slush hole on Lake Winnipeg. We had made the trip to Bloodvein often that winter and did not suspect a change in conditions along the well-travelled trail across the lake. Slush ice is caused by water seeping through the ice and forming up to a foot of slush on the surface. As we proceeded the slush piled up underneath the machine until the tracks lost all traction. I had come prepared and had seen fishermen work their way out of slush holes before but had never actually done it. I stood in the icy water up to my knees as I wired a log to the bombardier tracks. Then I drove back and forth until the slush was dislodged from under the machine.

Ed Kirkness and Ruben Orvis with Ed's bombardier, the kind of vehicle which replaced our power toboggan in 1956.

Once that was done I removed the log from the tracks and put it back into the bombardier. The idea was to drive as far as possible, hopefully out of the slush ice, without having to repeat the operation. We cleared the spot on the first try but decided to return to Matheson Island after our ordeal. I made a big arc to avoid going through the slush again but bogged down a half mile further south. By this time people on the Island were aware that we were in trouble and Raymond Settee made plans to pull us out with his dad's horses. However, with a great deal of effort we made it back on our own power. This ended our trips to Bloodvein River that winter.

As I mentioned earlier, the winter road was first slashed in February 1949. The gravel road from Riverton was extended to Pine Dock five years later in 1954. In March 1956, the right-of-way to Matheson Island was widened with axes, Swede saws and maybe a power saw or two. Our MLA was Dr. Thompson, a medical doctor in Riverton. I accompanied a delegation to see him about extending the road. He instructed us to meet him in Winnipeg where he arranged for us to talk with officials from the Department of Highways. As a result we were able to negotiate the extension of the road from Pine Dock to a point on the mainland across from the Island. This new right-of-way provided work for the men. The logs were used for firewood and the brush burned to produce a wide clean-cut to reduce fire hazards along the road. Later a dragline was used to build up the grade and provide drainage for the road which was then gravelled. Once it was complete Transport Canada built a substantial dock at the end of the road.

The Islanders had petitioned for these kinds of improvements for at least seven years to get better access to larger centres for their medical and economic needs. This new road sparked the community's hopes and initiatives. They began developing their own fishing cooperative and built a fish shed at the end of the new road. Their intention was to market their fish collectively and independently of the big fish companies with headquarters in Winnipeg. They also pooled their resources and purchased a community sawmill. The mill provided residents with affordable houses and community facilities such as a new school building, community hall and recreation complex. New streets were laid out, telephone service was initiated and electricity was installed, first using diesel generators and later by underwater cable from the mainland. The community became selfgoverning with a local mayor and council. Living conditions improved steadily from then on.

Initially we had agreed to come to Matheson Island for one year but our term was extended a number of times. At one point several women

had asked Trudie how long we were intending to stay to which she had replied, "Ten years." It turned out she was almost right. In the summer of 1956 we decided our time to move on had come.

On one of our last sing-song nights the people had a farewell get-together for us. They presented us with a Dutch oven and some cash. Mrs. Gilbert Settee, an active Christian, was in charge of the farewell and also gave a short address. It was heartwarming to hear her relate some of her experiences with the Lord. She mentioned the fact that her interest in the Bible prior to our coming had been almost nil. She also spoke of the interest in the Bible within her family. After a light lunch the heartfelt goodbye and farewell handshakes began.

This and the following days of packing were hard for us. Some of the women came with tears in their eyes, assuring us that they would miss us. How could we forget a people that we had learned to love? Their culture was quite different from ours but we had all grown during our time together. Cultural differences no longer kept us from appreciating each other's gifts. We had seen prejudices grow and vanish. In fact, more gratifying, we had seen people who resented our arrival now thanking the Lord for sending us to help them find salvation. One lady who at first said, "I'm only coming to your services once a year," had become a faithful parishioner later.

Before we left, quite a number adults were coming to Bible study and prayer meetings. When we had first approached them about this there had been little interest. "We can pray at home;" "Bible study and Sunday school are for children and our young people." We prayed long

Helen Willms with her Sunday school class in 1956 shortly before we left Matheson Island.

and hard to get the adults involved. By 1956 there was a very keen interest in Bible study groups. We found it difficult to leave these dear friends. Even though our ultimate objective of organizing a Mennonite church had not yet been realized, we had seen the moving of the Spirit and knew the Lord was present with His people.

Our leaving was made easier when Larry and LaVerna Klippenstein agreed to replace us. Larry had spent several years as a teacher at Grand Rapids. We felt confident he and LaVerna would fit in well at Matheson Island. Mary Janzen had also been assigned to replace Helen Willms as the public health nurse. On August 8, we said our last farewell to the Island. We left the Island the way we had come: via the S.S. Keenora.

Our farewells to the Matheson people were more final than one would assume. We had instructions from the board not to return to the Island in order to give our replacements the opportunity to establish themselves on their own terms. We still find it difficult to visit the Island because we did not keep up our friendships as should have been possible after walking with them on the Way. The thread was not completely broken, as we found out later in Winnipeg when people from the Island renewed our relationship and recognized our pastoral gifts. One example would be Caroline Everett, a strong Christian witness on Matheson Island. In her last years she stayed with her daughter and family in Winnipeg. Caroline was a faithful supporter of the Mennonite church. She always impressed us by the respect she demanded and gave to the reading of scripture and to prayers. I remember her on her birthdays when she invited her friends in for tea and shared her spiritual journey. Her life of faith combined with a strong work ethic rubbed off on her children. We were encouraged to reconnect with her and her family before she died.

When we returned to Winnipeg for a year's furlough in 1956 we felt totally "bushed." I went to Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) and, as always, Trudie was the stay-at-home mom. Pregnant again, her hands were full: five children to look after, a husband in school and mission conferences to speak at. After eight years we thought we should be ready to try new things as we had been in 1948 when we left for Matheson Island.

We lived at 144 Charleswood Road in a house owned by Peter Brown, our brother-in-law. It wasn't an ideal setting because our four children attended three different schools, miles apart from each other. The only one that could come home for lunch was Pat, our oldest. On the whole the children benefited from the new classroom settings in the Charleswood School Division. Pat claims she learned her grade seven

mathematics there. During this year our youngest daughter, Vernelle, was born on April 9, 1957.

In 1956 when I registered at CMBC as a first-year "mature student," I expected to get some transfer credits from Elim Bible School. I was asked to write qualifying exams in German and Church Doctrine. I had a fair understanding of German grammar but I had taken Church Doctrine in German under the title *Glaubenslehre,* and was expected to write the exam in English. I must have passed because I was able to transfer these credits from Elim. By the end of the school year we had to make plans for the following year. First we got an assignment to visit the British Columbia Mennonite churches in the interests of MPM. Rev. J.J. Thiessen asked whether I wouldn't consider taking another year at CMBC and offered to assist with our finances. However, we felt that our family was large and needed to settle in a more permanent location as soon as possible.

I had always believed that the only way to minister authentically was to be genuinely interested in people's lives and become active in community affairs. In this way I was able to feel the pulse of the community and develop meaningful relationships. . . . My year at CMBC had confirmed this vision. Genuine ministry involved caring for the whole person: body and soul.

6

Merging Words and Deeds
Manigotagan 1957–1965

During our stay at Matheson Island, the Mennonite Pioneer Mission program had expanded into a number of other northern communities. We were encouraged and our isolation was relieved when we were able to meet with other workers for fellowship and mutual support on a quarterly basis. By 1957 the mission staff included Henry and Elna Neufeld in Pauingassi, Otto and Margaret Hamm in Cross Lake, Ed and Margaret Brandt in Loon Straits. Many of these new opportunities were first cultivated by Mennonites who were assigned to teaching posts during the war or began their careers as permit teachers in the north. They often held Sunday school and participated in the life of local Christian communities. Through them the board became aware of new potential for ministry.

The first contacts at Manigotagan were made by Bill and Kathleen Braun of Altona who were teachers there for a time. The Brauns had been very well received during their stay and had started a regular Sunday school program. Health problems forced them to return to southern Manitoba during Christmas of 1956. The following summer Bill accompanied members of the MPM executive on a visit to Manigotagan. As a result the executive recommended a couple be sent there and approached us to see if we were possibly available and interested. Manigotagan had recently been connected by road and could be accessed through Pine Falls and Powerview. All but the last 50 miles of road were well maintained and this stretch was to be gravelled before freezeup. Manigotagan was not as isolated as Matheson Island and

MPM northern staff in 1960 at the Brandt residence in Loon Straits (l to r): Larry Kehler, Trudie and I, Elna & Henry Neufeld, Susan & Henry Gerbrandt (MPM board secretary), Margaret & Otto Hamm, Marge & Edwin Brandt.

involved few of the risks of lake and winter travel which always caused us a lot of anxiety. Our children were entering high school, but could be accommodated with the help of relatives and friends in southern Manitoba. The road made it possible for us to get together as a family on a regular basis. Trudie and I sensed this was the kind of fresh start we felt ready for.

In July 1957 I made an exploratory trip to survey the area and find accommodation for our family of eight. The region included the mining town of Bissett; Manigotagan, the Metis settlement near the falls on the Manigotagan River; and, by trail, the Hole River Indian Reserve at the mouth of the Wanipigow River. Hole River also had two small Metis settlements attached to the reserve: Agaming (East Seymourville) and Seymourville. Once the Manigotagan-Pine Falls stretch of road was finished it would be easier to transport products to Winnipeg, which was only 130 miles away, and gasoline prices would come down as well. From all appearances, the country was suited for mixed farming, something I thought the mission could look into. I speculated it could be a real asset to have an experienced Christian farmer as part of the ministry. I was able to rent an 18 feet by 20 feet house from Hannes and Winnie Bell who lived in Bissett. Their summer cottage was situated on Indian Point on the banks of the Manigotagan River and just west of the main Manigotagan settlement. In some ways it was better than the

average northern house. It was a frame construction with a ceiling which made it easier to heat.

August 17 was a rather cloudy, yet pleasant Saturday when we loaded our belongings on a big truck for the move to Manigotagan. Two of our brothers-in-law drove the truck and Trudie and I followed in our car. We arrived at 5 p.m. and found the only door to the cottage locked. Bells were in Bissett but John Wood, their father-in-law in Manigotagan, had a solution. "I have a goose-neck; we'll pry the door open," he said. And that is just what we did. After unloading, we settled in and the truck left for Winnipeg. We hurriedly made up a bed in one corner and retired by 8 p.m. only to be awakened by the Bells at 11:30. They had not expected us so soon and wanted to spend one more weekend at their cottage before we came. They cheerfully returned to their home in Bissett. We got up at 10 a.m. on Sunday morning. After breakfast we sought out some local blueberry patches and in the afternoon stopped at a home for a short visit. After supper we sat on the doorstep, sang and played a few songs on the accordion and soon we had 12 children and three adults in our fledgling congregation.

On Monday we rose early and set to work in earnest to get things unpacked and put in order. It was quite a job to arrange our belongings in the little cottage and still have room for a family of eight, but we had not come for our own comfort. We had come to share the gospel and a northern cabin serves that purpose as well or better than a house in the city with all its modern conveniences. We ended up living at Indian Point for the first two years while the board looked for property on which to build a more adequate chapel and residence. In the first few years we followed the local custom of holding services in schools and private homes.

Manigotagan is a picturesque village that straddles a wide river. Its banks are mostly clay with some granite outcroppings covered in a good growth of poplar, spruce and balsam. Each homestead consisted of 130 acres in narrow strips extending up from the river bank. There were two churches in the community but no resident minister or priest. Like Matheson Island, they were served by itinerant clergy on an irregular schedule. The people in Manigotagan were mainly Métis and spoke English. Seven miles north on the Hollow Water Indian Reserve the first language was Saulteaux, but most people could also converse in English. In 1957 the total population in these two communities was just over 500. The people of Manigotagan were anxious to know what we thought of the community and if we were intending to stay for the winter.

When one old man heard that we were Mennonites, he said, "They are good, hardworking people. We need them to help build up the place."

A grandmother greeted us with, "So you are our new neighbours, glad to have you."

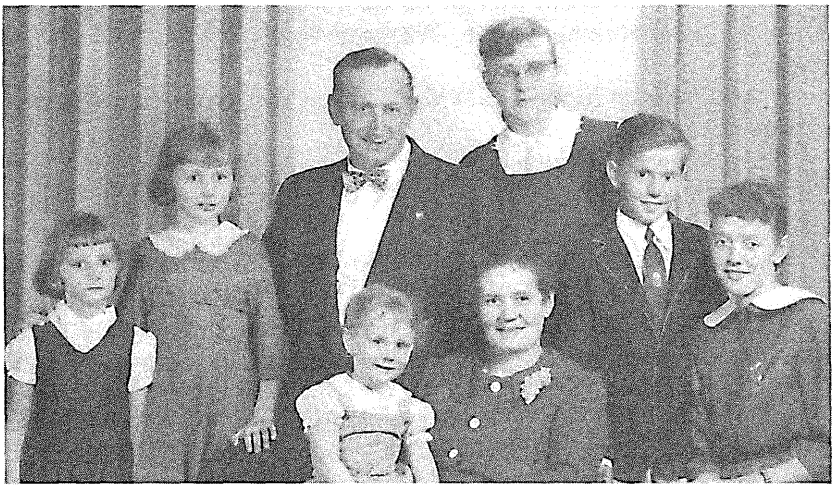
A local businessman said, "We are all Christians, but some of us are very badly off the track. We'll send our children to your Sunday school."

Another common remark was, "Now we'll be able to learn new gospel songs and hymns."

We felt welcomed but also apprehensive at what lay in store. How would we fit into the fabric of this community? We felt called of God and prayed that our efforts would be used to bring glory to His name.

Our teaching ministry began with Sunday school. At first these meetings were not too well attended. We thought it might be because of the community social evenings which were held in fall and winter and often lasted well into the night. We had as many as 32 and as few as five besides our family at Sunday school and between 30 and 60 on Sunday evenings. Hannes and Winnie Bell lived in Bissett and regularly attended the evening services with their children. Their seven-year-old son once remarked, "I'd go 1,000 miles to your services." We took that remark as an openness to the gospel and prayed he would become a living witness. Trudie and I made an effort to visit all the homes in the community by Christmas. Patsy was only thirteen, but we felt she was trustworthy enough to take charge of her five younger siblings for three or four nights a week. Looking back, we wonder how we ever could

The Grades 1 to 4 class at Manitotagan in 1957. Many of these children came to our Sunday school.



Our family in 1959 (l to r): Phyllis, Mable, I, Patricia, Larry, Hedwig, Trudie with Vernelle on her lap.

have risked leaving her in a house with a wood heater and kerosene lamps. God always kept the children safe, for which we are grateful.

Like other northerners, the residents at Manigotagan were singularly hospitable but reserved or seemingly indifferent when it came to talking about spirituality. They did express a concern that we should cooperate with the Catholic priest like the itinerant Anglican minister had on his monthly visits. The Catholic priest usually spent the two summer months in Manigotagan and Hole River. We weren't sure whether it was in response to the improved road or to our intrusion, but the Catholic Church assigned a new priest who taught catechism and began holding weekly services. The Anglican minister also promised to come to the community more often. At first this increased activity by the local churches left us with some questions about our place in the community. It took a great deal of effort to get to know the other clergy since they were always changing. Several priests did feel comfortable enough to drop in for coffee and discuss how we might work together.

In our first years in Manigotagan I often walked to Hole River for services or just to visit. The road to Bissett bypassed the reserve and only a winter road and bush trail connected Manigotagan with Hole River. One of the places I always called on was the chief's house. George Barker had been a chief of this band for 40 years and I always enjoyed his rich storytelling. He had a lifetime of experience as a trapper, community constable, forest ranger, chief and founder of the

Manitoba chiefs' organization to draw on. He had been to Ottawa several times to negotiate for Manitoba bands. He also knew the traditional Nanabush stories and elaborated on them in great detail. George Barker was a strong supporter of the work of the church in the north.

By day the trail between Manigotagan and Hole River was an easy walk, but at night it could get scary. One pitch dark night I sensed a presence and heard a whistle near by. When I asked George Barker he thought it probably had been a deer. Another time I could smell wet hair and heard the movements of what must have been a black bear but could not make it out in the darkness. I also remember going to an evening service in Hole River. During the service it began to rain. At the end of the service Chief Barker asked if I didn't want to stay the night to wait out the rain. I had a gasoline lantern with me and felt confident I could find my way even though it was darker than usual. In short order I was soaked to the skin. The only dry spot I had on my body was just below my chin and part way down my chest. Fortunately, I found my way through the driving rain in the total darkness. It would have been easy to lose the trail and wander aimlessly all night or, worse, fall into a pond in the muskeg. I finally stumbled into the house around midnight and was more than relieved to be with my family and crawl into a warm bed that evening.

In 1958 the mission was able to purchase a parcel of land near the centre of the community and had a new house built for us in Altona. Even though we had a basement ready the house could not be delivered until March 1959 due to an unusually heavy snowfall in southern Manitoba. By the summer of 1959 the new house was ready for occupancy. We used the basement for services and Sunday school until the chapel was completed the following year.

With a regular program in Manigotagan and contacts in Hole River established, we responded to numerous requests from the mining town of Bissett about 32 miles east of Manigotagan. The gold mine was in full operation at the time and the company town had a population of between 500 and 1,000 people. We already knew the Bells who introduced us to others. The town had a hospital and a medical doctor as well as a well-stocked company store where we bought most of our household supplies in the early years. The road to Bissett was so winding that a tourist once remarked, "A horse would need a hinge in the middle of its back to get around all the curves." This road had been built years earlier to transport materials from Lake Winnipeg to the mine at Bissett. It was more stable than the new road to Pine Falls. For

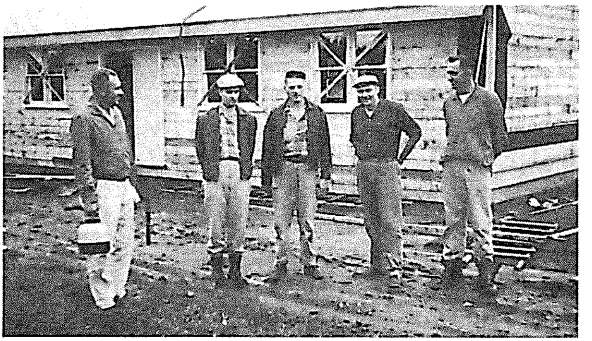
a time we travelled to Bissett three times a week. It was a special treat for the family to leave early for Bible study there. We would take a package of wieners and a loaf of bread, climb a big rock on the way and feast on raw wieners wrapped in a slice of bread.

The first baptismal service held at Manigotagan was on New Years Day 1960. We gathered in our basement which served as a worship centre. Hannes and Winnie Bell had accepted the Lord a year earlier. They and our oldest daughter Patsy made their public commitments before the community and several visitors. Rev. Henry Gerbrandt and the Jake Derksen family had come for this occasion. Patsy's cousins sang several special numbers. What an evening! I momentarily forgot the wording of the baptismal vows because I was so choked up with emotion as the Bells and Patsy knelt and the rites of baptism were performed with the traditional words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." It was a night to remember. Inside we basked in the glow of the experience while outside it was a bitterly cold winter night. Although we had our share of disappointments, there are many northern Christians like the Bells who have lived consistently in the Way and matured in the challenge and comfort it brought them. They often said, "We were searching for something, and we didn't know what it was. We were willing to give our home to the work of the Lord and never knew it was our hearts He wanted." These newly baptized members, Trudie and I became the charter members of Grace Mennonite Church in Manigotagan.

By 1960 our ministry in the three communities followed a regular pattern. Preaching and other church obligations certainly kept us busy. On Sundays we had Sunday school at Manigotagan in the morning, a Sunday afternoon service at Hole River and a Sunday evening service back at Manigotagan. During the week we had two Bible study classes, one at Manigotagan and one in Bissett. At the former we also had boys' and girls' club, ladies' meetings and sing-songs. Besides this, Trudie and I continued our round of home visits in all three communities. My records show we were in contact with about 1,000 persons per month. Every night seemed to be filled with church-related activities. When the chapel was erected in the summer of 1960, we painted it brown and adopted "Little Brown Church in the Wildwood" as our theme song. The second baptismal service occurred on June 9, 1963, when Lillian Wozny was baptized. She came to faith through the DVBS program and showed consistent spiritual growth. Rev. Dueck and the Lowe Farm choir were present for this occasion.

Living in the community with our family made it possible for us to

A 1959 visit by members of Lowe Farm Mennonite Church, including Rev. Peter Heinrichs, Henry Heinrichs, the Petkaus and their families.



A group of men from Elmwood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg help in the construction of Grace Mennonite Church in Manigotagan in 1960.

become part of its fabric. We participated in the everyday life of the community to which our main contribution was regular church activities. Hallowe'en was a special time for the local children who were normally quite shy. Once they were in costume they were transformed and could get fairly boisterous and aggressive with our children. One year Trudie had had enough of the usual horseplay and thought of baking pumpkin pies with whipped cream as a Hallowe'en treat, something they couldn't put into their bags. We knew the children enjoyed pie, but we didn't know whether they would take off their masks to eat it. You should have seen how fast the masks came off as they gathered around the table to enjoy their treat. The first year Trudie made 12 large pies which she cut into six pieces each. All 72 pieces disappeared before the evening was over. Thereafter the children came to our house first, then went home to dress up for trick-or-treat at other homes.

In winter I would usually make a skating rink on the sheltered bay just below Johnny and Dorothy Meade's house next door. When school dismissed at 4 p.m. a whole gang would come to use the rink for skating

Playing hockey on the skating rink which was prepared on the bay every winter.

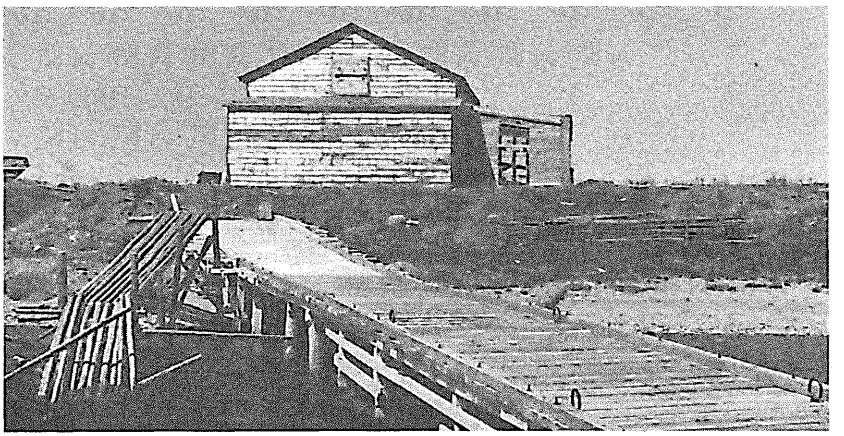
or hockey. Our basement became the change room. After skating, the tired children would leave their skates scattered all over the floor. We often had to negotiate an obstacle course to get to the pantry door at the far end of the basement. Trudie finally put nails into the floor joists close to the wall and asked the boys to tie their skates together and hang them up. When that failed to get the desired results, she gathered the skates into a box and locked them into the pantry. The next day when the children demanded to know where the skates were Trudie reminded them about hanging up the skates. They stayed locked up for a week. Needless to say the problem never resurfaced after that.

When I first visited Manigotagan, I had noted its potential for mixed farming. The soil was rich and Trudie's garden was an incentive for others to plant gardens as the older generation had done earlier. At one time Manigotagan had produced much of the fresh produce and beef for Bissett. I have always been interested in agricultural demonstration projects and thought of ways to encourage agriculture. We had a tractor and offered to do the plowing to get people started. We also encouraged children to get involved in 4-H gardening projects. Patsy and Hedy had left home by then, but Larry and Mable grew wonderful gardens. When Larry got too proud to have Trudie cut his hair, he would take a head of cabbage or whatever other produce was ready in his garden to the local barber in exchange for a "professional" haircut.

I had always believed that the only way to minister authentically was to be genuinely interested in people's lives and become active in community affairs. In this way I was able to feel the pulse of the community and develop meaningful relationships with men who seemed less responsive to our church ministry, on the surface at least.

My year at CMBC had confirmed this vision. Genuine ministry involved caring for the whole person: body and soul. I knew people in the area had a particularly difficult time with earning a livelihood. My thoughts turned to the time I had spent in the CO camps. Manigotagan had plenty of timber and a tradition of lumbering that was still remembered. It had been the site of a major sawmill at the base of the falls. In its day it supplied much of the lumber used for house construction in Winnipeg. I sensed there was room for a cooperative effort such as I had seen in Matheson Island. This opened up new possibilities and my involvement in the planning and organization of a cooperative venture in Manigotagan and Hole River. The idea had already been planted by Jack Rolfe from the Manitoba Government Cooperative Branch and accepted by Chief Barker and the Indian agent. Together we put our shoulder to the wheel to make it a reality.

During the winter of 1963–1964 the Wanipigow Producers Co-op was formed with 43 members who each paid a five-dollar membership fee. The government contributed 3,000 dollars in start-up funds. With these resources and careful planning we were able to negotiate better prices for products such as fish, pulp and berries and to make better credit arrangements for the members. My position as secretary-treasurer of this organization drew me directly into the everyday life of local families. For a time I put about half of my time and energy into getting the Co-op running. At the same time I felt that the sooner local people gained control of community affairs the better the potential for the emergence of an indigenous church would be.



The new government dock and the Wanipigow Producers' ice house and packing shed at the Hole River Indian Reserve.

Founders of the Wanipigow Producers Cooperative in June 1964 (back, l to r): Frank Seymour, Lawrence Hardisty, Wallace Seymour, Jack Rolf, George Bushie, Sr., Jake Unrau, Henry Seymour, Alex Simard, Donald Byrd, Ambrose Bushie, William La Fren, Sidney Seymour, Albert Wood; (front): Lyle Barker, Wilfred Seymour, Douglas McKenzie, Louis Simard, Sr., Elmer Seymour, Mervin Favel, Disbereen, Ted Seymour, Edward Seymour, Stanley Seymour, Jack Seymour, Alfred Favel, Jr., Chief George Barker.

Of course the people who really made Wanipigow Producers Cooperative a success were the men from Manigotagan and Hole River who had the skills and a will to work. They were skilled fishermen and knew how and where to fish, how to prepare fish once they were caught and how to pack them in crushed ice for transport. They knew what boats, motors and equipment to purchase as well as how to maintain them. When the Co-op expanded into pulp cutting they brought their experience and knowledge to bear as well. They knew how to fell trees safely, cut up and scale them, and build access roads over the frozen swamps for the trucks to haul the logs to the mill. The members also had access to good advice and instructions on how a cooperative should be run. Manitoba Federated Cooperative professionals advised us to make good decisions from the start and then follow through with them even when intimidation and coercive tactics were used to try and influence the board of directors. The first task was to draw up a constitution which outlined the duties and obligations of all the active members. The constitution sought to involve people from both communities in an effort to improve the quality of life and living standard of all residents. The Wanipigow Producers Cooperative had its critics right from the very beginning. We were called Communist; yet our directors believed in the inherent good in every person and gave everyone a chance to prove themselves, even when their personal sentiments suggested otherwise.

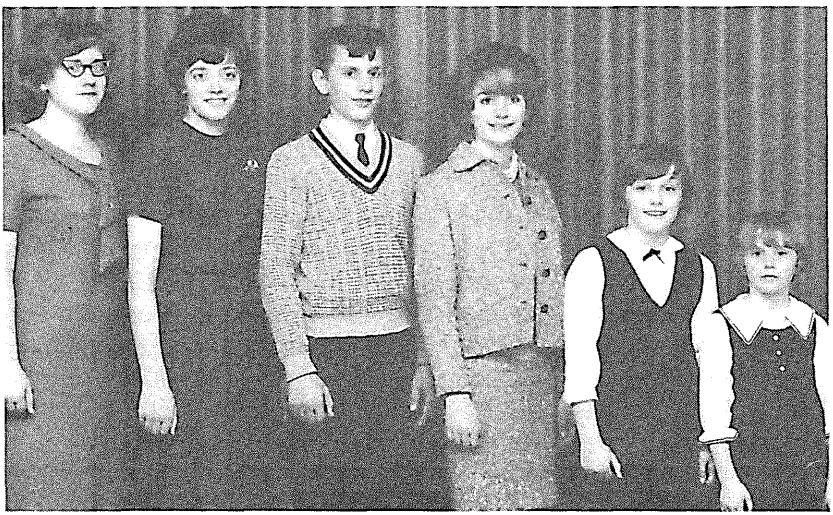
When other people saw what we were trying to do, they offered to support our efforts. The Manitoba Fish Company gave the Cooperative 3,500 dollars worth of fishing gear so that all 12 fishermen in the Co-op could start fishing on the first week of September 1963. The company also delivered ice and picked up the fish regularly. When the first fishing season ended each fisherman received up to 500 dollars in cash. Even though some men owed the Cooperative for outboard motors, anchors or nets, the bank balance still stood at over 1,000 dollars. Later some of this surplus was distributed according to the number of fish each fisherman had delivered to the packing shed at Hole River.

With the fall fishing season over we turned our attention to cutting pulp. We negotiated a contract with Manitoba Pulp and Paper Company at Pine Falls, only 44 miles away, to deliver 500 cords of spruce logs. During the winter we put up ice for the following year's fishing season. The cooperation did not end there. It did not take long for the two main communities, Hole River and Manigotagan, and the smaller nearby settlements of Agaming and Seymourville to come together in an effort to improve the local education system. Together they built a compre

hensive school which served as a learning centre for all ages. By combining their efforts the school could offer a kindergarten-to-grade 12 program as well as continuing education programs for adults.

All this was not as easy as it looks on paper but to be part of it certainly was gratifying. People in our Mennonite constituency could not always understand the holistic approach of our work which combined social programs with evangelical preaching and pastoral work. I wonder if they have forgotten the Anabaptist understanding of the Way which emphasizes that beliefs and actions go together. We were convinced our ministry had a single goal: to present a whole gospel which ministered to the whole person. We felt God's direction and blessing in our efforts.

When we came to Manigotagan, we knew our children would need a high school education which was not available locally. With the help of relatives and friends, they attended various schools in the south. We felt responsible for them and visited them as often as we could afford to make the trip. In 1959 Patsy attended the Mennonite Educational Institute (MCI) in Gretna. During this time Hedwig boarded with the C.N. Friesens and attended Miller Collegiate in Altona. In later years Larry and Mable also attended MCI. Much of our travelling in those years was on gravel roads and conditions varied from season to season. One Easter week we were returning from seeing the children in Gretna. It was a bright, sunny day and the wind had drifted a layer of pure white



Our children in 1965 (l to r): Pat, Hedy, Larry, Mable, Phyllis and Vernelle.

snow onto the side of the road east of Rosenfeld, making it hard to judge the shoulders. When I hit a snowbank on the right of the road, the car careened into the ditch and tipped onto the driver's side. The family was left suspended in mid-air by their seat belts. Fortunately, the driver of the highway maintainer saw what happened and came to our rescue. We were able to tip the car back onto its wheels. The only visible damage was a large dent in the driver's door. He pulled us back onto the highway and we proceeded on our way. We had the car checked at Morris but found no further damage.

After eight years of service, we took another sabbatical beginning in summer of 1965. We moved into the Mar-Joy Apartments in East Kildonan. While I attended CMBC, our children had a chance to attend regular public schools. There they had an exposure to life in city schools which was very different from the two- and three- room schools in the north. Pat was in her final year at Elim Bible School; Hedy was in nurses' training at Grace Hospital in Winnipeg; Larry was in grade eleven at MCI, Mable in grade ten at North Kildonan Collegiate; Phyllis was in grade six and Vernelle in grade three.

When my CMBC classes finished at the end of April, Trudie and I made an extended tour of Mennonite churches in southern Ontario in the interests of the MPM program. Pat had returned home to look after the younger three girls. When we came back, we discovered Pat had accepted a voluntary service assignment with the General Conference voluntary service unit at Welcome Inn in Hamilton, Ontario.

We returned to Manigotagan during the summer to find the situation had changed to the point that we felt somewhat at loose ends. Others had taken up the Co-op reins as we had hoped they would. We watched and supported its progress from the sidelines. There were still the services and home visitations, but our role felt somewhat redundant. Steve and Jeannette Stuckey, who had replaced us during the sabbatical, were well received by the residents and were very involved in the work of the church and in community development. Inwardly we wanted to put our energies more directly into the pastoral ministries of the church. Others had picked up on community development initiatives and had the energy and skills to continue them without us.

During this time the Bells from Bissett had moved to Selkirk and a nucleus of a Christian fellowship had formed around them. As the group grew it decided to look for a pastor and approached us. Since we were somewhat unsettled we considered their call an answer to our prayers. Here was a new chapter along the Way into which we could put all our energies.

To many people the name Selkirk conjures up images of the Provincial Mental Health facility; others think of the hockey team and its prowess or the large steel mill just south of town; but to us it meant finding old friends and helping to mould them into a fellowship. Selkirk was another new and exciting chapter of our pilgrimage along the Way.

7

From Muskeg to Pavement
Selkirk 1967–1972

Mennonite Pioneer Mission had been aware of the drift of northerners into Selkirk. They came seeking employment when fishing on Lake Winnipeg was shut down for several years to allow the stocks to recover from overfishing. Rather than be idle while waiting for the reopening of the fishery, people simply moved in search of gainful employment. Selkirk was also appealing because it provided a range of services not available in isolated communities. The migrants included a number of Christian families who had been active participants in MPM churches in their home communities. Among them were our good friends, the Bells from Bissett, Settees from Matheson Island, Monkmans from Loon Straits, and Scotts and Leas from Pine Dock. At first Hannes and Winnie Bell held Sunday school in their home and later Orville Andres, a former Loon Straits worker and at the time a student at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, helped with the regular services. When Orville finished his studies at CMBC and left for Saskatchewan, Raymond Settee and Hannes Bell approached MPM for help to develop a church in Selkirk. They requested I be reassigned by MPM as their full-time minister.

They asked the question: "Would you help us start a church in Selkirk and bring other white Mennonites along with you?" and added, "Peace should be the emphasis."

Over the summer and into fall I served as an interim pastor for the group and worked to develop a stable core group. On October 30, 1967, I handed the following letter to all in attendance.

Dear Friends of the Selkirk Mennonite Mission Group!

We would like to let you know that we are still meeting regularly every Sunday morning at the home of Hannes and Winnie Bell at 510 Moody Avenue. Two Sunday school classes are being held every Sunday morning at 10:30 am. Trudie Unrau is accompanying us on her accordion in most of the songs we love so well. Our sermon text last Sunday was, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12: 1–17). We thought it fitting for our Reformation Sunday observance. We would like to see you with us next Sunday also. Phone Raymond Settee at 482-5723 for any particular information.

A special meeting is being planned in Selkirk about some of the future concerns and the calling of a pastor. This meeting will probably be some time in the evening of November 9. Please join us in praying for the great work that lies before us in Selkirk.

Your interim pastor,
J.M. Unrau

On Monday night, November 6, the executive committee of the Board of Missions of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada met with the Selkirk group to confirm our assignment. Shortly thereafter *The Selkirk Enterprise,* the weekly community paper, made the announcement,

Rev. Unrau to Pastor Local Fellowship

Rev. Jake Unrau of Manigotagan, Manitoba, has accepted the call to become pastor of the new, yet unorganized, Mennonite Fellowship in Selkirk.

The small group, consisting mainly of former Lake Winnipeg residents, has met regularly for over a year. The group had been under the leadership of Orville Andres, former mission worker at Loon Straits, Manitoba. The program, consisting of a Sunday school and worship service, has been conducted in several different homes. Presently the group is meeting in the home of Hannes Bell at 510 Moody Avenue.

Jake Unraus were known to the group members from earlier associations at Matheson Island and Manigotagan where they served as missionaries from 1948 to 1956 and 1956 to 1967 respectively.

To many people the name Selkirk conjures up images of the Provincial Mental Health facility; others think of the hockey team and its prowess or the large steel mill just south of town; but to us it meant finding old friends and helping to mould them into a fellowship. Selkirk was another new and exciting chapter of our pilgrimage along the Way.

On November 23, 1967, we packed all our belongings and furniture onto Currie Transportation's truck around noon and by six in the

evening were unloaded at 222 Rosser Avenue in Selkirk. We had rented the house for 85 dollars a month from Mr. and Mrs. Mike Chanas. It later came up for sale and we were able to purchase it. We thought we were settling down for a long stay. By today's standards it was not a large house but had enough room for our adult children to come home to. When we moved to Selkirk, Patsy had just returned from Hamilton and found work in Winnipeg and later Thompson, Hedy was a registered nurse in Calgary; Larry had opted for an apprenticeship with Derksen Plumbing and Heating instead of finishing high school. He was the first to get married in 1968 followed by Hedy in 1969. Our three youngest daughters, Mable, Phyllis and Vernelle, lived with us and attended local schools.

During this time the Mennonite Pioneer Mission program was officially transferred to the Home Mission Board of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. This change meant moving toward a self-supporting ministry. To supplement our Conference support, I found work as a delivery boy at the local Tomboy store. The owner was very sympathetic to my situation and readily accommodated my need to attend conferences, seminars and funerals. This also gave me an opportunity to experience the world of work as the members of the fellowship group did. Places where I delivered groceries were not always aware that I was a minister, and so I saw a side of life I had been sheltered from in pastoral situations. People tended to treat a minister differently. In the five years I held the dual role of delivery boy and pastor, I began to develop a vision for a new kind of integrated ministry. I enjoyed this experiment very much but was unable to implement the concept as fully as I would have liked.

Against this background we began our Selkirk ministry. This time we were again pioneering but in a less familiar setting. We had moved into a larger town in the Interlake region with a greater variety of residents from diverse backgrounds who needed to create community for themselves rather than take it for granted as we had been able to do in the north. We were also surrounded by a variety of denominations with active congregations and resident clergy. The core of our ministry involved recent migrants from Matheson Island, Manigotagan, Bissett, Loon Straits and Pine Dock as well as Mennonites who did not have a church home in Selkirk. The task of uniting people from a variety of communities and representing several cultural traditions and of bringing together these elements into a formal church structure became our challenge.

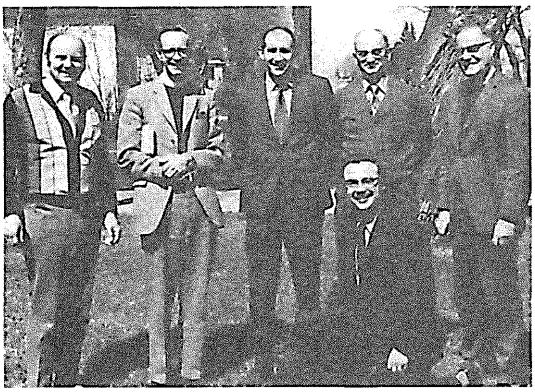
We had our first Sunday morning service on January 14, 1968, in

Participants in the Mennonite Fellowship at Selkirk in 1970 included our good friends from northern communities: the Bells from Bissett, Settees from Matheson Island, Monkmans from Loon Straits and Scotts and Leas from Pine Dock.

the Odd Fellows Hall on Clandeboyde Avenue. Four families attended the service; the offering of $7.76 was enough to cover the rental of the hall. We had invited the Selkirk churches for an installation service in the afternoon. A good attendance of 70 people, including friends and pastors from Winnipeg, were present for a time of prayer and commitment. The service confirmed our calling to ministry and reassured us of God's presence in this endeavour. It felt good to experience the show of support from locals and the sponsoring constituency.

We gave leadership to the Fellowship in Selkirk for five challenging years. On March 1, 1983, I responded in writing to Darrel and Gladys Heidebrecht, a young couple who were active in Selkirk Christian Fellowship soon after we left. My response summarized our involvements and vision for the Selkirk ministry.

> Here are some answers to the questions you asked in your February 16, 1983, letter. I am not sure my interpretation is correct. However, I shall try to answer your questions as best I can. In the beginning, Trudie and I made many house calls to those who wanted to be part of the Fellowship. We also called on a number of Mennonite families to join us—not all wanted to join and felt comfortable where they were. As you know the active members of the Selkirk Christian Fellowship still represent a mixture of people from Métis, Indian and Mennonite backgrounds. We resolved right from the beginning to be as self-sufficient as possible. As a group we committed ourselves to meet all local expenses ourselves. Personally, I agreed to earn as much of my own livelihood as I was able.

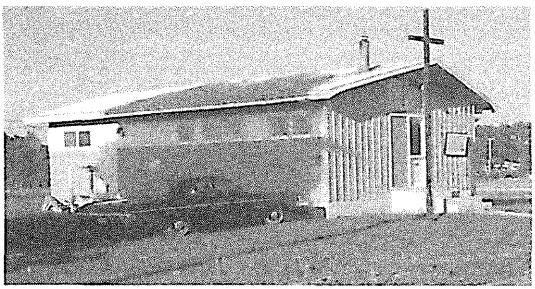


The Selkirk ministerial from 1968 to 1972 included (l to r): Don Berheim, Good Shepherd Lutheran; Pat Phillips, St. Clements Anglican; Rev. Kornfeld, Selkirk Lutheran; John McLeod, Selkirk United; Mel Findley, Clandeboyne United; Bernie Lea, Little Britain United Church (in front).

I joined the local ministerial and we exchanged ideas on sermons, shared the visitation to nursing homes and planned an annual Good Friday service together. It is here that the Selkirk Christian Fellowship did their part and my successor, Jake Wiebe, became a hospital chaplain under the sponsorship of the local ministerial.

At first we rented the Odd Fellows Hall. When we discovered the Selkirk Church of the Nazarene was available, we moved there because it had a better atmosphere for Sunday morning worship than the Hall where they held regular parties on Saturday nights. I always found it distracting and assumed others did also. We were grateful to the Nazarenes for making this change possible. I think it was less than a year later that the building was put up for sale and, with the help of the Mission Board of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Selkirk Christian Fellowship was able to purchase it for 12,000 dollars. The church came complete with plenty of metal chairs, tables, small chairs, a piano and altar rail. This put pressure on the church budget of 1,400 dollars to keep up with mortgage payments besides the cost of utilities.

Our goal in working with the Fellowship was to have a worshipping



The Selkirk Mennonite Fellowship building in 1971.

body that would be actively involved in community affairs with members who would share the message of evangelism as a testimony to their salvation; in other words, living a life which integrates faith and works so others would become interested in worshipping with Selkirk Christian Fellowship. Hopefully their curiosity would lead them to ask, "What is there about your group life to be so resolved and peaceful in all that you do? We want to be part of that also."

We made efforts to have Bible studies in all the homes that participated in our Fellowship. At one point the Anglican priest applauded the Mennonites for being able to sustain a home Bible study program. Of course we had some difficult moments too. Because we were a small group, any family crisis affected all of us. When families broke up or left for other reasons, a large gap was always left for those remaining. While we did some innovative things it was not without a great deal of effort and persistence of a faithful core group of mainly older members. The move from the north took a greater toll on the young people and potential members of the church.

We understood the peace witness as first becoming right with God, then translating the peace we had experienced into everyday life. This meant looking for ways to find peaceful and nonviolent solutions to conflict. This is expressed in resisting evil by not reacting to it and showing love to our neighbours no matter what the circumstances are. Thirdly, we worked at helping people find the way of peace for themselves by inviting them to Sunday school and Bible study. It was

The Selkirk Mennonite Fellowship congregation in 1982 when Esther and Malcolm Wenger (back row, centre) were its leaders.

at this point that our members got to understand what the gospel of peace can do.

In the beginning the Selkirk Christian Fellowship wanted "Mennonite" attached to the name because of the emphasis on peace. They wanted to be part of the Good News that carried the message of peace and joy. One obstacle we faced was the inherent racism that was prevalent in the urban setting which discriminated most heavily against the most vulnerable, in this case, new migrants from northern communities. Their experiences with prejudice and discrimination caught them off guard and they questioned the wisdom of "turning the other cheek." Selkirk and nearby Winnipeg exposed especially the young people to some sad experiences which drew them away from their earlier Christian commitments. Many times, when there was social unrest in town, participants from Selkirk Christian Fellowship were unfairly targeted. I believe this directly affected the potential for the growth of Selkirk Christian Fellowship. It is also what will make it difficult to foster a peace emphasis among Native people. What is needed is a broader church body which truly believes in peace and reconciliation and promotes a society free from racial prejudice. The Selkirk Christian Fellowship is not perfect—nor do I know of any other church that is. I would suggest Selkirk Christian Fellowship is still seen as part of the peace church movement in the community despite its shortcomings.

I saw a charismatic influence which brought new life into worship as well as resistance from those who feel most comfortable in following the more traditional practices of the past. It remains to be seen how this will work out. I would like to think that the leaders of these two groups—one in the extreme evangelical, the other in the more traditional thinking—come together to work things out to the best of their abilities. I have confidence in the Native people's ability to find their own solutions. I also hope that when these leaders suggest change they would have the fortitude and patience with their less accommodating brothers and sisters in the Lord. As far as I am concerned our duty is to stand and support and pray and wait for God's spirit to lead these groups in a peaceful way that will bring unity and love in Selkirk.

. . . I had the opportunity to attend the Mennonite Indian Leaders Council (MILC) in Montana . . . with the southern Cheyenne and Arapaho in Oklahoma and spreading to the northern Cheyenne in Montana and the Hopi in Arizona. At these meetings I was impressed by the way Indian and European cultures had come together to create new expressions of the body of Christ Jesus. This gave me a new vision of what it takes to truly become God's people.

8

Pastor in Southern Cheyenne Country
Hammon, Oklahoma, 1972–1975

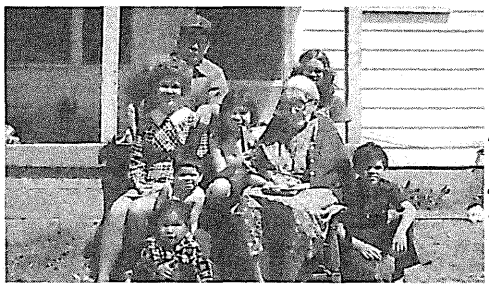
By 1972 we began to feel we had made as much of a contribution as we could to get Selkirk Christian Fellowship started and were questioning our suitability for continuing in ministry because of personal struggles. We seriously considered withdrawing from active service for a time. Rev. D.D. Klassen from Homewood listened to our apprehensions and counselled us not to abandon our calling. Nevertheless, we felt that for the congregation to develop further it needed pastoral gifts we were lacking. What was needed was a minister with pastoral experience in an established church.

In January I had the opportunity to attend the Mennonite Indian Leaders Council (MILC) in Montana along with Menno Wiebe, executive secretary of the Native Ministries program (as the Mennonite Pioneer Mission program had been renamed after it was transferred to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada). MILC involved all the Indian churches in the United States relating to the General Conference. I found out the General Conference relationship with Indians had begun in the late 1800s starting with the southern Cheyenne and Arapaho in Oklahoma and spreading to the northern Cheyenne in Montana and the Hopi in Arizona. At these meetings I was impressed by the way Indian and European cultures had come together to create new expressions of the body of Christ Jesus. This gave me a new vision of what it takes to truly become God's people.

At this conference I also learned that Bethel Mennonite Indian Church in Hammon, Oklahoma, was looking for a pastor. When I introduced the possibility of going there to Trudie we decided to give it some thought and prayed whether this might be a new learning experience God had in mind for us. To help make our decision we made an exploratory trip, first to see Malcolm Wenger at the Commission on Home Ministries office in Newton, Kansas, then to meet with Robert and Marcia Standingwater at Foss Lake near Hammon, Oklahoma. Robert was chairman of the church council. By the time we returned to Selkirk we had decided to accept Bethel Mennonite Indian Church's invitation. We submitted our resignation to the Selkirk Christian Fellowship. One issue remained before we could leave for Oklahoma: to find a replacement for us at Selkirk. With the help of Ike Froese the church called Jake and Helen Wiebe to take our place. Jake had been a Bible school teacher and was a career pastor. We were confident his and Helen's experience in established churches would help Selkirk Christian Fellowship mature.

On July 20 we headed south across the Canadian-American border for a 1,200-mile drive to our new home. We arrived three days later in the blistering heat of midsummer and were met by Robert Standingwater at the parsonage across from the church. As we unpacked and settled into our new home we were both excited at the new possibilities this experience would bring as well as apprehensive whether we would be up to meeting the challenges that lay before us. We were confident in our calling and God's faithfulness. Knowing we were part of a vital congregation would carry us through as it had in the past.

Moving to a new country meant becoming familiar with new ways of doing things and acclimatizing ourselves to a new community and environment. We soon learned that people in Oklahoma were very aware they lived in a tornado zone. They kept a careful eye on the sky

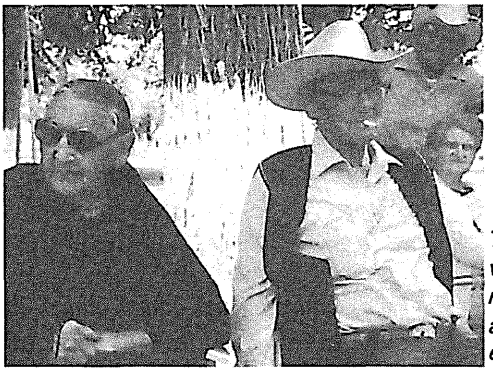


Robert and Marcia Standingwater, their daughter and family. Robert was chair of church council at Bethel Mennonite Church in Hammon, Oklahoma, when we arrived.

when the towering cumulus clouds began to form in the late afternoon. When a heavy thunderstorm threatened, the neighbours would begin gathering around our house. We had a storm shelter under the house which could be entered only through our kitchen. When a tornado warning was issued the neighbourhood would take shelter in our bunker. We took along our transistor radio and followed the progress of the storm. Once when we were down there, the radio reported that the storm centre was approaching Hammon from the west at 10 miles per hour. A few minutes later it passed right over the city. When the danger abated we saw the havoc the storm had caused. There was water, hail and debris everywhere. Fortunately this storm had stayed overhead. There would have been serious damage if it had touched down in town. Another difference I had difficulty getting used to was that many of the Mennonite churches displayed the American stars and stripes prominently in their sanctuaries. Some members and children of members were veterans of World War II, the Korean War or the Vietnamese War.

During the second year in Hammon we got to know the history of the southern Cheyenne and Arapaho a little better on a guided tour given during the Western District Conference held in Clinton. The tour took us west to see the Cheyenne Museum, the site of the Battle of Washita, including the Mennonite mission graveyard which is over 100 years old. While touring the monument of Chief Blackkettle, which is about three miles northwest of Cheyenne, Oklahoma, Lawrence Hart told the story of how the 7th U.S. Cavalry had swept over the hills in a surprise attack and massacred Chief Blackkettle and most of the men in the valley of the Washita. The remaining women and children had been taken north to the Kansas state border to a place called Fort Supply. All this happened a few years before Mennonite missionaries arrived. Albert Koontz, one of the men on the tour, was captivated by the story and concluded his uncle must have been in the cavalry regiment. When the appropriate time came, he embraced Lawrence and spontaneously offered his confession and asked for forgiveness on behalf of his family. The southern Cheyenne and Arapaho are obviously a people who know suffering and, as we found out, were also a people committed to peace. Lawrence Hart is a Peace Chief in the tradition of Blackkettle.

Our intention in Oklahoma was to be a reconciling force in keeping with the Anabaptist tradition. To this end we planned to have DVBS together with the Indian Baptist church in 1973, something which had never happened before. There was a temporary setback when Max Malone, the pastor, informed us he personally could not participate. I suspect his supporting churches vetoed his personal involvement. How-



The Albert Hoffmans who were members of the Mennonite Church at Hammon and advocates for the Native American Church.

ever, his wife and other Baptist Indian people participated in a community Daily Vacation Bible School as they had originally planned.

It was not long before I was also assigned to the Koinonia Mennonite Church in Clinton where Lawrence and Betty Hart had been serving earlier. Not only did I preach in both churches, but Trudie and I were able get to know many of the people during our home visits. Another highlight in the life of the church in Hammon was the members' involvement in the local powwow. I was intrigued by how they were able to bring their culture and Christian faith together without any sign of contradiction. Hammon residents, Mennonite and Baptist, attended powwows elsewhere and sponsored an annual powwow at another location but, until we came, had never held one in Hammon. It took a lot of planning and work to prepare for the three- to four-day event. The campsite needed to have electricity since the main events occurred at night. The custom also called for the hosts to provide rations for all the participants. Members of the churches worked alongside other community members to make sure everything was in place. The church had put up a temporary electric line to the outdoor arena for the powwow and found that the circuits were overloading. Fortunately, a local lineman was able to change the wiring to carry the load without tripping the breakers. We also made available a big tank truck loaded with drinking water to the participants. On Sunday morning Bethel Mennonite Church participated in an ecumenical service at the powwow grounds. I was away at Deer Creek that Sunday morning, but Trudie reported that Max Malone, pastor of the Indian Baptist Church, had preached a good message in which he had explained what give-away dances are really about. The message had been well received by the fairly large gathering. The powwow strengthened cooperative relations between Bethel

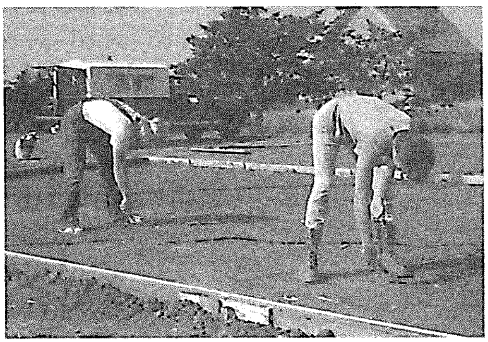
Mennonite members and the Christian Indian Baptists. Later it was easier to cooperate at other times such as funerals. People expressed appreciation that pastors could be seen together since many of the families from the congregations were interrelated and earlier had felt obligated to keep themselves separate.

Besides the usual function as a worshipping community, the church also was involved in a number of community projects. It sponsored a General Conference Voluntary Service (VS) unit consisting of two couples, the Shoals and Shapmires. They ran a daycare centre in the church. Together we were able to get a grant from Showalter Foundation to build a recreational centre for local youth programs. The centre gave ample access and extra space to develop athletic abilities. I found it great fun to travel with the young people to basketball tournaments. We went to Clinton, Hydro and Bessie in Oklahoma and as far away as Newton, Kansas, to compete with other Mennonite teams. The Hammon team usually raised its own funds to cover the costs of these road trips.

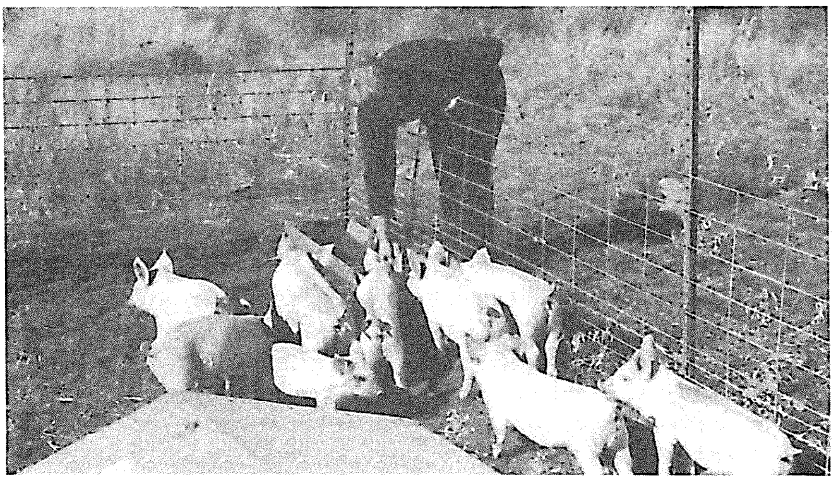
At one point the Mennonite Indian Leaders Council recommended that the Hammon church get a community development worker to work alongside the church program. At first there was discussion of developing a craft industry. It generated a lot of interest but in the end the participants chose to work independently rather than develop a larger market through collective effort. The discussion then turned to finding ways of making better use of Indian land in the area. Too many people were leasing their land to outside farmers and then working for these farmers. As the discussion progressed we settled on developing a 4-H program for Hammon youth. When Robert Woods, who had been working with the Oklahoma Cheyenne Indians from his farm in Watonga, heard about our plans he offered his services even though he was about to retire. Robert was associated with the Oklahoma University extension services in Agro Business. He volunteered to provide the 4-H instruction when we were ready to begin. Virgil Claassen, a businessman from Newton whom we consulted, and I saw that Robert had the community at heart and recommended we accept his offer.

We felt very fortunate to be able to rent an old farmyard next to the town. The yard had a house to accommodate the VS workers and several small shelters for hogs. All this was within walking distance for the boys and men in the program. We were even given permission to hook up to the city water line. The plan was to get eight purebred Duroc hogs, four boars and four gilts to start. The boars would be castrated, brought to market weight, then sold to pay for the feed. The gilts would

Children at the Hammon day-care which was staffed by Mennonite Voluntary Service volunteers.



Voluntary Service workers repair the basketball court at the Hammon church.



Trudie with a litter of hogs raised as part of the 4–H program at Hammon.

be kept as breeding stock for next year's litters. Club members were to return a hog of equal weight to Robert Woods as payment for the first hog they received. Another boost for our self-help project came from the Grace Hill Mennonite Church youth who delivered three hogs from the Harms and Neufeld farms in Kansas. Club members were Tyrone Peno, Terry Bird, Phillip Hart, David Osage and Amos Bird. Our VS workers were Don Esau and Lyle Gates.

Amos Bird, one of the adult participants, bought a purebred Duroc sow that was about to have a litter. This brought a bit of a different aspect to the whole operation, especially to our young boys who were 9 to 12 years of age at that time. His second purchase of a similar sow failed to produce a litter so he became discouraged and would have quit if Robert Wood hadn't loaned him one of his sows in exchange for some of the litter. Amos was still part of the hog project when we left in 1975. One part of the 4-H program required having your pig officially judged. It was really brave for our boys to show their animals at the Custer County Fair in Clinton. Their lack of experience showed but Phillip Hart's hog came in fifth in his category. Robert Wood thought they had made a good showing for their first time out.

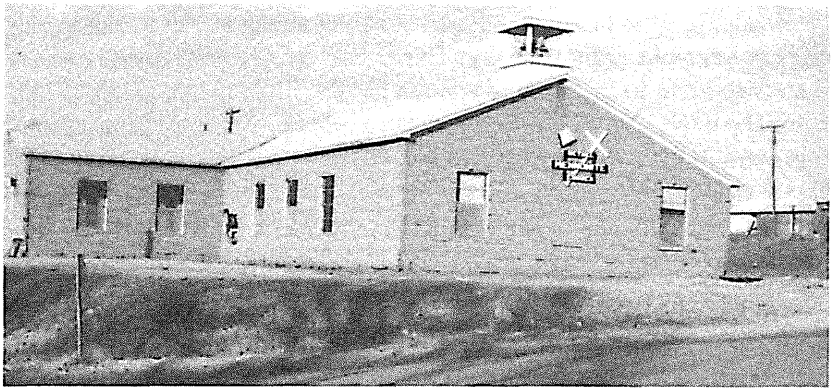
While we were in Hammon, we also witnessed the struggle of Indian parents with the education system. For years the City of Hammon had been running the schools without consulting Indian parents. Since the parents had little say in the hiring of teachers or curriculum development, they felt they had no control over their children's education. When no accommodation for their concerns could be found they announced the opening of a Native American Survival School for Monday February 10, 1973. As the tension heated up even Trudie and I were suspected of being trouble makers and were followed wherever we went because some of the Bethel church members were involved in the school issue. I remember Nathan Standingwater, our youth worker, telling me I had been in real danger when I crossed Main Street to go to the tribal offices to meet with him. It frightened me to realize there were people ready to resort to violence over the private school matter.

On February 24, 1973, the City of Hammon almost went to war to keep control of the public school system. Almost half of the students were of Indian extraction and having a private school would mean large losses in revenue for the town. This was also at the height of the Red Power Movement and people appeared to be lining up for a major confrontation. The American Indian Movement gave moral support but according to reports a Presbyterian lawyer gave 5,000 dollars to get the

Menno Wiebe (left), executive secretary of Native Ministries of the Canadian Conference, present at the Mennonite Indian Leaders Council (MILC) in 1973 in Arizona. Present were Native leaders from Oklahoma, Montana and Arizona.

school started. The town officials adamantly insisted they were the democratically elected power in the town and therefore legitimately controlled the school system. It was unfortunate the controversy hardened along racial lines as the tension mounted. The city fathers apparently wanted Indians to choose sides and alerted local law enforcement officers to prepare for a showdown. Many people in the churches were praying for restraint and that cooler heads would prevail. Fortunately, no serious incidents occurred and the school was developed under control of the Indian parents. Because most of the Indian children came from the two Indian churches in town, we became directly involved in the school's operation. Bethel Mennonite Church was asked to provide the equivalent of the lunch program in the public school system. Our Youth Centre building was also available for recreational activities. At Christmas the church hosted the Freedom School Christmas program. With time tension over the school issue dissipated.

The church also became directly involved in other tribal initiatives. Fred Hoffman, a tribal counsellor, approached the churches for support to build a tribal centre that could also accommodate some of the churches' larger celebrations. One such was the annual Christmas–New Year celebration where former Cheyenne residents came from as far



The Bethel Mennonite Church building in Hammon, Oklahoma, in 1973.

away as California, Montana and South Dakota. Agreement was reached and construction commenced in fall. It was progressing well when a storm collapsed the entire structure and damaged the foundation on January 4, 1975. The rafters and walls lay in a tangled mess on the cement slab floor. It was clear that a great deal of work would be needed to repair the damage. The foundation needed to be repaired, the structure disassembled and the prefabricated rafters repaired before reconstruction could begin again.

Nothing was done until March. It took that long for the tribal council to wait and see what the contractor was prepared to do. Fred Hoffman had also contacted Dean Shantz from Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) in Oklahoma to help assess the damage. In the end a group of volunteers, assisted by local businesses and members of both Indian churches, rallied to restore the building. In just one day they were able to rebuild the structure and sheet in most of it. They had even begun shingling the roof. It was an amazing work bee to witness. The local and MDS volunteers, carpenters and youth worked shoulder to shoulder to make the building a reality. They set aside their differences to help a small local contractor meet his obligations. To me it was the kind of joint venture that brings out the best in people. It also provided a positive witness for the two Indian churches.

The tribal building was more or less finished and we were enjoying our Easter Sunday activities at the church. The Easter Sunday morning service had been beautiful followed by the Easter potluck on the patio behind the church. Even though this was the largest service during our time in Hammon, the setting provided ample room for everyone to be comfortably accommodated and to enjoy each others' company.

While we were having the Easter meal, word came via telephone that our six-year-old grandson Kurt Unrau had accidentally died, and we were expected to come to Manitoba for the funeral. Needless to say, when the news came Trudie and I were in shock. We told the congregation and they extended their condolences in various ways. They encouraged us to go to the funeral because they felt it was our Christian duty to support our children. Fred Hoffman suggested taking a collection for us. We made immediate plans to leave for Winnipeg to be with our children during this tragic time.

Our three-year commitment came to an end in the summer of 1975. We made plans to return to Manitoba to be closer to our children. On June 15 the Hammon Bethel Mennonite Church held a special farewell for us at the Foss Lake Picnic grounds. After a sumptuous barbecue we were presented with an eight-piece "Frankoma" dinner set. The Baptist Indian Church gave us a watercolour painting of a man riding a horse pulling a travois with a woman and all their possessions on it. Blanch Whiteshield said that this is how she sees us moving from one place to another. Later, Blanch presented Trudie with a pair of Cheyenne beaded moccasins as a going-away present.

She added "This pair is guaranteed for life. If you wear out these leather soles, I will replace them for you free of charge."

Vernelle and Pat came to Oklahoma to help us move. Pat had brought her three-quarter-ton truck and we had a new 1985 Chevrolet pulling a six-foot U-Haul trailer. On June 25, 1975, we had a final supper with Bob and Marcia Standingwater at Foss Dam. After a slight delay to replace the starter on the truck, we were on our way the next morning. We stopped at Watonga around 11 a.m. where Robert and Ellen Woods joined us on the way to Talequah. We had tickets to see an evening performance of "Cherokee's Trail of Tears" in an open-door theatre set-up between big rock formations. It was a beautiful setting. The three-act play, performed by college students, depicted the sad story of how the Cherokee Indians were forced westward into Indian territory in Oklahoma.

We left early the next morning to avoid the heat of the day when temperatures reached up to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Our plan was to drive in tandem directly north on Highway 75. This would bring us to the Emerson border crossing due south of Winnipeg. On the first day we had a mishap which could have been serious. Vernelle was driving the truck at the rear of the convoy near Burlington, Kansas, when it blew a right rear tire. I saw her swerve but lost track of her as we went over the crest of a hill. The truck had come to rest teetering over the edge of a

ravine next to the road. By the time we got ourselves turned around a truck driver was helping the girls to safety. It took a tow truck to pull the truck back onto the roadway. With the exception of this incident and heavy rain which soaked the contents of the truck, the remainder of the trip was uneventful.

Arriving in Winnipeg was quite a shock for all of us. We had forgotten one small detail. We had sold our house in Selkirk to Jake and Helen Wiebe who had replaced us at Selkirk Christian Fellowship and so we were homeless. Fortunately relatives took us in until we were able to rent temporary accommodation in the CMBC dormitory.

Our hope is that by doing this at least one myth which our Native friends have about the white man's churches—"They cannot work together;" "See how they have divided our families in our communities to the point where we have not recognized the Christ whom they claim,"—might be brushed aside by saying, "See how they work together, how they love each other." Our prayers for the givers and receivers are that all our friends would be helped in finding the true peace of God through our willingness to seek to understand and keep on working for the common good.

9

Pastor, Chaplain, Community Developer
Winnipeg 1976–1985

By fall of 1975 we had settled in North Kildonan and decided to take a sabbatical before considering any new assignments. I was able to audit the course, "Theory and Practice of Pastoral Training" with Professor Harold King at the University of Winnipeg. This was a credit course for students in the theology degree program. It was good to meet with this class and to help each other in theoretical and practical assignments. The course alerted me to my weaknesses as a caregiver so I enrolled in a unit of "Supervised Pastoral Education" to work at these issues in a structured setting. I hoped the clinical training would make me more responsive and more effective with persons in crisis either from illness or bereavement. A more distant goal was to qualify for pastoral ministry in a senior citizens' home. I made a major blunder early in the training. I congratulated a new mother on the maternity ward only to discover later that the child had been stillborn. Obviously I had made a wrong assumption without reading the charts carefully enough, as a result had not provided the care she needed and actually added to her grief. This was one incident I would rather not have had analyzed by my supervisor and classmates during my training. While the process was often uncomfortable, writing verbatim reports for critical analysis did prove to be an

effective way of learning. Fortunately, the sessions also involved affirmations of existing gifts and new skills I mastered which helped to build my confidence. This convinced me that the program was designed not to destroy me as a caregiver but rather equip me as a better pastor.

I still have the self-evaluations we were asked to write at that time. In them I described my theological orientation as having its roots in southern Manitoba and northern (and southern) Metis and Indian communities. In dealing with theological issues I had to come to terms with my own anger, loss, depression, withdrawal, fear and loneliness before fully celebrating God's love. It was at such times that the power of listening, confirming, consolidation, consolation and redemption led to the healing of broken relationships. My philosophical approach was seen as judgmental and authoritarian which got in the way of the pastoral care I was able to provide. I preferred to get things done but could also exercise tolerance when necessary. I needed to wait on my patients and work on their agenda instead of on my own. The development of a pastoral image came to me gradually so that at times it felt more natural. After almost 30 years of ministry, it was painful but also freeing to deal with these issues. I found I could be more assertive and less embarrassed to admit my shortcomings. I learned to take risks without needing to fear the possibility of failure.

By January 1976 we felt ready to become more actively involved in ministry again. In discussions with Ike Froese, interim executive secretary of Native Ministries for the Canadian Conference, we explored two possibilities in Winnipeg. One was to add my pastoral skills to the existing Native Ministries program in the city, the other involved establishing a new receiving home as temporary shelter for patients coming to Winnipeg for medical treatment from northern Manitoba and northwestern Ontario. Let me describe these two ministries and our involvement in them in turn.

When we arrived on the scene there already were some models for receiving homes in the city. Elijah McKay and his wife Jeannette had run a number of such homes in the past and confirmed the need for more. Medical patients from remote communities had few contacts in the city and needed a safe and congenial place to stay while they had their appointments, waited for test results or recuperated from operations or childbirth before returning home. Elijah had counselled us that Indian people's spirituality is more firmly rooted in everyday experience than western spirituality which is more abstract and intellectual. Our involvement needed to have a spiritual as well as tangible aspect. I was reminded of my Anabaptist roots which brought

belief and practice together and were grounded in everyday life. With this in mind the receiving home possibility continued to grow on us. It was not a question of whether we should or should not be involved in receiving Native people in the City of Winnipeg. We believed Indian and Métis people had adopted us as neighbours when we went north; now that they were coming to the city we needed to return the hospitality. Our prayer was, "Dear Lord, grant us the needed grace to do so."

First, I wrote Vicki Burns, director of Medical Services, to confirm the need for more receiving homes. I explained that our interest was to establish a good, clean residence where we would want to stay ourselves and consider our home away from home.

She responded, "Get a place and then I can say if we will be able to use it as one of our boarding homes."

The next 44 days we scoured the city for appropriate houses. By February 17, 1976, we had narrowed the choice to four and took three members of the Native Ministries program board on a tour. They recommended making a bid of 57,000 dollars on the house at 171 Walnut Street. It had three large bedrooms on the main floor, two self-contained one-bedroom suites on the second floor and a large kitchen and wet bar area in the basement. The house was well furnished and decorated and could easily accommodate 14 guests. Since the Native Ministries board was not prepared to place the program under its umbrella, Trudie and I took the initiative to purchase the property and assume responsibility for its operation. The mortgage was held by Mennonite Foundation of Canada with the Conference of Mennonites in Canada as co-signer.

The Walnut Receiving Home at 171 Walnut Avenue in Winnipeg.

In the kitchen at Walnut Receiving Home: Rose Bueckert (centre), staff, with residents in 1977.

Once the house we named Walnut Receiving Home was approved by Medical Services, the real work began, especially for Trudie. Seldom were there fewer than ten guests and often more than the 14 we had planned for. Most of them came through Medical Services but we were also open to others needing temporary shelter. Our guests came from about 70 different communities in the Northwest Territories, Ontario and Manitoba. Only about 7 percent came from communities in which the Native Ministries program had a presence. The average stay was three-and-a-half days. We were reminded that many of our guests had just gone or were about to go through a crisis while they were with us, therefore needed care that went beyond their immediate medical needs. We were not always able to provide the pastoral care that was called for because of our work load and inability to communicate in aboriginal languages.

Besides the sheer work involved, at times the situation also became rather frustrating. We did not know most of the people. Furthermore, they came from different communities and did not always mix well. Because there was a certain amount of suspicion among the various communities, people sometimes refused room assignments or seating arrangements at mealtime. At times people around the table spoke in five different languages with no one language in common. This could be very frustrating because we had the responsibility of keeping track

of all the arrangements to ensure that patients made their appointments on time or caught their flights home. The problem was compounded when escorts sent along to interpret for patients took advantage of being in the city and abandoned their charges.

However, we did have northern experiences in common with many of the guests and found Walnut a good place to catch up on developments in the north. Among the patients were many people who identified with the Christian church. Some urged us to arrange devotional times, others showed no interest. However, we informed patients that Walnut was a home where the Bible would be read and prayer could be spoken.

We operated Walnut Receiving Home for two years from May 1976 to May 1978. On May 15 the title of 171 Walnut was transferred to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada which then assumed the mortgage as well as operation of the facility. This experience had been very difficult for Trudie in particular. Now that it was established, we felt Walnut was a sound investment for the Native Ministries program. It complemented the other programs and services being provided. We felt that with the contacts and resources of the Native Ministries program, Walnut Receiving Home could develop beyond what we were able to do on our own. I understand Walnut has had its ups and downs but to this day has become a preferred home away from home for many guests.

My involvement in the city focused on the Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) program. This Native Ministries program was directed mainly at students from northern Manitoba who were finishing their education in Winnipeg. For a time it was located at the corner of Notre Dame Avenue and Langside Street, then on Langside just north Portage Avenue. When Rev. Edwin Brandt moved to Winnipeg from Loon Straits he was asked to explore the possibilities of ministry in the city. He noticed a number of students at the Rehabilitation Centre attached to Health Sciences Centre who were losing out on their education. He developed the idea of starting a tutoring service using volunteers. Early experiences at the Centre highlighted an even greater need: opportunities for these young people to socialize since they came from isolated communities and had few friends and acquaintances in Winnipeg. Menno Wiebe, executive secretary of the Native Ministries program, had the idea of forming Club 12 where frustrations could be aired and support given to the participants. Basketball and ice hockey teams were formed and times to celebrate set aside. What I missed in this program, even at this level, was the difficulty in finding or

The YOU hockey team in 1970–1971.

developing leadership from within the group. Because I was part of the advisory committee and staff, I must share some of the blame for this failure.

In 1976 the program was located in a storefront on Langside Street north of Portage Avenue. On staff were Clarence Nepinak, Elijah McKay, Roger Groening and I. Clarence and Roger were involved in the Club 12 and recreation programs. Clarence coached the hockey team and also encouraged craft production in Winnipeg. Roger was a lanky basketball coach who took the YOU team to a number of national and international tournaments. Tom Jackson, from CBC's "North of 60" series was one of the star players. He also sang at many of the award banquets and dinners sponsored by YOU. Elijah and I addressed pastoral concerns more directly through home and hospital visits and Bible studies. The idea was that Elijah, who was from Sachigo Lake, Ontario, and was fluent in Cree and Saulteaux, would most naturally develop his ministry around the needs of this community in Winnipeg; I would follow up our many acquaintances from the north now living in Winnipeg. All of us used the storefront as our base. We took turns keeping the YOU drop-in centre open. There I met old acquaintances and saw new faces among the people who came through the door. I also quickly got to know and enjoy the Anishinabe Church on Logan and Ellen Street. On May 23 nineteen people with whom we had renewed our friendship in the city met at our house to celebrate our 38th wedding anniversary. It was a warm feeling to know they still remembered us and valued our friendship.

Later in 1976 when the storefront was closed for a variety of reasons, the Native Ministries board struck a five-person study

commission to review urban programs and make recommendations for the future. The needs in the city had changed and staffing had always been difficult. Elijah McKay and I continued to locate and survey scattered families and friends throughout the city. We found approximately six percent of the Metis families we contacted were active in some church program. Fifty-four percent of the families surveyed went to church occasionally. Some did not feel loyalty to any church.

The commission's report released in June 1979, read in part: "In response to constituency requests and advice from Native leaders, it is recommended that in the further development of NM work priority be given to urban centres; that such work be undertaken on an ecumenical basis whenever possible."

In keeping with this directive Elijah and I cultivated contacts with other ministries in Winnipeg and tried to combine our efforts. While we were looking for an office in the downtown area, South East Development Council expressed a concern for their youth attending schools and universities in Winnipeg. I could see that the tribal office visualized that the Indian and Métis families who had been resident in the city for ten to twenty years were in a good position to help ease the transition to city life for families and youth migrating from the reserves. We had plans to rent a storefront on 567 Broadway Avenue together to put this new vision into action, but the tribal council withdrew at the last moment when they received approval to build a facility of their own on Notre Dame Avenue. Elijah and I continued in our efforts to draw people together and develop leadership. We felt leadership had to receive its strength from somewhere and hoped that it could come from spiritually-minded people who drew their strength from studying the Bible. Each week dozens of people came through the new YOU storefront at 587 Broadway. There we experienced the hurts on the streets in very real ways. At the YOU centre people could get away from the noise of the street, pause to make new friends, have a cup of tea and find shelter from the elements. There Elijah's dream of developing a Native church was retold many times. There also spontaneous Bible studies were sometimes sought and held. We set aside Wednesday evenings for more structured Bible studies.

I found it takes strength and stamina to learn to suffer with people in crisis. In 1980 my diary documents that I made 400 visits to hospitals. I tried to schedule regular visits for two days a week at Health Sciences Centre, St. Boniface, Grace and Concordia hospitals. I followed this routine to provide consistent pastoral care to northern

Elijah McKay, my co-worker in Native Ministries work in Winnipeg.

patients and their families. Usually I was accompanied by Trudie when I visited families in their homes. Somehow I felt more complete when she was at my side, contributing her gifts. One couple on our circuit came to the conclusion that they should legalize their common-law marriage to set an example for their children. They wished to have a Christian wedding and indicated a desire to institute a Christian home for their two young boys. We were able to guide them through the experience.

Elijah and I tried to continue the practice of celebration which had been part of the earlier YOU program. Together we prepared and found funding for banquets which were usually held at Home Street Mennonite Church. On many occasions members of the church joined in. For me skinning bush rabbits and preparing rabbit stew was a new experience. The meal was often accompanied by fresh bannock, canned fruit and lots of tea and coffee. This was followed by a speaker and a program. Of course it also included a lot of spontaneous sharing and singing.

For some time Native Ministries workers had regularly attended the annual ecumenical conferences at Gimli, and the board had given a specific mandate to work on an ecumenical basis in the city. As urban church workers we also met regularly to encourage each other and seek ways of cooperation among various church programs. Urban Native Ministries Committee, as we called ourselves, consisted of an ad hoc group of workers from seven different churches. One of our initiatives was to explore models for leadership development. A number of proven models developed in the United States were discussed at length but no

concrete steps were taken to implement them in Canada. In recent years the United Church has opened a theological training centre at Beausejour, Manitoba, to which the Native Ministries program has sponsored several students. The Urban Native Ministries Committee also called for a Spiritual Hunger Conference held on November 7–8, 1980, at the Winnipeg Friendship Centre. This event was widely publicized on radio and television. A goodly number of people, including Native people from Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, came out for this two-day conference. The committee was puzzled at the poor showing from local church groups. The event was a moving experience as Christians shared in their struggle to find a place within the established church especially in the urban context.

It was after this conference that the Leonard Settee daughters, Elsie, Eleanor and Pat, came to see us at 920 Warsaw Avenue one Sunday evening with the question, "Can you help start a Christian church in Winnipeg?" This was an answer to prayer and a call we could not ignore. For some time we had been praying for the beginning of the Métis Church in Winnipeg and felt this was God's leading. A year earlier we had discovered the Grenier family, whom we knew from Manitogotagan and Bissett 15 years earlier, was living in Winnipeg. Lillian (nee Wozny) had been baptized at Grace Mennonite Church in Manigotagan in 1961. She had married Jerry Grenier and together they had eight children. We had been having Bible studies in their home every Wednesday evening for a year when the Settee sisters approached

Participants in The Métis Church of Winnipeg in the early 1980s.

us with their request. We asked the Greniers whether they could see themselves as part of this church venture. They thought this might work and put their energies into making a worship service a reality. The name, The Métis Church of Winnipeg, was adopted some time later when we received charitable organization status from the Government of Manitoba.

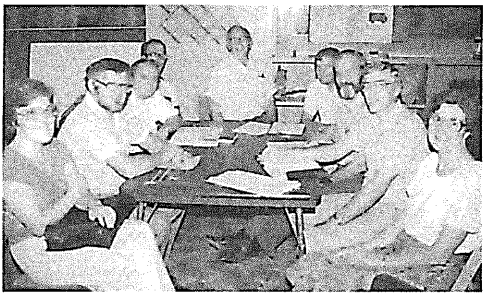
Worship services were held at three different locations. At first we held afternoon services at the Home Street Mennonite Church. This arrangement wasn't altogether satisfactory. While we searched for a more suitable location the group met at the YOU. It wasn't long before Bethel Burrows Church in north-end Winnipeg made their basement, complete with kitchen facilities, available to us. We met mainly for worship purposes and felt that we would be able to encourage northerners who lived in this area of the city to worship with us. For a time we held Sunday school so that everyone could actively participate. The Settee sisters also shared their talents by providing guitar music and singing. Evan and Arlie Shultz, a young couple from the church who later spent three years in Bloodvein River, added their talents to our efforts.

One factor which contributed to the eventual disbanding of The Métis Church of Winnipeg was the disappointing development in Jerry Grenier's life. We knew there were difficulties in Jerry and Lillian's marriage and that they had been separated for a time. However, Jerry did confess to being a believer and asked to be baptized upon confession of his faith. There was some uneasiness about this but consensus was reached and a baptismal service was held for Jerry. Tensions arose when he began to see himself as leader of the group. Jerry, along with Elijah and Jeannette McKay and Pat and Earl Settee, participated in a special leadership class conducted by various local pastors. The main courses were held at Home Street Mennonite Church and concluded with a seminar at Elim Bible School in Altona. Sad to say it was at this point that we lost Jerry Grenier: from his workplace, from The Métis Church of Winnipeg and from his family. Apparently, he drifted to British Columbia and died near Vernon several years later. This meant Lillian Grenier was left to look after her large family alone. After this the group found it difficult to rally. We also had difficulty meeting in one location since we were scattered across the city and Lillian no longer had a means of transportation. The decision to disband officially was made by the founding group in the autumn of 1988, three years after we had retired from active service. Lillian, Elsie, Eleanor and Pat were present. Lillian who looked after our bank account

transferred the bank balance over to the Native Ministries program.

I became aware of a resolution passed at the November 24, 1979, annual meeting of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba that dealt with finding ways of providing adequate housing for Native people who were reported to be the largest, underhoused group in the city of Winnipeg. Out of this resolution came the formation of an inter-Mennonite society known as Mennonite Urban Renewal Program (MURP). Initial funding got a boost from 30 members, mostly from River East Mennonite Brethren Church, who had raised a substantial amount of capital for this purpose. Also helpful were Peter Kroeker and Peter Thiessen who had experience in residential management in the Winnipeg housing market. On July 14, 1981, I wrote a letter to Vern Ratzlaff of MCC Manitoba to report on our progress. MURP's vision included providing affordable housing as well as employment for low income or homeless people in Winnipeg. Originally, our thinking involved the purchase and renovation of single family units, but some board members felt that purchasing an apartment block would provide low rental housing more efficiently. The argument was we could provide more housing to more people more quickly in apartment blocks. When the Vogel Apartment, a 21-unit block, became available for under 100,000 dollars and met our guidelines, a meeting of the society was called to approve the purchase. This good start would give us some experience in being landlords before we tackled bigger projects. I felt uneasy about purchasing additional blocks on Toronto Street and Westminster Avenue soon after that. We seemed impatient to expand without involving the poor in our planning and decision-making which had been an important part of our original vision. However, the board was persuaded that, in order to make the program viable and to make more efficient use of Gerald Brown, our manager, we needed the 64 suites. My concern was that we were moving too independently of the persons we were trying to help. How could I explain MURP to people in need of shelter whom Elijah and I encountered in the course of our ministries? Elijah was particularly upset that the effort had not been coordinated with existing housing initiatives by Native organizations in the city. Many northern people saw MURP as just another organization in which they had no ownership or voice.

At this time Habitat for Humanity was also organizing in Winnipeg and inquired whether we could combine our efforts since the organizations had similar goals. Their plan was to build affordable single family homes with 0 percent mortgages. The MURP board decided our own initiatives were on track and needed all our attention.

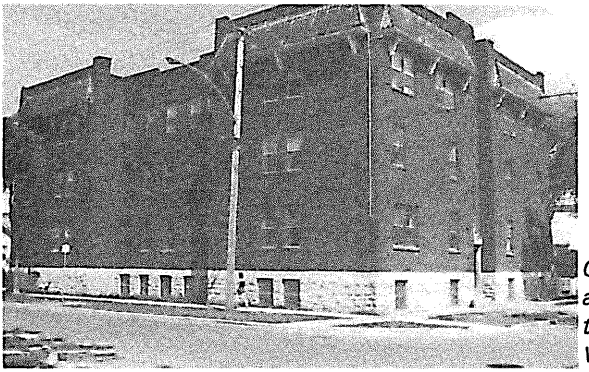


Members of the MURP board in 1981.

We were convinced that the two efforts would not be in competition. We felt the apartment complexes could carry themselves financially and, with some additional effort, we could assist in building community among the blocks.

Both Native Ministries of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and Cornerstone Church of the Mennonite Brethren Conference got involved and tried to find ways of ministering to tenants in the MURP apartment blocks. At one point Reg Litz reminded us that we may have put the cart before the horse by putting in these caregivers without alleviating the serious overload experienced by the manager. Gerald not only managed the blocks but also did most of the repairs and supervised the renovations. He found all the roles difficult to juggle since tenants could be very demanding and difficult to deal with. I think our board members should have lived in the blocks so that they would have been able to hear the cry, "Lord have mercy on us." I'm guessing we might have been spared some errors by exploring solutions together with the tenants who shared our vision. We really never got to understand all that is involved in being poor, homeless and vulnerable in the city because we didn't take the time to have the poor teach us. We defined the problem from our perspective and addressed it within our limited view.

Once we had the three complexes, it was impossible to back up and start over again. We found we had not done our homework adequately on another score. Our intention was to provide quality and safe housing at affordable prices with full knowledge that the blocks we had purchased were among the older housing stock in the city. We discovered that the city was giving particular attention to standards in older apartments and began making demands for renovations and repairs to meet new city codes. To comply with these orders we had to find volunteers in a variety of trades to have the necessary work done. We even had to find volunteer steam engineers to replace a few of the old boilers. For a time we were able to cope with these challenges, but



One of the MURP apartments on Atlantic Avenue in north Winnipeg.

sometimes we got lost in the magnitude of the project. In the end, financing of the new purchases and necessary renovations and maintenance proved to be the MURP organization's Achilles heel. As I write this, MURP is no more. I hope we learned some lessons which can help us develop more sensitive approaches to expressing our concerns for the homeless.

In 1979 soon after we had moved in, Rick Allen and Barry Morris, two United Church workers, came to see me at Youth Opportunities Unlimited at 567 Broadway. They had come to find out about our program and to welcome us. They expressed the hope that our organization could be of help to churches in the neighbourhood. They bemoaned the fact that "our churches up and down the street do not adequately minister or meet the needs of people who come knocking at the church doors." Out of the needs they identified eventually grew the vision and planning for an ecumenical effort to address the issue in the area bounded by Broadway and Portage Avenues, Main and Sherburn Streets. At the time—institutions, churches, synagogues, agencies and others—were giving out vouchers for food or handing out food directly. The vision, which eventually took shape in the Agape Table program, was to provide a meal, with companionship, warmth and shelter, along with some opportunity for counselling and personal development to street people in the area. During the spring and summer of 1980, Agape Table operated a soup kitchen out of Young United Church on a three-month trial basis. When the 90-day trial period was over, some churches continued providing food to street people. I remember that Elizabeth Krahn, who had been the cook for those 90 days, kept on supplying sandwiches to people on the street and at YOU. The executive of the

Agape Table program kept on reviewing what had been done and what possibly could or should be done before winter came along. With a grant from St. Stephens Broadway Church, planning for a permanent site began in earnest.

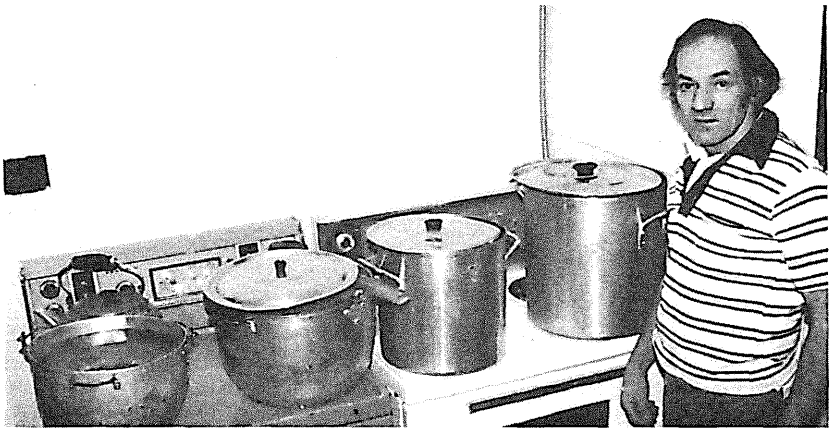
On November 3, 1980, Agape Table opened its doors at 567B Broadway Avenue in an apartment behind the YOU storefront. We served an average of 60 meals a day and had outgrown the small apartment. We were looking for a new facility when the president of Broadway Optimist Community Club asked if we would consider moving into the Recreation Centre at 175 Young Street a few blocks west of Broadway Avenue. This was a godsend because the hall was spacious and would serve our purposes very well. The city health inspector informed us we would need to install an automatic dish washer. Fortunately the city also supplied a grant of 5,700 dollars to bring the building up to specifications. In addition to the dishwasher, renovations were also required to the cupboards, floors and walls. It helped the program that we were able to arrange a three-year lease with the city at a very nominal rate.

As chairperson of the steering committee, I had the privilege of addressing Agape Table's first annual meeting of street and church people to remind ourselves who we were and that we had to work together for a very good cause. Following is part of what I said to the group:

The storefront at 567B Broadway Avenue, home of Youth Opportunities Unlimited, with an apartment behind it which housed Agape Table in the early 1980s.

> All of you know that we have come together from many Christian churches and other persuasions in order to work at this gigantic task of assisting the poor in providing a safe place to have one meal five days a week at the place we call Agape Table. Our hope is that by doing this at least one myth which our Native friends have about the white man's churches—"They cannot work together;" "See how they have divided our families in our communities to the point where we have not recognized the Christ whom they claim,"—might be brushed aside by saying, "See how they work together, how they love each other." Our prayers for the givers and receivers are that all our friends would be helped in finding the true peace of God through our willingness to seek to understand and keep on working for the common good. Personally speaking, we have been blessed.
>
> It is with a feeling of joy and thankfulness that we have been able to employ a good staff and many volunteers who have worked so faithfully and given of themselves as true evangels to needy people on our Winnipeg streets and this can be said of people living around the Broadway west area. We shall never know what our simple acts of kindness really are doing to develop the interest and the commitment to a better life amongst those whose lives we are touching day after day.

I was involved with the Agape Table board for six years and served in a variety of capacities. I visited the site regularly and found the number of friends coming to have a bowl of soup and chat were far greater than the number of transients. I also felt that people would come to eat and make room for others that were standing in the waiting line. At other times the dining room area was almost solemn when we



In the kitchen at Agape Table on Broadway Avenue in 1983.

thanked God for "our daily bread" as we prayed the Lord's Prayer. Very seldom was there loud talking and when there was it came from those who had had enough to eat or too much to drink, which sometimes happened. It was really good to see that friends would reprimand each other when there was trouble and unrest. They would simply say to each other, "Do you want to spoil this good thing and take it away from us?"

By late 1984 Trudie in particular was looking forward to retirement. As I approached my sixty-fifth year events unfolded more quickly than we had planned. Six days after we had tentatively listed our house we received an offer for the full asking price. We had no choice but to accept and make hurried plans.

When we told our children, Phyllis was particularly upset, "Mom, how could you be so stupid to sell in the coldest time of the year with no place to go."

Trudie replied, "Me and my God have gone many a mile together and He will not let us down."

The next day at noon, the manager from Bethel Place, a seniors' complex near Bethel Mennonite Church, called to say a suite would be available on February 15. We hurried there to make our deposit and came home to another surprise. John Funk, executive secretary of the Native Ministries program at the time, had come to deliver a retirement gift from the Conference: an all-expense paid study tour to the Holy Land leaving on February 12. We made a hurried trip to visit our children, relatives and friends in the west and were back in Winnipeg by January 25 to pack and move. Before we left on the tour the Native Ministries board arranged a retirement supper for us in Selkirk during the annual Council of Board's sessions. Some 120 relatives and friends from all the places we had served, Native Ministries staff and board members were there. It was a great evening. "Lord, how can we ever praise you enough for all you have done for us."

We left Winnipeg on the morning of February 12 for Chicago where we met the rest of our tour group and flew to Tel Aviv via Amsterdam. There we were picked up by bus and taken to Jerusalem where we stayed for three nights and took in guided tours during the day and lectures in the evenings. After three days in Galilee, we returned to Jerusalem for another three days. In addition we stopped in Egypt for three days, then returned home. I can't begin to tell you what a moving experience this was for both of us. We walked in places and saw sights we had only read about and cherished while reading scripture. It was a pilgrimage everyone should take if they possibly can.

Once back in Winnipeg it was time to settle in at Bethel Place and

make the most of our retirement years. We still didn't know whether we could actually retire, but we knew we could do with a good rest. We dusted off the German Bible and began to become fluent in a language we had used very little since we first went to Matheson Island. We also wanted to take plenty of time to visit our children and especially the grandchildren. It seemed as if we had had very little time for our own children when they were growing up and, if we did not make an effort, we would miss our grandchildren's early years as well.

I believe many of the Kanadier Mennonites in Mexico are welcoming change and know in their hearts it will come. . . . In our assistance we need to dissolve the barriers between the Mennonite denominations. We need to hear their requests for assistance as cries for help from one member of the Mennonite family to another and respond with the energy and commitment Jesus asked of the seventy he sent out (Luke 10).

10

Discovering Mennonite Kinfolk
Mexico 1987–1988

Once we had settled into our apartment we began to take seriously the task of making Bethel Place our new home and community. The facility more than adequately provided us with the secure accommodation we were looking for in our retirement years. What we had not been prepared for was sharing our everyday life with other seniors whose experiences had been very different than ours. I thought we were moving into a community of friends who could be supportive of each other during the latter stages of their lives. However, I often felt like an outsider with little in common with other residents. Sometimes it felt as if I had peculiar beliefs and was out of the mainstream of many conversations. When I raised the topic of our involvement in northern communities at coffee in the South Oak Inn attached to the complex, I received the terse response, "Don't talk about your life's interest; we know all about those Native people." On another occasion there were objections to hanging two original oil paintings by Indian artists in the recreation room even though the paintings had been explained as expressing a belief in the God of creation. I felt people should want to know and appreciate another side of Indian peoples' experience rather than the popular stereotypes. Initially it was a real disappointment to be misunderstood when I mingled with the other residents. I needed to overcome this fear of rejection during the transition from a private residence and fairly autonomous and wide-ranging pastoral ministry to a more restricted and initially unfamiliar lifestyle. During the first year

I struggled with reaffirming who I had become in the Way and my need to develop a sense of belonging within the Bethel Place community. Sometimes it felt more like literally being "in the way."

February 16, 1987, we received an unexpected call from Menno Kroeker, director of Kanadier Concerns for MCC Canada, asking us to consider a two-year assignment in Mexico. Several days later we met at the South Oak Inn where he laid out details of the proposal and led us to believe the final decision was in our court. The assignment involved a counselling and pastoral ministry attached to the medical clinic run by Dr. Franz Penner in Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. The project was sponsored by a foundation with the support of the Mexico *Hilfskomitee* and the Kanadier Concerns Committee of MCC Canada. While we were contemplating the possibilities of our involvement in the project during the following weeks, our devotions focused on Matthew. In chapter ten we reflected on the story of Jesus sending out the seventy. They were to take no extra precautions, to preach the message of peace; if rejected they were to find another place and, if arrested and brought before the courts, they were not to be concerned because the Lord would give them words to speak. We wondered if there was a message in this for us. In Matthew 13:12 we read, "Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" *(NIV)*. In other words, Jesus expects us to use the revelations and gifts that God has given to us. If we don't, we will lose them in the end.

We were still unconvinced about whether we should go to Mexico and took some time to seek the counsel of our friends, Mr. and Mrs. John P. Dyck, who had worked among Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico, Paraguay and Belize. They were particularly encouraging. Ruth Friesen, a Native Ministries board member and volunteer coordinator for South Oak Inn, also gave some helpful encouragement, "If your health is good enough, why don't you go?" After checking with our family all signals seemed to be "go" so we filled out the necessary paper work to be processed by MCC Canada.

While we were waiting, we made preparations for a two-year stay in Mexico. Dr. C. Hildahl, our family physician, arranged for a duplicate set of medical records to take with us. Menno Bergen and Willie Guenther helped us work through Spanish lessons so we would have an elementary grasp of conversational Spanish before arriving in Mexico. I found Walter Schmiedehaus' book *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (1948) a good introduction to Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico even though the German was not the Luther German I was familiar with.

Another book I found helpful was Howard J. Clinebell, Jr.'s *Understanding and Counselling the Alcoholic.* We had been informed that alcoholism would be a significant part of our counselling ministry.

Before we could leave we needed to attend an MCC Canada orientation for volunteers at CMBC from June 16 to June 26. These sessions covered a range of theological, logistical and practical issues. We were reminded of MCC's historical position of caring, peace and serving in the name of Christ. We were asked to be "peacemakers in today's world." Through our assignments we were to communicate a Christian faith that was strong and constant, emphasizing love and caring in our everyday contacts with people. We were to remember that the dynamics of spiritual life manifest themselves most forcefully during life's transitions such as childbirth, marriage and death. During practical sessions we rubbed shoulders with residents of a Toronto Street low-rental apartment in a cleanup and repair of apartment block B. We also shared a common meal with the residents. One day we also attended court and were exposed to the mediation model developed by MCC.

During the orientation Menno Kroeker informed us that our departure would be delayed until Dr. Franz Penner returned to Mexico from a visit to Canada at the end of July. We were anxious to be on our way and found this delay frustrating. Our friends at church noticed our impatience and extended their hospitality and understanding—this is the time Jake and Tina Letkemann introduced us to a dice game called "Zilch." Menno Kroeker suggested we use this time to familiarize ourselves with Kanadier Mennonites living in Manitoba. We learned that, for a variety of reasons, many of them had recently returned to Canada from Mexico. We also found out they had been denied Mexican citizenship because of their refusal of military training and had retained their Canadian citizenship by default. However, many were born in Mexico and had not officially been registered as Canadians. Between visiting Kanadier Mennonites in southern Manitoba and visiting friends we were able to fill our time productively and enjoyably but were still anxious to begin our new adventure along the Way.

On July 28 we left Winnipeg with our Astro Van loaded with bedding, clothes, books, typewriter, piano accordion, dishes and other personal effects. It was raining as we crossed into North Dakota at Neche at mid-morning. By evening we were in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Our next stop was Newton, Kansas. On the third day we reached Plainview, Texas. The next day being Sunday, we visited the EMMC Church in Seminole for morning worship and arrived in El

Paso, Texas, at 6:45 p.m. Our contacts there were Jac and Bertha Kroeker who directed us to the Imperial 400 Motel which would become our home whenever we came to El Paso on business or to renew our Mexican visas. The next day Jac helped us with getting our van insured and making a deposit at the El Paso Federal Savings and Loans on which we could write cheques while living in Mexico. We had no trouble crossing the border and were soon on the last 400 kilometres to our destination. We arrived in Chihuahua later that evening and, with the help of Dr. Penner, serviced the van and found accommodation for the night. On the morning of the sixth day after leaving Winnipeg Franz and Sarah Penner, our assignment coordinators, welcomed us royally. Our home was in Cuauhtemoc across the street from Clinica Santa Maria, seven kilometres south of Dr. Franz Penner's clinic.

Excerpts from a letter Trudie wrote to our friends back home describe our involvement well.

November 6, 1987

Dear friends in Canada,
Greetings!

Our first three months have come and gone. It has been a good three months. Even though we sometimes feel we are not doing that much, we have been kept busy. We have visited 54 homes so far. In some homes we have been a few times, according to need. We have been to six different churches, and Jake goes to the Santa Maria Clinic every day. That is a good place to contact people and visit the sick. It's just across the street from us. We find most of the people friendly. Some families are poor, others are quite rich.

This Sunday the 8th is the joint Thanksgiving service of the Conference churches here at the Blumenau Church. The churches here have problems too. The biggest issue at this time is mixed marriages. Some of the Mennonite girls want to marry Mexican boys. A few already have. The parents blame the church. Why do they allow the Mexicans

The Blumenau Conference Church in Cuauhtemoc in 1988.

to attend the Mennonite churches? We have told some that we have five different denominations in our family. How can we do mission work if we do not want to accept other people?

Last night we went to an [Alcohol Anonymous] A A meeting, Jake to the men's group, I to the ladies.' There were twelve ladies, two from the Conference church, the others from the Reinländer, Kleingemeinde and Sommerfelder. Mrs. Abe Harms is a good leader, a dedicated Christian with a husband that is drinking heavily. Her life is not easy, but she is faithful. All the ladies seem to gather strength to carry on for another week. These meetings seem to be the high points in their lives. Jake thought the men's group was not as meaningful. They lack strong Christian leadership, and their leader cannot read. Therefore it is hard for him to study so he can present the lesson well. He is a very good man though, who has not been drinking for eight years now.

Last Sunday we went to El Paso to renew our papers. It was a good trip. We came back Wednesday night. We stopped at Casa Grande to visit a family Jake has been working with. They had moved to the Quellen Colony, so we visited his parents who also are very concerned about their children. Coming home through the mountains at night where you have never travelled before was trying. It delayed our homecoming by two hours. It was a good road, only zigzagging back and forth made it slow going. But we are back and ready to go on with the work we are to do.

We are getting used to the food here and can shop without too much difficulty. My baking has improved a lot, even though it is not like in Canada yet. The weather is still very nice. My garden is just about all dug up ready for planting in spring. This has been my exercise instead of walking on broken sidewalks.

Some Canadians working here are: Tina Fehr, nurse in Cuauhtemoc; Helen Ens, teacher in Steinreich; Abram Siemens, teacher in Quinta La Pita; George Reimer, *Menno Zeitung,* Cuauhtemoc; Henry and Helen Dueck, pastor of the Blumenau Church; Philip Dycks with agriculture in Cuauhtemoc; Werner Froeses at Burwalde Church; and John Bergmans in the Santa Rita Church.

Did you know that: 1) the Mennonite population is around 40,000 living in an area of about 1,000 square miles; 2) the city of Cuauhtemoc (population 80,000 Mexicans) is at the south end of these colonies?

Jake and Trudie Unrau

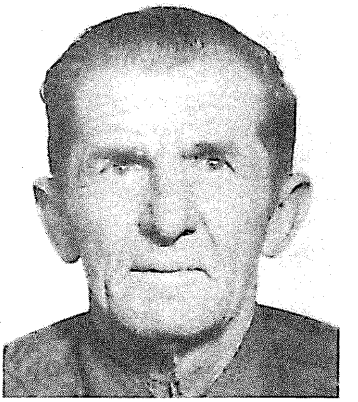
P. S. As you can see we enjoy our work and we find plenty to do, but we feel that our part of the work should terminate on July 31, 1988.

Living among the Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico gave me the opportunity to examine stereotypes other Mennonites have of them. We were able to see them at their worst through the work at the clinic and

The Jacob Neufeld family who celebrated their release from alcoholism through the AA program.

through our association with the Alcohol Anonymous (AA) programs. We found people were struggling with a serious alcoholism problem in the colonies. At the same time we also saw them at their best in community building and in determined struggles to overcome their addictions. Several profiles of people we learned to appreciate while we were there may help the reader gain a more balanced attitude toward these brothers and sisters with whom we share a common history and faith.

Abram Friesen was a member of the *Hilfskomitee* (Service Committee) which had been instrumental in starting the *Altenheim* (seniors' home) near Cuauhtemoc. This home had found acceptance in the Manitoba and Swift colonies in Chihuahua. While we were there Abram was looking into the needs of handicapped children in villages with Reinländer and Old Colony churches. He had an ability to motivate people around a cause and could turn their collective interest into concrete action. I was present when he called delegates from the villages to discuss a proposal that had come to his attention. We met in an old building at Campo 6½ (also known as Lowe Farm), which had been used as a cheese factory but was vacant and for sale. The meeting was to decide whether this building could be renovated to meet the needs of people with handicaps. Abram proposed one way of raising the needed capital for the initial purchase of the property and renovations: divide the 40 acres on which the building was located into lots which could be purchased by the delegates as individual shareholders in the project. This would bring in enough money to buy the property as well as get the major renovations to the building done. At the end of the meeting I raised the issue of teachers and nurses to run the new institution. This was a secondary question that needed more work. The



Martin Hildebrandt, an ardent social activist in the Old Colony villages and leader of the local AA group.

decision to purchase the property was postponed temporarily. Later Abram found a solution and proposed merging the administration of the home for the handicapped with that of the *Altenheim.*

Another person I got to know quite well was Martin Hildebrandt, an ardent social activist in the villages. Martin and his wife lived on a small farm near Campo 6½. We learned that they were Old Colony Church people and were proud of it. Martin did not own a car but used a horse and buggy to travel from one village to the next. He was well known as a butcher and in demand in surrounding villages. He was also the local AA leader and in that capacity a source of information, advice and support for the counselling I was asked to do. He was the first to give me AA materials translated into the German language. Martin, a recovering alcoholic himself, tirelessly confronted other alcoholics who still needed to be freed from "the evil one." He did not hesitate to advise them to call on the higher power of God for salvation from this terrible sickness. In many ways Martin welcomed and encouraged inter-Mennonite cooperation. He often expressed the idea that denominations should not hinder, but rather cooperate in liberating people from the habit that was destroying Mennonites as individual people, families, churches and as a society. He said the church pulpits should support each other so the Mexican Mennonite society could experience healing, forgiveness and true salvation. I attended some of the AA meetings led by Martin. Even though the materials were written and read in High German, the discussions were all in Low German. Sometimes the Luther Bible was read but the interpretation was always done in Low German. A text of great significance to many AA members was Ephesians 2:8:

> Denn aus Gnade seid ihr selig geworden durch den Glauben—und das nicht aus euch: Gottes Gabe ist es—, nicht aus den Werken, auf dass sich nicht jemand ruehme. Denn wir sind sein Werk, geschaffen in Christo Jesus zu guten Werken, zu welchen Gott uns zuvor bereitet hat, dass wir darin wandeln sollen. (For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do).

In the last few months of 1987 Martin Hildebrandt became very sick and could not always attend the weekly meetings. The local AA group often went to visit and talk with him at his bedside. Even though Martin was weak he had a charisma which convinced us he would fully recover. However, his condition continued to deteriorate. He and his wife decided to hold an auction and visit their sons in Manitoba to seek further medical help, but to no avail. As his condition continued to worsen the trip was put off and he had to undergo major surgery to repair damage to his kidneys. Before and after the surgery he experienced constant pain. His children from Manitoba and Seminole, Texas, came to see him before he died. We agonized with the family as they were forced to make hard decisions during this time of crisis.

Martin's death was a tremendous loss to the AA program. During his eight years of sobriety he had demonstrated his leadership abilities and helped many friends overcome their addiction. Through his efforts AA gained acceptance as an effective way of learning to lean on the higher power. It helped addicted believers find help, hope and happiness in the community and within themselves. They could boldly talk of living victorious lives. It was the higher power (God) within the group that could set the individual free from the power of alcohol. Whenever I saw the caring and patience in the group, I was reminded of the Way that leads to life. Even in death Martin was testimony to that fact.

As Trudie mentioned, our stay in Mexico was shortened to one year. In this short time we made dear friends that will remain in our memories. We also learned to know and appreciate more of the total Mennonite family. Some Mennonites in Canada might want to ignore or even disown especially the criminal elements among them as identified on the national news. I believe many Kanadier Mennonites in Mexico are welcoming change and know in their hearts it will come. One thing is clear to me: God has His people in Mexico. A sentiment I heard repeated in one form or another suggested that church and community leaders were afraid to tackle the serious problems in their villages.

Abram Friesen once said, "If the Ältesten and deacons will not act, then we will have to do it ourselves."

Rather than condemning, our response to Kanadier Mennonites in Mexico should be a willingness to continue to send innovators such as the Henry Hieberts who introduced the Alcohol Anonymous program. In our assistance we need to dissolve the barriers between Mennonite denominations. We need to hear their requests for assistance as cries for help from one member of the Mennonite family to another and respond with the energy and commitment Jesus asked of the seventy he sent out (Luke 10).

. . . many strangers have joined you en route on your pilgrimage. The warming of hearts takes place, your pilgrimage has become meaningful. People you walk with have become friends . . . to walk in the same direction having a conversation. . . . That's life's calling. Today is the jubilee reflection on your pilgrimage. There will be cause to recognize our Lord as your fellow traveller just like Jesus joined the Emmaus disciples. Who can give great inspiration, who breaks the bread with people, and who generates love for life? Mission has little purpose if there is no love for life.—Menno Wiebe

11

Resting along the Way
Retired but Not Finished

We arrived back in Winnipeg in late June 1988 and resumed our retirement. Besides learning to make the most of Bethel Place by participating in the life of the community through recreation, worship and volunteering at the South Oak Inn, we also kept up our friendships with friends in the north. Also we indulged our earlier intentions of getting closer to our own family members, especially our grandchildren. Bethel Place has grown on us to the point we can genuinely call it home. It has become the secure base that has allowed us the freedom to leave on interim assignments or visit friends and family without concern. While there, it provides varied opportunities to nurture our physical, social and spiritual needs among friends.

As I mentioned earlier this was the time the original members of The Winnipeg Métis Church decided to dissolve as a group. They are still part of our lives and often join us to celebrate anniversaries or birthdays. From time to time we also visit northern communities and have northern residents contact us in Winnipeg. For Matheson Island this is more difficult because the board at the time had given us explicit instructions not to interfere with the workers who replaced us. As a

After retirement we had more time to spend time with the family—a family gathering in September 1989 at Mable and Ken DeGraffs home in Neepawa.

result we feel freer to circulate in Selkirk, Manigotagan and Hole River. Over the years we have been invited to speak in Manigotagan a number of times and rejoice at the energy and growth of the group nurtured by Ruth and Murray Martin (1981–present), Oliver and Hulda Heppner (1985–1991) and John and Marie Zacharias (1993–present). We sense the moving of the Spirit among them as new people are added to the fellowship and mature in the Christian faith. We also keep in touch with our friends in Selkirk. Selkirk Christian Fellowship has gone through some difficult transitions in the past five years and a ministry around Terry and Cara Widrick is emerging with a distinctly Indian Christian orientation. We applaud the vision and energy this young and capable couple brings to a renewed ministry in Selkirk.

Once we had settled in and resumed our old patterns we began feeling the need to moderate our involvement in our home church, Home Street Mennonite. Driving to meetings at night was becoming more difficult. Bethel Mennonite Church next door to Bethel Place had just expanded its capacity in the new sanctuary to 700 and we felt we could continue our Conference involvement there. We knew we would be missed in the smaller church and would become almost invisible in the larger one, but we decided it was important to be members in the church we found we were attending with some regularity. We made the

transfer official on November 24, 1991, and put all our energies into supporting the various programs of Bethel Mennonite Church.

At the same time as we shifted to a more relaxed lifestyle, we found it difficult to say "no" to continued involvement in the Native Ministries program. In the fall of 1988 Murray and Ruth Martin left Hole River on a study leave and we were asked to fill in while they were away. It was a treat to rub shoulders with our old friends on a daily basis and catch up on the changes that had affected their lives since we had lived in the area. One obvious change was the 70-kilometre paved highway between Manigotagan and Pine Falls. We remembered when it was under construction and nothing more than a sea of mud. The gravel road was better but was dusty when dry and slick when wet. These communities were no longer as isolated as they had been when we were there. It was almost unbelievable that things could change so much in such a short time. Actually it felt more like house sitting since few ministry tasks had been assigned to us. Several things required attention before winter set in. The septic tank and water line needed to be covered with brush to catch the snow and prevent the water system from freezing up. Oliver Heppner, who was still in Manigotagan, helped me get eight cords of jackpine for the winter's supply of firewood. One of the delightful tasks

Participating in the 40th anniversary celebration of the newly restored Matheson Island log church in July 1988 soon after our return from Mexico.

was feeding the bluejays on the back porch. We could always count on a real show as they gorged themselves on sunflower seeds and whatever else we set out for them. I had learned to reweave lawn chairs at Bethel Place and found I had time to experiment with different patterns and colours. I sometimes walked to the band office for a visit or sat on the sunny side of a construction shack with Alfred Williams, Sr., and watched a construction crew install a huge steel-framed bridge across the Wanipigow River to connect the settlements of Hole River and East Seymourville (Agaming). We took part in the regular Bible studies and worship services while we lived in Hole River. It was particularly encouraging to witness the unity of the Christians in Hole River and Manigotagan during the weekly Sunday morning services. This was a first in our recollection and a very positive development. We have been back several times since then and praise God for the signs of growth and vitality in the group.

Another highlight in my retirement was the honour of being recognized as one of the founders of the Wanipigow Producer's Co-op. It happened on November 6, 1992, at the celebration of the Cooperatives 30th anniversary. As the first bookkeeper I was asked to present a historical overview of the organization. It was gratifying to know that my efforts had been appreciated and were being recognized.

Another celebration is still fresh in my memory, not only because it is more recent, but because it had a lot of personal significance. On May 23, 1993, Trudie and I celebrated 50 years of marriage in the company of people we loved very deeply: our children and their spouses, our grandchildren, relatives from near and far, friends and colleagues from northern and southern Manitoba. Without their support and understanding our life in ministry would have been more difficult. They had given us a lifetime of memories of work and struggle, joy and laughter. It was only right that they were all there to celebrate with us.

Before I get to the celebration itself let me bring you up to date on our children and grandchildren. ***Patricia Faith*** (Pat) our oldest, was our "Honey Bun." Her public school education was at Matheson Island and Charleswood with grade 9 at Manigotagan in a makeshift school building called "Dot's Cafe." Later she graduated from the MCI in Gretna and went on to Elim Bible School in Altona. From there she went into voluntary service in Hamilton, Ontario, and to Thompson, Manitoba. She married Earl Settee from Matheson Island, a boat captain on inland waters like Lake Winnipeg, later also on the Beaufort Sea and MacKenzie River in the Northwest Territories. They live on a farm near Camp Morton north of Gimli.

The Jacob and Trudie Unrau Family Tree

Jacob M. Unrau 1-19-1920 **Trudie Giesbrecht** 4-17-1919
m. 5-23-1943

Patricia 5-31-1944 Earland Settee 3-26-1931
m. 9-15-1973
Carman (son of Earland from a previous marriage)

Hedwig 5-27-1945 Ronald Sklaruk 5-17-1943
m. 5-17-1969
Cheryl Rae 2-20-1970
Andrea 11-3-1971

Larry 2-26-1949 Karen Hogg 6-7-1950
m. 7-6-1968–1974
Kurt 12-17-1968 to 3-29-1975*
Richard 3-1-1970
Debbie Kiesman 7-10-1955
m. 7-13-1975
Ryan 12-8-1979
Ashlee 10-12-1983

Mable 9-19-1950 Ken DeGraff 12-31-1948
m. 9-17-1971
Tara 3-1-1976
Jolene 12-29-1977 to 8-18-1995*

Phyllis 12-15-1953 Ron Vialoux 10-22-1950
m. 12-27-1974–1979
Pamela 6-25-1975
Austin 7-9-1978
Bill Frailick 4-8-1939
m. 3-4-1989–1993

Vernelle 4-9-1957 Jack Unrau 11-22-1956 to 5-8-1980*
m. 10-28-1978
Justin 3-16-1980

Hedwig Trudie (Hedy), our "Suka Puss," got her nickname because she had a weakness for dried fruit. When Trudie wanted to make *Plüme Mooss* (fruit soup) none could be found. She attended public schools at Matheson Island, Charleswood and Manigotagan, took grade nine at W.C. Miller Collegiate in Altona and graduated from the MCI in Gretna. Following high school she took her registered nurses' training at Grace Hospital in Winnipeg. Hedy is married to Ron Sklaruk from Yorkton, Saskatchewan; they have two daughters, Cheryl and Andrea. Ron was a peacekeeper with the Canadian forces in Cyprus. Hedy still nurses and Ron has an upholstery business in Canora, Saskatchewan. One humorous memory of Hedy (now called Heide) has to do with how she got her driver's licence. After she graduated from the MCI I took her to A.L. Friesen, the local examiner. His only question was, "How many telephone poles have you run down?" She answered, "None" and without further testing she was issued a driver's licence.

Larry Leonard, nicknamed "Pickerel," received his public schooling at Matheson Island, Charleswood and Manigotagan. He attended the MCI and apprenticed as a plumber-pipefitter with Derksen Plumbing and Heating. He continues to work in this profession. Larry is married to Debby Kiesman; they have two children, Ryan and Ashlee. Larry had two sons, Kurt and Richard, from a previous marriage. Kurt died in a tragic accident on March 29, 1975, while we were in Oklahoma. He had been playing in the backyard with his younger brother Rick. They were climbing maple trees when Kurt slipped and fell. He was left hanging with his scarf tangled around his neck. Rick, who was only five years old, ran for help but Kurt could not be revived when help arrived. Richard, the younger of the two boys, lived with his mother for a time; when he was in his teens he came to live with Debby and Larry. The family lives in Ashern, Manitoba, at the present time.

Mable Martha, or "White Fish," was our sleep walker. One night I heard her and went to see what she was up to. "Oh," she said, "I'm just combing my auburn hair in the moonlight." She took her elementary grades in Charleswood and Manigotagan. Her high school education began at MCI but she graduated from Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg. She completed her nurses' training at Grace Hospital in Winnipeg. She is married to Ken DeGraff; they have two daughters, Tara and Jolene. Mable is a nurse at the Snow Lake Hospital, Ken an employee of Natural Resources Forestry Department of the Province of Manitoba. Both Mable and Ken are strong supporters of Native values and have tried hard to help integrate northern and southern Manitoba communities.

At the anniversary we had no idea we would have Jolene, their youngest daughter, with us for only two more years. Jolene's accidental death came when she was on her way home from Whitehorse in the Yukon to prepare for her final year at Rosthern Junior College. She had gone to the Yukon with her uncle and aunt who were working for the Department of Mines and Resources at Carmacks, about 100 kilometres north of Whitehorse. When it appeared she would not be able to catch a flight on her standby ticket for some time, she made arrangements with her parents to take the Greyhound bus to Yorkton, Saskatchewan, where her mother would meet her. When the bus stopped at Teslin southeast of Whitehorse she was offered a flight to Edmonton in a private plane. A waitress at the restaurant took her to the local airport where a twin engine Piper Seneca was being serviced. When preparations were complete Mr. Rolf, the pilot, started down the runway. For reasons unknown at this time the airplane was airborne for only 58 seconds before it crashed, killing all four passengers. Jolene's death came at night on August 18, 1995. It was difficult to grasp that she had died in a plane crash when hours before it had been decided she would take the bus. Mable and Ken flew to Whitehorse to bring the body home for burial. While there they held a memorial service at the crash site and mourned the loss of their daughter along with loved ones of the other crash victims. Jolene's death leaves a vacuum in their lives as it does in ours.

Phyllis Priscilla, also known as "Sunfish" in our family, was our budding theologian. When she was about one-and-a-half years old, Trudie saw her sitting on the living room floor with my Bible on her lap reading, "Jesus said, I can jump." Menno Enns, who was teaching on the Island at that time, took a picture of her outside on the grass reading the Bible. She loved the Bible. Phyllis started her elementary education in Manigotagan. For high school she first went to Westgate Mennonite Collegiate but graduated from Selkirk High School. She then went on to complete her Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPN) training at the Selkirk Psychiatric School of Nursing and Registered Nurses (RN) training at Red River Community College. Her career in nursing has taken her to the Youth Detention Centre in Winnipeg and Headingly Jail where she currently is heading up a new health care program. She has two children, Pamela and Austin, from her marriage to Ron Vialoux. She has been a single parent for the past 15 years.

Vernelle Violet was called "Sucker" because she compulsively sucked her thumb as a child. Vernelle was always good at saving money. When we asked her to pay for an ice cream cone with her own

Vernelle (centre) with four of our granddaughters—Cheryl & Andrea Sklaruk, Tara & Jolene DeGraff—Christmas 1990 at Pat & Earl Settees in Gimli.

money she simply said, "I'm saving my money for a bike." She also walked in her sleep and we had to be careful she did not wander out of the house. One night she was determined to go to school because the teacher would be angry if she was late. Finally she was persuaded to go back to bed with the comment, "Mom, it's your fault if I'm late for classes." She attended elementary school in Manigotagan and Selkirk and graduated from MCI while we were in Oklahoma. She went on to business college and is employed as an executive assistant in a major firm in Winnipeg.

Vernelle was married to Jack Unrau from Snowflake who died in an accident only six weeks after the birth of their first child, Justin. His accidental death came before 7 a.m. on May 8, 1980, while he was on his way to work. He and Vernelle had just moved to Westbank, B.C. where he was working at the Okanagan Lake Resort golf course on the west side of the lake north of the Okanagan Bridge. Jack had taken his motorcycle to work that morning and, when he caught up with a slow-moving heavily loaded truck, he pulled out to pass and collided head-on with an oncoming pickup truck. He died instantly. Jack and Vernelle had been married for a year and a half. Vernelle moved back to Winnipeg and has been a single parent for over 15 years.

When we stop to reflect, our extended family resembles the cooperative and ecumenical flavour of our ministry. Family gatherings bring together Métis, Ukrainian, Dutch, English, Scottish-German and Mennonite elements. Now that we have more time and patience we have visited them often enough to appreciate them as adults. They all left home quite young and had to find their own way in the world. We were always preoccupied with our own agenda and somewhat distant from what mattered to them. One of our joys in retirement is our contact with grandchildren who are developing into fine men and women. It would take too long to list all their talents and accomplishments—if I did, you

Our family on May 23, 1993, at our 50th anniversary celebration.

would probably think I was bragging. It almost seems easier to relate to them than it was to our own children. The difference probably says something about the new freedom we have to spend time with them without the distraction of other agenda.

With the exception of Kurt and Jack, our entire family came to the May 23, 1993, celebration of our fiftieth anniversary. Let me share some of the meaningful moments of this important day for Trudie and me. Pat reminded us of the wedding text from Colossians 2:7–8; 3:7–18 which Ältester David Schulz had used on our rainy wedding day 50 years earlier. She also pointed out that Linda and Leonard, children of Ältester Schulz who sang several special numbers at the celebration, had also sung at our wedding in 1943. This brought back many fond memories of another time when Trudy and my pilgrimage together first began.

Andrea Sklaruk, daughter of Hedy and Ron, wrote an eloquent tribute to our ministry and role as grandparents.

> My grandparents are adventurers. Come back with me to a time before today when my mother was a frail little girl hiding behind Grandma's legs, her green eyes large against her pale face, peeking out every so often, at the strange land her mother had brought her to.
>
> It was a strange new land for Grandma too as she got off the boat at

Matheson Island. Wisps of her straight dark hair whipped against her face, caught by the cold wind blowing off Lake Winnipeg that day. A day's trip had taken her from the comfortable civilized streets of Winnipeg to this wild place—so far from what she'd known, so much unknown. But the dark curious eyes and timid smiles of the Indian children were no different from children anywhere else.

She was there with Grandpa and they were there as people of the Church. All of us are people of God. It was a message she knew well, a truth she believed in and a message she wanted to share with the people whom she would meet in the years that followed.

It was a new world for Grandpa too. A world he was well suited to. He was a man of discipline; he was a man of strength—strength in the word of God and strength in himself knowing the work he would do in the name of the Church.

In the years to come his sermons would reach the souls and minds of the people—the people he would learn from and work beside and lead when it was needed. When he led his family off the boat that day at 6 feet, 2 inches, he must have been an imposing figure but it was the man and his discipline the people would remember. Grandpa was a man of the Church and he organized the people in God's name. Grandma was a lady of the Church and she brought the women together under God's roof. She was a mother in the Church and she brought the children together in God's house. Grandma and Grandpa were married in the Church and they brought families together to pray. Like expert weavers, the love, the prayers, the hugs, the smiles, the songs they wove kept warm the souls of all they met, including those of their grandchildren.

Around Grandma's Table

Our families are victims of the wind
Scattered to our own corners of the Universe
But now, we all sit around Grandma's table.
Now we're here, all reaching for the same soup ladle
    all sharing some of Grandma's spicy broth
    all listening to Grandpa give thanks
    for our togetherness.
And I, like the other grandchildren,
    look around the table.
We're all used to our own small families
    but here we're moulded into something more.
These are the children I've worked with
    and shared with for my entire life
    through the different schools, the moves
    through growing up
    when it was important to be together
These people came together

and met around Grandma's table.
Conversations float around that table
of lives unwinding
and Grandma makes sure
everyone is satisfied
tending to our plates
tending to our souls
making a family of us
keeping us from falling
into scattered friends and acquaintances
Reminding the youngest of where we've been
and that we can't stray too far
because there's always a place for us
around Grandma's table —Andrea Sklaruk

Menno Wiebe, a long-time friend and executive secretary for Native Ministries from 1968 to 1974, drew an analogy between the disciples on the road to Emmaus and our own journey along the Way. After a good- natured "roast" of the Unrau family he concluded with the following comments:

> Let us reflect on the journey of the Unraus for just a moment. They too are disciples of the church who have been on quite a journey. They met and they married half a century ago, they travelled the long way before the road was taken. . . . They were there ahead of the pack, whether there was a road or not. Their travels took them to Matheson Island, Loon Straits, Pine Dock and they pioneered the work at Manigotagan, Selkirk, Hammon, Oklahoma and Mexico. These modern Emmaus disciples have been on the road quite a while. So before retirement their life was en route; they were officially on the move. What conversations did they have along the way? It was about important things in life and conversations of faith in God, about the crucified and the risen Christ. Their talk and their walk was that of the first Emmaus disciples—it had purpose and destination—then the two were joined by strangers whom they had not known before. Those weren't only meetings in the church or Sunday schools or formal gatherings, they met people in the middle of their daily life. I saw Trudie canning beets with Mrs. Simard outside on a Coleman stove. They were processing red beet pickles together and having a great time. I saw Jake teaming up with the chief and plowing the garden at Hole River or in the bush with the wood cutters or meeting with people to organize a Cooperative to make life more bearable—people who would stand with one another as at Pentecost. Often it was the great outdoors that was their sanctuary. Jake and Trudie have also invited people to their table. . . . There was room at the Unrau table and it was my privilege to sit at the table on quite a few occasions. People who like each other eat together, in the church, and elsewhere. . . . Today's sharing around the table will be symbolic of this. And with

> how many people have you walked on this journey? . . . I am one of those who joined you on this pilgrimage and as a result my own life has been greatly enriched. You are the apostles of the north, and I see others who have joined you. I see Henry and Elna Neufeld, Henry Gerbrandt, Otto Hamm, Isaac and Margaret Froese, Neil Von Gunten, the Abe Hoeppners and the list goes on . . . many strangers have joined you en route on your pilgrimage. The warming of hearts takes place, your pilgrimage has become meaningful. People you walk with have become friends . . . to walk in the same direction having a conversation. . . . That's life's calling. Today is the jubilee reflection on your pilgrimage. There will be cause to recognize our Lord as your fellow traveller just like Jesus joined the Emmaus disciples. Who can give great inspiration, who breaks the bread with people, and who generates love for life? Mission has little purpose if there is no love for life.

Andrea and Menno have a way with words that made Trudie and me feel grateful for having experienced the struggle and joy of living in the Way. At the same time we were humbled by their generosity and love. We were obviously in good company and embraced by God's people.

My own understanding of the Way has been nurtured as I was able to share my pilgrimage with Native Christians. I think it is important to acknowledge that I learned godly ways while I was working alongside Native peoples. They reminded me of the integrated theology and practice of the early Anabaptists.

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The Way Revisited
Personal Reflections

The last chapter could have made a suitable ending to our story. The 50th anniversary celebration recounted our mountain-top experiences along the Way. While that event gives me a warm glow I still feel the need to reflect on our life in ministry as a journey filled with struggles, learning and vision. Trudie undoubtedly has her own thoughts that she expresses in her own way and in her own time. These are mine.

Our original mandate from the Mennonite Pioneer Mission executive was to seek, establish and nurture Christian fellowship. More importantly we were convinced God had called us to this task through the church. This has been a constant theme as we put our commitment and energies into doing the best we could with the available knowledge and skills. Because often we were pioneering we needed to learn how best to approach each task. In the on-the-job training we received, northerners were our best teachers. We set out to establish friendly and cooperative relations with those who claimed Jesus as their own, regardless of the label they carried. Even in Oklahoma where the Mennonite and Baptist churches had been quite exclusive since their missionary beginnings, we were able to foster reconciliation and cooperation. In all the communities in which we lived we worked to draw Christians together for Bible study and regular worship. On several occasions we helped construct churches or chapels as visible signs of God's people in the community. With the exception of Mexico you will notice we seldom hesitated when new opportunities for ministry presented themselves. We felt invitations from local people were requests for help from God's people and evidence of His call to

ministry for us. Early in our pilgrimage along the Way, we had committed ourselves to be obedient to His call individually and as a couple.

When I look at my sermon outlines I notice I often used evangelistic themes. I believed the good news was for everyone. I was concerned that people would understand the ABCs of finding and following the Christian way clearly. Matthew 11: 28 shows up often in my notes: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This theme went with me throughout my ministry. I would cheerfully talk about it while cutting pulp, repairing the fish shed, managing the Cooperative, picking berries on the rocks or while travelling together. Expressing my faith freely became an important part of my life. I would agree with Menno Wiebe when he said my pulpit was more in the workplace than in the chapel or church.

It could be said we did not always plan our involvement in advance, but our activities were in keeping with our commitment to be faithful and energetic about the opportunities that presented themselves along the Way. We didn't even know where Matheson Island was when we agreed to go there. We wanted to be open to the agenda of others and the leading of the Lord by applying our gifts to worthwhile tasks. Sometimes we may have been derailed and sometimes our approach

"I feel the need to reflect on our life in ministry as a journey filled with struggles, learning and vision." A trip with Trudie in 1994 to the grave of Albert Hoffman at the Hammon, Oklahoma, cemetery gave one opportunity for such reflection.

was challenged so we were forced to explore new avenues of ministry. I am sure we did not deviate too far from our original call even though there were many changes as we learned to do ministry along the Way.

An important lesson I learned from northerners early had to do with taking risks. Travel in the north was fraught with all kinds of dangers. A storm could stop everything for several days. Unless a person understood the dangers and took precautions a situation could easily be life threatening. Early I learned that people around Lake Winnipeg respected the risks and prayed for travelling mercies before embarking on a journey. They also didn't hesitate to come to the aid of fellow travellers. Their hospitality was freely extended to strangers who needed shelter and care during a storm. At the Wanipagow Producers Co-op I noticed Native Christians had a way of working out their marriage problems better than white marriage counsellors could have done. I got to know the men quite well and discovered when a marriage break-up occurred and new relationships were formed, there was little of the trauma and expense associated with our handling of a marriage crisis. I considered their way of handling these problems as more Christian than the adversarial approach we see in family court. I also noticed Native people had a way of disciplining each other without rejecting the offender or neglecting the victim. They cared for each other by making sure everyone had a chance at getting a job even if this meant giving up their own job in favour of an unemployed person. They were not as individualistic as we have become but were concerned how their decisions affected the whole community. They also taught me to be transparent if I was to be a credible witness in the community. Acknowledging my weaknesses as well as my strengths was important to being seen as a whole person. This was not an easy lesson to learn for an idealistic young missionary but I am now convinced it was essential to have any integrity. My own understanding of the Way has been nurtured as I was able to share my pilgrimage with Native Christians. I think it is important to acknowledge that I learned godly ways while I was working alongside Native peoples. They reminded me of the integrated theology and practice of the early Anabaptists.

I still struggle with having patience, but I learned to appreciate its importance while living in the north. Northerners seemed to have patience with each other, especially with their children. I often felt their patience went too far by expecting children to know as much as adults. They believed children's decisions were to be respected and followed. Sometimes we forget that our children have values and that God has entrusted them to us. I noticed the Native approach nurtured personal

competence by drawing children into an extended family or clan system which had mutual obligations on which every member could depend. This was a great consolation in a crisis such as illness, accident or death.

I also learned that I am finite. In the north people were often faced with the loss of loved ones through accidents and tragedies. My mortality has been underlined during our retirement as we regularly attend funerals of former friends or residents of Bethel Place. I only have a short and precarious time here on earth. I believe I am part of a bigger story which involves God's purpose. I am reminded that with God all things are possible. I need to yield myself to His will for His greater purpose and glory.

Living in the north also taught me that ministry involved the whole person. That meant being able to communicate and demonstrate real concern for people by entering into their life's experiences. We found that to be effective it was important to share in all aspects of community life and become part of its fabric. You will have noticed that, as our ministry moved from one community to another, it progressively became more holistic. Between potato experiments, road clearing, nursing station, fishing co-ops, 4-H, MURP, Agape Table and AA, we attempted to tailor our ministry to life as it was being lived within the community. A personal benefit of learning this lesson was that people also treated me as a whole person.

The story would not be complete without recalling some of my struggles physically, socially and personally. Even though I reported my travels in the north as adventures, they also gave me a lot of anxiety during the Matheson Island years. I never felt completely competent to brave the waves and currents in summer and the snow and ice conditions in winter. There always seemed to be an element of risk when I encountered storms or ice heaves on the lake or travelled the bush trails over unpredictable muskeg with a team of dogs. It seemed only a little less risky on a power toboggan, snowmobile and later bombardier. The latter felt like the safest way to travel in harsh conditions but it also presented its own set of dangers. What sticks in my memory are the restless and sleepless nights I spent before making a longer trip. It was a real relief to know the move to Manigotagan would not make these demands on me.

One of the struggles related more directly to our ministry was the realization of my own deep-seated prejudices. In 1948 when we boarded the S.S. Keenora I noticed a group of Indians on the riverbank leisurely going about preparing their lunch. At the time I wondered whether I was

"Living in the north taught me that ministry involved . . . being able to communicate and demonstrate real concern for people by entering into their life's experiences." An October 1989 visit to the Oriel and Harry Boulette home in Manigotagan.

capable of what I then thought meant lowering myself to that level. I couldn't see myself on the riverbank in full public view. I needed more privacy than that. The culture was strange to me and I didn't know whether I could fit in. I also had some struggles with aboriginal spirituality. People would respond with, "I have a religion of my own and I'm going to live by it." At the time I had little appreciation for other religious expressions. Now I can freely acknowledge that Indian values, spirituality and lifestyles have had a profound influence on my own spiritual formation.

Earlier I reported our determination to ensure that our children would remain fluent in German when we first went north. We felt it was essential for them to know the Mennonite way. The struggle was in reality my own. My upbringing and education had been in German and there was little need for me to be proficient in English until we arrived at Matheson Island. If I was to communicate the gospel effectively I needed to learn the common language of the people. I sometimes think my struggle to learn English was much like Henry Neufeld having to

learn Saulteaux. At first the English translations of the Bible didn't speak to me at all. I did all my preparation in German, then translated my sermons into English. Before a service I would be quite nervous because I was never certain that I was actually communicating, but the people on Matheson Island had patience with me. My confidence always increased when I looked into their expectant eyes during a gathering. As I became more competent in English and it became easier to think theologically in English, some of my initial apprehensions faded.

It also required an effort to get used to the openness and honesty of small northern communities. I was somewhat naive and sometimes took offence too easily. During our first year I was sometimes labelled a "holy roller" and "Pentecostal." These were unfamiliar terms to me and they made me uncomfortable. More unexpected and upsetting were statements like, "We asked for an Anglican missionary and the damn Mennonites came;" or "Hammon did not get the right missionary." Maybe I was too sensitive but these kinds of statements cut deeply and made me question my own integrity. It was clear they were referring to us and I didn't have the courage or energy to try to sort out what to take seriously. These awkward moments did not only come from northerners but also from the supporting constituency. We heard remarks such as, "You couldn't survive without a welfare cheque from the mission coffers;" or "Your faith is weak because you don't trust God to make things happen." We tried to dismiss these statements as coming from uninformed and misguided people who sought only to criticize; nevertheless, we were discouraged by them.

On a personal level I had to struggle with my own inadequacies. I had never completed my high school education or gone to college as many of my colleagues had. Despite that lack we took on a major pioneering ministry on behalf of the Mennonite church. In the beginning I thought I had all the answers but soon found that my communication skills left much to be desired. I realized I was really a novice who had much to learn. I must say, I did not always exercise adequate self-control. Far too often I found myself defending my own position rather than listening to other points of view. I had a very definite set of expectations and found it difficult to accept if things didn't follow my logic. When this happened I would become frustrated and defensive. I was also rather slow at recognizing other people's strengths. I regret that people suffered while I was learning this fundamental lesson about relating to people sensitively and effectively.

When our children reached their teen years and wanted to strike out

". . . our ministry involved not only risk and adventure but also a faith in God to transcend our weaknesses to accomplish His purpose." On Lake Winnipeg in 1955.

on their own, I was impatient and harsh with them. I put more effort into appreciating, interpreting and understanding other people. I realize now that this was a mistake. This struggle with myself affected our relationship. Retirement has offered time for reflection. I hope it also includes the time and energy to redress past oversights to some extent.

My prayer is that as you read this story of two pilgrims along the Way, you will be reminded of our common journey together as Christians. We were only one cog in the larger wheel of a mission vision in the Bergthaler Church and later the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. We were also only one expression of God's presence in the communities in which we lived. Our hope is that we would be seen as an example of obedience to our heavenly Father's will. He created and called us to be His witnesses. Even though Native peoples saw our faults more clearly than we did, they still wanted to know more of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ we represented.

I also hope that as you read this story it will have been abundantly clear that our ministry involved not only risk and adventure but also a faith in God to transcend our weaknesses to accomplish His purpose. We often felt ill prepared and knew we lacked the skills for the ministry which the sending church and the communities expected of us. Nevertheless, God saw fit to use us, for which we are grateful. We also learned to trust people and appreciate them as fellow travellers along the Way. Our Christian life has been nurtured by the experience.

Finally, I hope the story is evidence of our willingness and eagerness

to put all our energies into the opportunities that came our way. Trudie and I shared a common goal from the beginning: to let our lights shine without getting weary and discouraged in the tasks before us. We are very thankful for local mentors in each of the communities in which we lived. Without them we could not have survived or done many of the things we were able to accomplish. They are too many to name individually but they will know who they are. We valued their support and encouragement throughout our ministry. We would consider them co-workers because in reality we shared common goals and worked shoulder to shoulder to realize them.

In our daily life we were committed to live in the Way by putting all our energies to whatever our hands found to do. When I look over the Bible texts I used throughout the years the story of the ten lepers in the Gospel of Luke 17: 11–19 stands out. As I looked at the passage again and again it seemed that the theme of ten persons sharing a dread disease and helping each other get through difficult situations emerges. They understood their common condition and collectively cried for mercy in their affliction. Jesus heard them over the noise of the crowd, responded by healing them and each went on the way rejoicing. Only one came back and thanked the Lord for divine healing. Our involvement in the north has some of the same elements. In various ways we all understood our common need and supported each other. In our own ways all of us asked for healing and received it from the message of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many of us found the Way and followed it victoriously. Some had the courage to talk about it openly and thank Jesus publicly in the congregation. To God be the glory!