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## Settling down in Moose Jaw

**W**e drove through Northern Ontario on the TransCanada highway. It was the first part of October, 1952. The weather was great and the leaves were starting to change their colours into reds and golden yellows. The scenery was breathtaking, the beautiful landscapes, the placid blue lakes and the wildlife we saw were the most beautiful sights to behold.

We took our time travelling. We stopped overnight in remote areas, sleeping in the car. We listened to wolves howling, moose roaming around and saw many other animals that lived in the wild. We washed in the lake and stopped for breakfast at roadside cafes.

This one day we happened to hit three spruce grouse with the car, killing them. We picked them up, then pulled into a roadside campground in Kabeka Falls. We plucked and cleaned them then cooked them on a coal and wood stove in the campsite. We had a gourmet dinner. It was fun.

Once in a while we stopped at motels, had a shower, a few beers and a good sleep on a bed for a change which was a treat after sleeping in the car.

We took turns driving. Anton didn't have a driver's license but I let him drive anyway. In those days there wasn't much traffic on the road. We finally came to the Saskatchewan border. We pulled over to the side of the road and got out a map. I noticed a funny name on the map called Moose Jaw. It looked like a good sized city. So I said to Anton, "Lets go and see what its like." So we did.

We drove down Main Street, parked the car and went and had lunch. We then walked around town, and liked what we saw.

That was the time when the airport and Training School south of Moose Jaw were under construction. Jobs were available. So we decided to stay for a few days. Many homes offered room and board for \$45.00 or \$50.00 a month. We talked to some people and they recommended a boarding house at 1126 Main

Street North. So we went to see it. There was one room available. An older couple ran it named Ma and Pa Meredith. They had a family of their own, Eddie, Pat, Mary and Goldie, besides six boarders.

We accepted the room and board for \$45.00 a month and some rules that went with it. For instance, if you were not on time for the meals it was your tough luck, you just didn't get any.

On Sunday, anyone who didn't go to church, didn't get any lunch either. This suited us fine as we attended church regularly and didn't miss any lunches on Sunday.

We thought that we would stay there for about a month and then we would go back to work in the bush. Our plans soon changed. Anton and I went to a dance in Temple Gardens (across from Crescent Park and the Harwood Hotel) on Friday night. We didn't know a soul there. I noticed two girls sitting by themselves at a table in the northeast corner of the hall. They looked so innocent, like they never had a boyfriend before. We walked up to them just as though we had known them all our lives and asked them if we could join them. They were quite friendly and we soon discovered their names - Minnie and Marian. We had a few dances. It was after midnight and the day was October 11, 1952. I liked Minnie at first sight. She was bubbly and lots of fun. I offered to carry Minnie home. She said she lived with Marian (which wasn't true). I said, "That's good. I will carry both of you home." They laughed and wondered how I would "carry" them home. This was an Eastern expression; meaning to drive someone home. So we drove them to Marian's home at 264 High Street West. We talked with them for awhile, then we went home. On the way home Anton and I were wondering whether we would see those two girls again. They were very young; Minnie was eighteen going on nineteen on October 27, 1952 and I was twenty-five going on twenty-six on November 14, 1952. Anton and I were wondering if they would go out with us as there was a big age difference between us and not only that we were two drifters, no job, no home and on top of all this we were immigrants. "Maybe they won't go out with us," I said to Anton. But we thought it over and decided to go and see them. We went to where we dropped

them off at 264 High Street West (which is now the Legion parking lot). Marian was home as was her brother Lloyd, her mother and grandpa. There was no sign of Minnie. Minnie had lied to me. About a week later Minnie got enough courage and told me that she lived at 360 Home Street West with her mother, dad, sister, Elsie, brother-in-law Steve, niece Beverly and nephews Wayne and Baby Johnny.

Minnie and I had a lot in common. We had so much to talk about, and would spend hours telling each other about our dreams for the future. I wanted to meet her family. About two weeks later, she got enough courage and introduced me to them. I liked her family and especially her mother. She was very protective of Minnie and very wise. So I thought that if I got along with her mother, and she accepted me, it would boost my chances with Minnie.

Her mother and dad were Ukrainians. They came to Canada before the Second World War from the Ukraine. I had to learn Ukrainian really fast, which was fun. Minnie's dad was a retired foreman from the Canadian Pacific Railway. He received a pension of \$35.00 a month.

Minnie worked for the Swift Canadian Co. (meat packing company) as a comptometer operator (adding machine) in the invoice department. The plant had just closed down in Moose Jaw and Minnie was transferred to Regina. She commuted to Regina every day. We would go on dates in the evening and as I said before we would have so much to talk about that before we knew it, it would be two or three o'clock in the morning before we said good-bye, and having to get up at 6:00 a.m. in the morning, Minnie didn't get much sleep. But she didn't complain.

Anton and I were still going back to Kapuskasing, Ontario as planned to work in the bush for the winter. I planned to leave my car at Fred Misfeldt's place in Dahlen, Saskatchewan. And I still wanted to buy a farm.

So one day we went to Dahlen to see our farmer friends and to look at our log house. I stayed over at Fred's place and Anton stayed at Orville Neumedahl's place. We found out farming in general wasn't very good that year. The wheat prices were low which didn't help matters. Some farmers were quitting and selling out.

This particular farmer, Orville Jenkins, was losing a quarter section which he had bought on time for \$2500.00 and he couldn't make the payments. The land was 80 acres in summer fallow and 80 acres of bush. So Anton and I decided to buy this quarter. We had \$2500.00 between us. I was a little short. I used the \$850.00 that Fred owed me and we decided to make a deal. We needed two witnesses to sign the deal. I asked Fred and Anton Jankauskas to be our witnesses. Fred, Anton and Orville sat in the back of my 1952 deluxe Pontiac while Anton Maj and myself sat in the front and we took off for Wadena, Saskatchewan to see the lawyer and make the transaction. We signed the deal.

I bought a bottle of Irish Whiskey and we all headed home to Fred's place. I opened the bottle and threw the cork away. Janet wasn't home when we arrived so Fred was worried about what to serve for dinner. I said, "Don't worry. This is my party. We've got an Irishman here (meaning Orville Jenkins) and Irish Whiskey, and since I am Polish, I will make a Polish lunch." I made onion sandwiches. We drank the Irish Whiskey Polish style - bottoms up, and everyone agreed the onion sandwiches were just delicious.

We made a deal with Fred Misfeldt, Gordon Hedin and Fred Thirsk (the Co-op farmers) to seed our land in the spring. All of these deals were done on that same day.

Here we were two immigrants who had just come to Canada three short years ago - driving a new car and now we were land owners. In fact, Orville Jenkins remarked on how hurt he was riding in the back of my car while Anton and I were sitting in the front driving while the old timers sat in the back. I said, "Life is like that. If you dance now you pay later or you pay now and dance later." My point was that you can't dance all of the time. Anyway, it made them feel better when people said that we paid too much for this land. But we didn't care if we paid too much. So with this behind us, we headed back to Moose Jaw.

As soon as we got home I phoned Minnie to tell her the good news that Anton and I had bought a farm. She was pretty cool to me. I wondered what was wrong. She didn't think too much of farming, especially to go into partnership. I thought, "She must love me", why

else would she care what I was doing. I drove down to see her and to explain that it was just an investment and that I wasn't moving there. Anton and Marian were pretty close to each other too. So we decided to get a job in Moose Jaw.

The airport south of Moose Jaw was being built, so we went there and applied for a job. We got a job right away on construction and started the next day at \$1.10 an hour.

So we started sprouting roots in Moose Jaw. We saw more of our girlfriends and we went to dances and movies and drove many times to Regina to go to dances and movies there. We even chased rabbits over the stubble fields in the evening. We had fun.

Anton and I still planned to go to Kapuskasing for the winter to make big money. In fact, in November I took the car to Fred's place in Daulton to store it for the winter because I didn't think it was a good idea to drive the car to the bush. But we still hung on to our jobs at the airport. The weather that year was mild and was just great. The first snow fall we got was on Christmas Eve. We also attended a big party at the airport before it closed down for Christmas.

Christmas 1952 was the most memorable one for me since before I left home in Poland. I spent it with Minnie and her family. After ten years I at last had a real family Christmas and I had Minnie by my side. I felt right at home and very much loved. I was blessed. I was very thankful and the happiest person in the world. That is when I really and truly fell in love with Minnie and her family.

Minnie's mother and her sister, Elsie were very good cooks and I enjoyed their delicious meals. Minnie had an older brother, John and sister-in-law Fern who lived at 327 Maple Street West and another sister Jenny married to Tom Owen who lived in Calgary.

After Christmas, Anton and I got laid off from our job at the airport. We had to make a decision as to what we were going to do. It was either to go to the bush to work or stay in Moose Jaw. I told Anton that I would not be going to the bush. Anton was also getting serious with Marian, so we both decided to stay in Moose Jaw.

There we were, both in love, no jobs, our

room and board went up to \$50.00 a month from \$45.00 and our only income was \$17.10 a week from unemployment insurance. So we had about \$10.00 a month for spending money. I didn't have any surplus money because I had spent what I had on my car and on the farm we had just purchased. Anton had some money and I used to borrow from him whenever I was short, \$10.00 here and \$5.00 there. So after a few months it soon added up - right up to \$200.00. But that was okay. We sat in this one room, read comics and sometimes we went to see a movie. One time we were short fifteen cents for movie tickets, so we went along side the parking meters and found enough change that people had dropped to pay for our tickets. But in spite of all this our girlfriends didn't abandon us.

One time we went to a restaurant for coffee and donuts. I was sweating because I didn't think that I had enough money to pay for the check. Minnie sensed why I was feeling uncomfortable. She pulled my hand under the table and put a dollar in it, so that I wouldn't be embarrassed. In those days there wasn't such a thing as going "Dutch"; the man always paid the bill. By the way, a cup of coffee and a donut cost 20 cents. I have been paying back that dollar ever since that time!

The weather got colder. My car was in Daulton in storage, so I walked over the Fourth Avenue bridge to see Minnie and to visit with her mom and dad. They were now living at 331 Maple Street West. I spent many evenings with Minnie. She was concerned about my walking over the bridge in the cold weather and catching cold. I liked that. I knew that she was concerned and maybe even loved me.

I was desperate for work. Frank Maydanich and Jim Collins were two boys who also lived in the same rooming house that I did. They worked for the C.P.R. in the Car Department. Their boss's name was Fred Woolley. They told me to go and see him and ask him for a job. "You never know. There might be an opening there," they said.

I went to see him. He was out in the shop when somebody pointed him out to me and said, "That's him."

I introduced myself to him and told him that I would like to work for the railway. His first

reply was, "Why?"

I told him about my adventures and of my intentions of going back to the bush for the winter where I had a job waiting for me. But that I had met this girl and wanted to settle in Moose Jaw and my heart was set to work on the railway. He asked me who the girl was so I told him and he mentioned to me that he knew her dad. Then he said that at the present time there were no job openings but that there may be some in the future. He told me to leave my name in the office. I thanked him and went back home to read some more comics.

I felt bad because I didn't have a job. It was bad enough that I was an immigrant, let alone not having a job. I felt like those guys in Toronto who hung out in Queen's Park. But Minnie stood by me for which I was most grateful.

The door to my life opened when on the morning of February 4, 1953 the phone rang. Ma Meredith said, "John, someone wants you on the phone." It was Mr. Woolley. He said, "Do you still want this job?" I couldn't believe my ears. Here it was in the midst of winter and you couldn't even buy a job and I had an offer. As soon as I hung up the phone, I went down to the C.P.R. office, filled out an application form and got my medical examination the same day. The next day I started working as a labourer in the C.P.R. shop for \$1.19 an hour. Later on I got promoted to Carman. I was jumping for joy. It was a promising job for the future. I could hardly wait to tell Minnie that I got a job on the railway. She was very pleased. I wasn't a drifter anymore.

There on the job I met my good friend whom I have until this day - John Fischer. We hit it off right at the beginning. We had a lot in common.

He had left home at a very young age too. We often compared notes. He had a girlfriend named Kathy Zbadynski who Minnie also knew. John and I got to be very good friends.

I soon went to Daulton to get my car. I now had money to buy gas and didn't have to look around the parking meters for change that someone might have dropped.

Minnie and I got more and more serious about each other. I saw her every day. We had so much to talk about and poured our hearts out to each other. We drove all around Moose Jaw, took walks through the parks and spent a lot of

time over at her home.

I liked talking to her mom and dad. Her mom used to say that if a boy and girl loved each other they should get married and not waste any time, (not talking directly to Minnie and I, of course) but generally speaking. I was afraid to ask Minnie if she would marry me just in case she might say no. So I asked her whether anyone would want to marry me. I caught her off guard. Not thinking, she said, "I would marry you." I said, "Would you really?" This happened when we went for a walk down Home Street one Sunday afternoon.

So a couple of weeks later I went to Peoples Credit Jewellers and bought a diamond engagement ring. There was a diamond in the centre and two diamond hearts on each side of it. It was Sunday evening on May 27, 1953. I drove up to 331 Maple Street West. Minnie, her mom and dad were there. I was a little nervous pulling a little wine velvet box out of my pocket.

I took Minnie's hand and said, "Minnie, I haven't got much to offer you, but will you marry me?" Minnie was completely caught off guard. She looked at me and didn't know what to say. I noticed that her mother was pleased. And I thought to myself that she will say yes. She finally said yes. I was relieved. This was one of the most joyful moments in my life.

So from that night on we started to plan for our wedding. We set the date for July 11, 1953. There wasn't any time to waste. We booked the hall, the Ukrainian National Home on Ninth Avenue Street, West. One Sunday after dinner, Steve, Elsie, Minnie and I went to the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church on Ninth Ave. S.W. to speak to the priest about marrying us. (Minnie had been baptized in that church). The priest said that we couldn't get married on that day (July 11) because it was some sort of holy day. We didn't want to change the date of our wedding so we went to see Reverend Sid Horne at St. Michael and All Angels Church (Anglican) at 303 Coteau St. W. Minnie had attended Sunday School there and had also been confirmed there. Reverend Horne said that July 11 would be fine and he would marry us.

I told everyone at work and at the rooming house that I was getting married. Ma Meredith said that it would never work out as I was Catholic and Minnie was Anglican. She said

that was no good. I said, "I love her and that's all that matters."

Ma and Pa Meredith were invited to the wedding anyway.

Shortly after we had made our wedding plans, I found out that my friend John Fischer and his girlfriend Kathy were going to be married on June 27. Minnie and I were invited to their wedding.

Our wedding was only two weeks away. Minnie had many thoughts as to whether she was doing the right thing. She wasn't sure if she could trust me or not. We had disagreements but nothing too serious. We had to settle where we would live after our marriage. Minnie's mom and dad offered to let us live with them. It was a very small house, two bedrooms with a kitchen and living room combined and was unmodern (outdoor toilet and no running water). But we didn't have any choice. Her dad was getting \$35.00 a month (C.P.R. pension). He

had to retire early because of his health and this is why he got such a small pension and Minnie was literally supporting them.

So we decided to live with her mom and dad.

We attended John and Kathy's wedding on June 27th and had a great time.

Our wedding plans were in full swing. There was a lot to do and Steve and Elsie were a big help to us. The wedding reception was to be held in their house at 360 Home St. W. So they were very busy too; along with Minnie's mom and dad who prepared all the food for the wedding.

### July 11, 1953 Our Wedding Day

The weather was just beautiful, sunny and hot. The temperature was 87°F.

My best man was Anton Maj and Jim Collins was my groomsman. Minnie's matron of honour



Steve Heshka, Lucretia Loveridge, Jennie Owen, Minnie, John, Tony Maj, Beverly Heshka, Jim Collins, (front, seated)  
Marian Knox, Jeanne Owen, Elsie Filipchuk, July 11, 1953



Tony and Marian Maj, and Minnie and John, Fortieth Anniversary, July 11, 1993

was Jennie Owen (her middle sister). Marian Knox and Elsie Filipchuk were her bridesmaids. Beverly Heshka (Elsie's oldest daughter) and Jeannie Owen (Jennie's only daughter) were flower girls. Steve Heshka was the usher.

We had a beautiful ceremony and everything went perfectly.

We had a small reception at the house for the wedding party, family, a few close friends and the minister. The rest of the guests (around 200) were invited to the wedding dance and midnight lunch at the Ukrainian National Home on the corner of 9th Ave. and Coteau St. W. (It has since been torn down).

Ma and Pa Meredith, Fred and Janet Misfeldt and Anton and Medora Jankauskas were some of the guests at our wedding. We are still making use of their wedding presents after 40 years of marriage.

Fred talked to me about our farm. He apologized for seeding our land so late. It was a very wet spring and they couldn't get on the land. So they decided to seed oats. Fred said that it probably would only be good enough for

feed because it was seeded so late. This crop turned out to be the best crop they ever saw.

I remember Fred Misfeldt had a great time downstairs at Steve and Elsie's place, sampling the whiskeys and trying different beers to see which brand was the best. I stayed fairly sober that night since it was my wedding day.

I had a great time at the hall and didn't miss many dances. We were presented with a chesterfield and chair as a wedding gift from all the guests present at the wedding dance. Minnie and I gave a thank you speech to all the guests for coming and making our day so special.

The next day we took off on our honeymoon to Manitou Beach at Watrous, Saskatchewan. And so we began our marriage adventure.

I hadn't earned any holidays on my job so I had to take a week off without any pay.

On our way home we stopped in Dahlen to visit Fred and Janet Misfeldt on the farm and we also visited other places in Northern Saskatchewan and this rounded out our honeymoon.

This was a big change for Minnie as she was never away from home and on her own before. She had a lot of growing up to do, and of course, I did too.

I was very happy to have a wife and I thought that my life was finally complete. I had someone to share my love with.

That week went by like the blink of an eye. Then I was back at work.

Of course for the next six months all I heard from the fellows was, "How is married life treating you?" I'd say, "Just fine." And they would say, "Oh yeah!" I think they were a little envious of me. I came all the way from Poland and got a beautiful girl right from their back yard, so to speak.

We settled down as we had planned. It was great. We got along very well with Minnie's mom and dad. We both worked and when we came home her mother had supper ready for us. We were just like two kids who never left home.

I liked my job. One time Mr. Woolley asked me how I liked my job. I said, "I'm fortunate that I got this job." He said, "If you weren't working here, you would be working somewhere else and would like it too." I thought how right he was. I don't ever recall having a job that I didn't like.

There were 145 men working in the Car Department at the C.P.R. Out of all those men only three of them owned cars. Some of the people had a hard time to understand how I got to own a car on being such a short time in Canada. This one guy said that he had worked for thirty years and he still couldn't afford to buy a car. I told him that he didn't want it bad enough. I said, "You should pray for it just like I did and it worked for me."

It was hard also for the people to believe that I owned a farm. It was too much for them. In fact, some of the guys made fun of me because I said I had a farm and they would say "Oh sure John," smirking behind my back. I didn't mind that. In fact, I had fun with anybody that didn't believe me. I used to say, "your loss, my gain."

Anton and Marian decided to get married on October 1, 1956. I was Anton's best man. It was a small wedding - no dance. We had an enjoyable time.

Minnie wasn't sure about our future. The

farm bothered her somewhat. So I talked her into going to see Fred and Janet in Dahlton. It was late in September and harvest time. While I was driving we passed a herd of cattle grazing in a pasture. Minnie commented on the cattle and said, "Look at that big cow." I said, "Minnie, that is not a cow. It is a bull." Minnie then asked me, "How can you tell the difference between a cow and a bull?" I said, "Never mind Minnie, you are not going to be a farmer's wife." So I thought I had better stay with the railway, and sell the farm in the near future.

We stopped in Naicam on the way to Dahlton. I picked up 24 beers and then we stopped at our farm just at the time they were combining our oats. There were three combines picking up the swaths. It was the best crop they had seen in years. Everyone said how lucky we were to have such nice oats. We stopped for a beer and Fred was worried, wondering where he would store the oats. I said, "How about our log house?" They filled the log house and also some other granaries that were available. They finished late in the evening and just in time as it had started to drizzle rain which turned into snow. That fall was a wet one and it was hard to get the crops off and anyone who didn't, lost everything. Winter set in after that.

That year the quota on oats was open. So we sold all of the crop. We didn't have to store it for too long. God was with us. Fred couldn't get over at how lucky we were, and we were pleased and thankful.

We had a nice visit with Fred and Janet, Medora and Anton and other friends. They all said that they missed my homemade wine. We stayed two nights at Fred's place, then we headed home.

On our way home I promised Minnie that I would stay with the railway until I retired, and that we would make our home in Moose Jaw and sell the farm in the near future.

We eventually sold the farm to Anton Jankauskas for \$4200.00. Everyone said that we sold it for too small a price. We didn't care as it had been a good investment and a good experience.

Minnie and I started to plan our future home. We were deciding whether to buy a home or to build one ourselves.

Minnie quit her job in Regina with the Swift

Canadian Co. shortly after we got married. Just before Christmas, fourteen men from the Car Dept. got their lay off notice, and I was one of them. This took effect on January 1st due to lack of business.

I went down to the unemployment office and was told I would receive \$24.00 a week in benefits. It was a sad time for me and especially Minnie as she was very concerned about everything.

Despite all of this we had a nice Christmas. To celebrate New Year's we went to a dance at the Dugout (located in the C.P.R. station) which was put on for C.P.R. employees. We had a nice time. Minnie wore her wedding dress (believe it or not). She looked beautiful. It was just like a wedding. She made good use of her wedding dress!

John Fischer and I bought one gallon (4 1/2 litres) of home-brew for \$15.00. We split it between us. It was good stuff, about 75% alcohol content. I burnt some sugar and added it to the brew. It looked like rye whiskey. After a few shots of it John and I forgot that we were laid off.

Soon the reality of being laid off came upon us. Collecting \$24.00 a week and looking out of the window watching the snow falling was our way of life at that point in time.

January was very cold. I went to Daulton to see Fred and told him my circumstances and that I was laid off. He said, "Maybe I can help you out." He picked out a heifer from his herd and butchered it. Fred kept one hind quarter and I took the rest. So we had lots of beef to eat that winter. I gave some of it to Steve and Elsie as well.

Everything was going very well so far until one morning in February, 1954 Minnie said that she wasn't feeling good and she also didn't look very good. I said, "You'll be all right. You probably have the flu." She couldn't keep anything in her stomach and seemed to be getting worse. So I called a doctor. In those days the doctor came to the house to see his patients. He examined her. I was very concerned and kept asking the doctor what was wrong. The doctor looked at me and said, "She's not sick. I am sure she is pregnant." My mouth dropped open for a few seconds, then I finally said, "Is she?" I was so happy. I'm going

to be a father, I thought. It wasn't very easy for Minnie as she was extremely sick with morning sickness for about seven weeks. I felt for her. One time her mother mentioned to me that if she knew that Minnie was going to be so sick she would never have let her marry me even if I was made of gold! I guess she said that out of frustration, seeing Minnie sick to her stomach for most of the day.

In February I got called back to work to the Car Dept. for two weeks, and then I got laid off again.

One day I said to Minnie, "I am going to get a job." So I went out looking for one. I went to several places, hotels, lumber yards and any other place I could think of that maybe would hire me.

I got hired on at the Grant Hall Hotel slinging beer. It was certainly different to what I was used to, but I did very well and even made some tips. I worked there until I got called back to the C.P.R. Car Department in April. I was glad to be back to my own job.

That summer of 1954 I built a garage on an empty lot that Mom and Dad owned on Maple Street situated a few houses west of us and actually right behind 360 Home St. W. There was some old lumber sitting on the lot that I used and I also bought some plywood. The total cost for my 12' x 20' garage was \$250.00.

Minnie and I were looking forward to our first baby. We were extremely happy.

On September 28th late in the evening I took Minnie to the hospital as she began having labour pains. I went back home to bed and the next day I got up in the morning and went to work. Around 8:30 a.m. on September 29, 1954 my foreman, Alex Pollock, called me to him and said, "The hospital called and said that your wife had a baby boy 7 lbs. 11.5 oz. You can go and see them." I dropped everything and rushed to the hospital and there was Minnie with our little son, Randy, in her arms. There are no words in the English language to describe the joy we felt. Randy had little curls in his hair and was the most beautiful baby you ever saw. Minnie held him so very gently, she was very tired. I left the hospital and went to the bank and withdrew \$20.00. I bought some White Owl cigars, then I went to the liquor store and bought a bottle of Scotch and twelve bottles of Calgary Stock Ale

12% alcohol content. I went home and celebrated with Grandma and Grandpa with a shot of Scotch and then went to work and passed out the cigars to the guys. After work I went to see Minnie and our new born son Randy. They both were rested and Randy was hungry. I then went home and had supper and I told Mom and Dad what a handsome grandson they had. So I thought that should call for a celebration. We dipped into the Scotch and had the beer for a chaser and smoked a cigar.

A few days later I brought Minnie and our son Randy home. Our life style changed a bit. Randy was a night hawk. He slept good in the day time but was wide awake at night. Minnie and I had a few sleepless nights. Mom helped out a lot. She just loved Randy. He was her pride and joy.

Randy, when he got a little older, loved car rides. So as soon as I got home from work Minnie would be waiting with Randy to go for a car ride.

Christmas 1954 was wonderful. We had Randy and it was his first Christmas. We went to church and left Randy with Grandma. She was a great baby-sitter. We had a very joyful Christmas and a Happy New Year, 1955. Mom was always our baby-sitter and a very good one. We went to the movies every once in a while for entertainment.

Late in the spring Minnie got a job at Canada Packers working in the invoice department. That year we got some of our income tax back and we started saving money for a house.

That spring the city of Moose Jaw advertised in the Moose Jaw Times Herald a number of vacant lots that were available to rent for garden plots. The fee was \$1.00 for the season.

I went to the city hall and rented one of the lots. I had to sign an agreement stating that if someone bought the lot the garden produce had to be harvested within thirty days and the lot cleaned up. So I asked the city if this particular lot was for sale. They informed me that they would look into the matter and let me know.

We planted the garden - mostly potatoes. About two weeks later the city phoned and said that the lot was for sale and we could have it for \$160.00. The location was 330 Grandview

Street West.

I thought that we should buy the lot. At first Minnie wasn't for it, but after a little persuasion she agreed and we bought the lot. Mom and Dad weren't too happy though. They wanted us to build on the empty lot on Maple St. but it wasn't serviced with sewer and water and we definitely didn't want to live in an unmodern house.

It gave me great pleasure to work in the garden and know that the lot was ours. Now what are we going to do with this lot we wondered. I said to Minnie, "I am going to build a house." She said, "You're no carpenter. How can you build a house?"

I soon learned. I had faith and lots of it. Mom and Dad didn't think too much of this idea of building a home, but we convinced them that it was the right thing to do. Especially after we went and looked at houses that were for sale in our price range. We couldn't imagine living in any of them. Our standards were too high.

Once we decided to build, I made a deal with Jules Pinel, a local contractor, to pour the basement for \$850.00 and I agreed to work with him for that price. So by my helping him we saved about \$200.00.

I had to dig out the potatoes a little prematurely. But that was okay with us. I sold the potatoes for \$3.00 a bag (100 lb. sack). We had about twelve bags of potatoes.

By the end of August, 1955, we had a basement. This day I will always remember. It was a Saturday and late in the evening when we finished pouring the cement. I went home and got two jars of homemade dill pickles. I stopped at the butcher shop and got a bunch of garlic sausages, rye bread from the bakery shop and then I stopped at the liquor store and bought a bottle of whiskey and 24 beers. When I got back the boys were just cleaning up the tools. I called them all down into the basement, filled up a glass of whiskey and christened our first home and said, "Happy days in this house," while pouring whiskey on the ground floor. We really had a nice time.

Later that night Minnie and I went to a dance at the hall. We met the contractor who poured our basement there. He wasn't feeling any pain. He was saying how he enjoyed working for us, and said that they will always

remember the hospitality and celebration they had at the beginning of our new home.

This is the time when Minnie and I got home after the dance and I backed the car into the garage and dented my car door a little. But I was lucky. It popped out again and was as good as new.

Our plan was to have the basement ready so that I could start building early in the next year, 1956. It worked out just great.

Soon after that John Fischer and I bought an old barley brewery elevator, 10 meters high and 4 x 4 meters square. We paid \$150.00 each for it. John needed the lumber to build his garage and I had enough 2 x 4's and 2 x 6's to build a house. It was beautiful lumber, well seasoned. John and I started from the top and took the elevator apart piece by piece and pulled all of the nails out of the boards. I hauled all of my share to our basement which was now covered by a plywood floor.

Minnie and I drew up our house plans and took them to the city for approval. We got a building permit and then my work was cut out for me. Minnie's dad gave me a hand saw, hammer and square and I bought myself a level and measuring tape. Now I was all set.

In the winter of 1955 - 56 every spare moment that I had I went to the basement, cutting studs, all the door ways and window headers. I was pre-cutting all the lumber I would need for the whole house. I had it all assembled and numbered ready for me to put together in the spring.

It was hard for Minnie's dad to understand how anyone could cut up the lumber so far ahead of time. He would say, "How do you know it's going to fit?" He was worried and said I was wasting the lumber.

In the spring of 1956 I moved our garage from Maple St. to 330 Grandview St. W. to store the building material for the house. We bought all of the plywood for the whole house through Steve Heshka from Bird's Construction at \$1.00 for a 4' x 8' sheet, and enough insulation for the whole house for \$60.00.

In the first part of May I took all of the lumber I had pre-cut in the basement and brought it up to the top of the floor ready to begin building. I was in luck. Steve was laid off from work for one week so he was able to help

me. In three days we had the whole house framed and we started working on the roof.

John Fischer and Frank Maydanich came and helped me to work on the roof, which I greatly appreciated.

After that it was a one man's job. Minnie's dad came quite often to see how things were going. He couldn't get over as to how the house went up so fast. I told him that all of his worrying was for nothing, as all of the lumber I had pre-cut made it possible for the house to go up so quickly.

That summer I spent every spare minute working on the house. I had fun and Minnie and Randy came to see me quite often.

We used up all the money we had so we went and got a loan for \$1000.00 through Beaver Lumber Co. for two years with payments at \$42.00 a month which we could handle quite easily.

Minnie began to have morning sickness, and this time we knew what that meant. She wasn't as sick this time as when she was pregnant with Randy. We were very happy and were hoping for a little baby girl. Now Randy would have a playmate I thought. We began preparing for our new baby with great joy.

At first Minnie was worried as to what we were going to do as she had to quit her job with Canada Packers. I soon made up for it by working in my spare time for the contractor Jules Pinel pouring basements. So I was a busy man.

That summer we made a contract with Richardson and Dracup to install our plumbing for \$850.00. Our payments were \$50.00 a month with no interest which was a big help.

In June, 1956 our roof was on and shingled. John Fischer helped me to put our cedar siding on, so the outside of the house was pretty well finished.

So now there was just the inside work to do, the finishing work, and building the cupboards (I built the bottom half only, at this time). We had to watch what we spent very carefully as we couldn't spend money we didn't have.

So everything was going just great.

We needed a furnace and hot water tank so we made a deal with Caribou Sheet and Metal Co. for \$675.00. The payments were \$65.00 a month and were made to the Royal Bank. We

were lucky that year. Natural gas had just come to Moose Jaw, so we took advantage of this new way of heating and had it installed. We were one of the few people with natural gas heat.

Our water line was hooked up to the house. We now had heat, the three bedrooms, the kitchen and the bathroom were gyprocked and painted and the rest would be done later.

October 26, 1956 was a memorable day for me. I called up an acquaintance who owned a half ton truck to help me move. I had helped him shingle his roof and he owed me a favour. We went to 331 Maple St. W. and loaded up our chesterfield and chair, chrome kitchen table and chairs which Mom and Dad bought us for our wedding present, our bedroom suite (Minnie's which she bought when she was single) and headed for 330 Grandview St. W. - our new home. We put everything in its place and it looked really nice and I was so proud of my accomplishment. After that I went to get Minnie and Randy from 331 Maple St. Minnie's mom was sad. She said, "You aren't going to live in that house, are you?" She looked questioningly at us. It was hard for her to see us leave.

We left. It was late in the evening when we moved into our new home. There was still a lot of inside work to be done after we moved in. The living room wasn't finished and the floors all through the house had to be done as there was only the sub-floor down covered with inexpensive linoleum. The basement floor wasn't cemented either. However, the whole house was sheeted with plywood before any gyproc went on. Also, the ceiling was sheeted with boards. So it was a very solidly built house.

We left all of our projects on hold. We ran out of money. But our house was warm and our very own and we liked it the way it was.

In the meantime, we were planning to finish it later on after we finished paying up what we owed. Our total debt was \$1300.00. We didn't have any mortgage but Minnie was still worried as to when we would ever pay all this debt up, which was quite a bit in those days. The payments were \$120.00 a month all told. I was getting some money from the contractor for whom I worked in my spare time and this helped us a lot. I thought we were heading in the right direction.

We were very happy in our new home and we settled down very well, although every once in a while Randy would say that he wanted to go home, meaning 331 Maple St. W. I guess he missed Grandma and Grandpa.

Christmas, 1956; our first Christmas in our new home. We were all excited. Randy talked about Santa Claus and the new baby that was coming soon. Minnie was preparing a special Christmas Eve supper. I thought we should have a Christmas tree so I went downtown to a Christmas tree lot and I soon found out that all of the trees were sold out except for one little forlorn tree that was standing in the corner. It was scrawny, a real Charlie Brown tree. I asked the guy how much he wanted for it. He looked surprised that I would even consider buying it, and said, "Give me 50 cents and you can have it."

When I got home with it, Minnie couldn't believe that I would buy such a scrawny looking tree. Never the less we decorated it and I thought it looked just beautiful. The scrawny, uneven branches on the three foot tree were decorated with a few glass balls, a plastic angel adorned the top of the tree, and a small string of lights entwined it. This little tree we put up right in front of our picture window for all the world to see - it was ours and it was Christmas. This was the most happy and joyful Christmas that we ever had.

Steve and Elsie invited us over for Christmas dinner. Mom and Dad were there too, so we all had a nice visit. I enjoyed the turkey dinner and all the trimmings. On Boxing Day a lot of our friends dropped over to our house and of course the topic of our conversation was our Charlie Brown tree.

It turned into a house warming party as well. Everyone loved our new home. We had fun.

On January 29, 1957 shortly after supper Minnie developed labour pains. She said, "I am ready to go in." I went and got her mother to stay with Randy. Around 9 p.m. I took her to the hospital, came home, put Randy to bed and I went to bed too. Around 10:30 p.m. the hospital called and said that Minnie had a little baby girl and that they were doing fine. I thanked God for our blessing. I woke Randy up and told him that he had a little baby sister. He opened his eyes, then turned around and went back to sleep. He

probably thought that he was dreaming.

I went to the hospital to see Minnie and our new baby daughter. Sandra was tiny, weighing in at 6 lbs. 5 1/2 oz. She had blue eyes and a little pug nose, and was oh so cute and sweet. We were very happy and full of joy that we had a healthy beautiful baby girl.

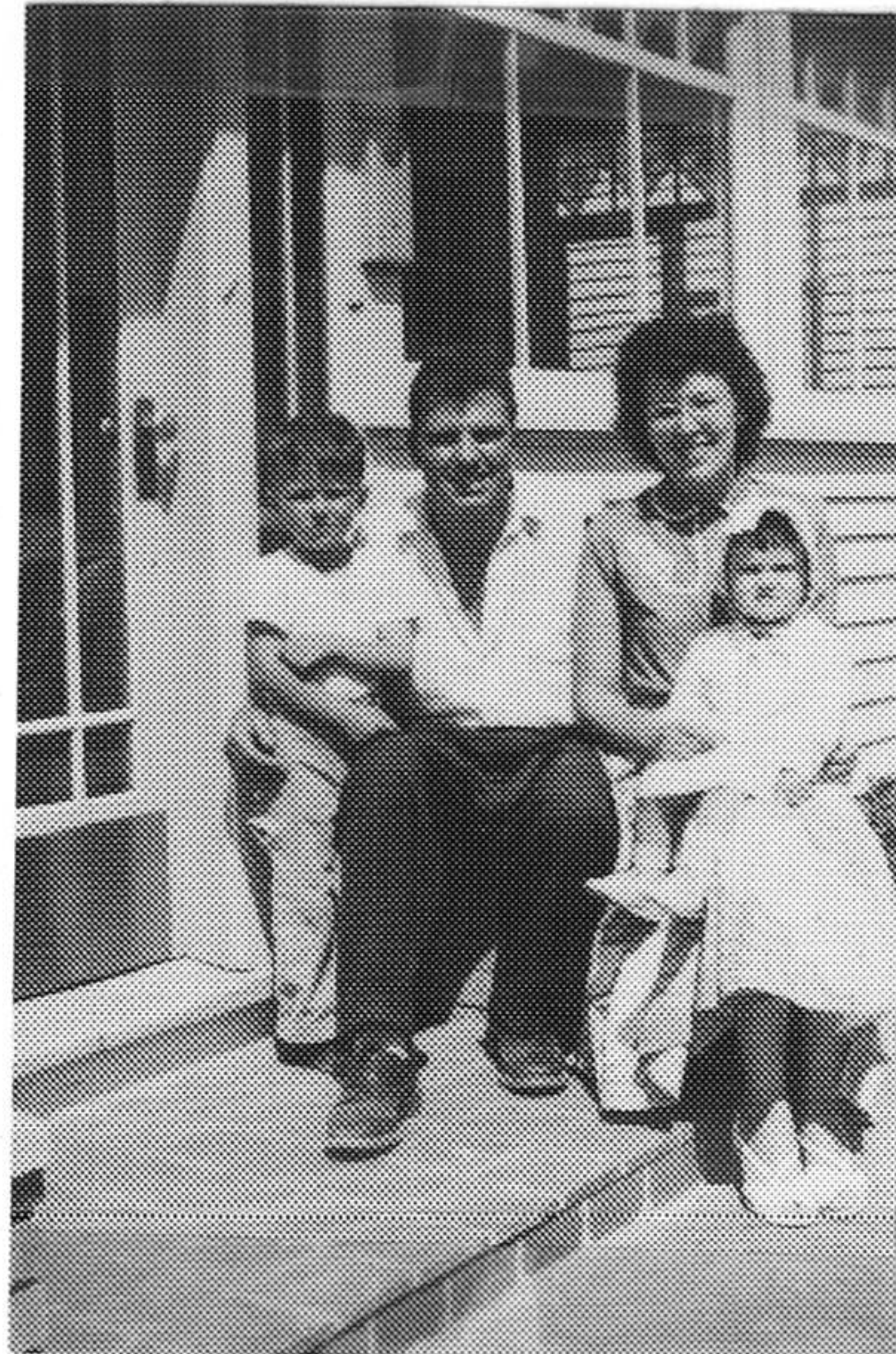
They were both tired so I didn't stay very long. I went back home. Mom was baby-sitting Randy and I told her that she was a Grandma again and that everyone was fine. Grandma and Grandpa were so very pleased to have a new darling grand-daughter. The next day I went to see them again. They were both rested and Sandra was blinking her eyes. She looked just beautiful. It was time for another joyful celebration and keeping with tradition, I bought a bottle of scotch, twelve beers and of course, White Owl cigars. Dad came over and we had a few shots of scotch and a beer for a chaser. I passed out cigars to all of our friends and guys at work. Our joy was complete. A few days later I brought Minnie and Sandra home, and we were back to diapers again.

We didn't have a washing machine, only a galvanized tub and a glass washboard. I felt sorry for Minnie as we didn't have any money with which to buy a washing machine, so I went to the Moose Jaw Hardware and asked them if they would sell me a washing machine on credit. The price was \$135.00 for a Beatty Deluxe wringer washer, pink and white in colour. I bought it. The payments were \$12.00 a month. Minnie thought that the machine was just great. For a "dryer" I hung clothes line wire downstairs stretched out from wall to wall and in the summer time the clothes were hung outside. It was just great. I guess that was because we didn't know any better.

We had a coal and wood stove in the kitchen and above that I made a small clothes line to dry Sandra's diapers on in the winter time. The heat from the stove made a great dryer.

Things were going very well. We kept up our payments and had plenty to eat. Then one day I got a lay off notice from my job at the C.P.R. So back to the unemployment office I went. They paid \$36.00 a week. We couldn't make our payments. So I went to Richardson and Dracup and asked them if they would settle

for \$25.00 a month instead of \$50.00. They said that it was fine and were glad that I came and told them about our situation. Many people would say that it was tough going but we were happy and I never once lost my faith and I thank God for that. When I got called back to work I resumed my full payments. It was a challenge to me. Anyway, I thought how fortunate we were. That year, 1957 Minnie was a full time mother.



Randy, John, Minnie, and Sandra

Randy and Sandra were christened that summer at St. Michael and All Angels Church by Father Lloyd. Randy's Godparents were Lionel and Gladys Jones, good friends and neighbours of ours, and Sandra's Godparents were Joe Prebushewski, a good friend of ours and Beverly Heshka, our niece. Randy was dressed in a little sailor suit (white top and navy pants) and he looked so cute. Sandra was dressed in a little white dress and she looked beautiful. Family and friends came over for a Christening Celebration Supper. This we held in our unfinished living room. We had a lovely time. We were so proud of our children and so very blessed to have them.

I was working the night shift from 12 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. in the morning. In the daytime I worked for Jules Pinel the contractor quite

often. I had a lot of energy in those days. This one time that I was working for Jules Pinel, we were pouring a basement. I was wheeling a load of cement in the wheelbarrow up a ramp. The ramp broke and I went down with it and the whole wheelbarrow of cement flipped over and came down on me. The cement fell on my head, covering my whole body. I never even missed a beat; I got up, wiped the cement off of me and grabbed the wheelbarrow. I filled it up again and continued to pour cement! By the end of the year we had paid up our debts. That winter of 1958 we got a loan for \$600.00 from the Royal Bank and we finished the house upstairs. I laid oak floors in the living room and bedrooms and I put the best inlaid linoleum money could buy in the kitchen, hallway and bathroom, and after thirty eight years it is just as good as new and is still in service.

We were very proud to have our home and it was much admired by many people.

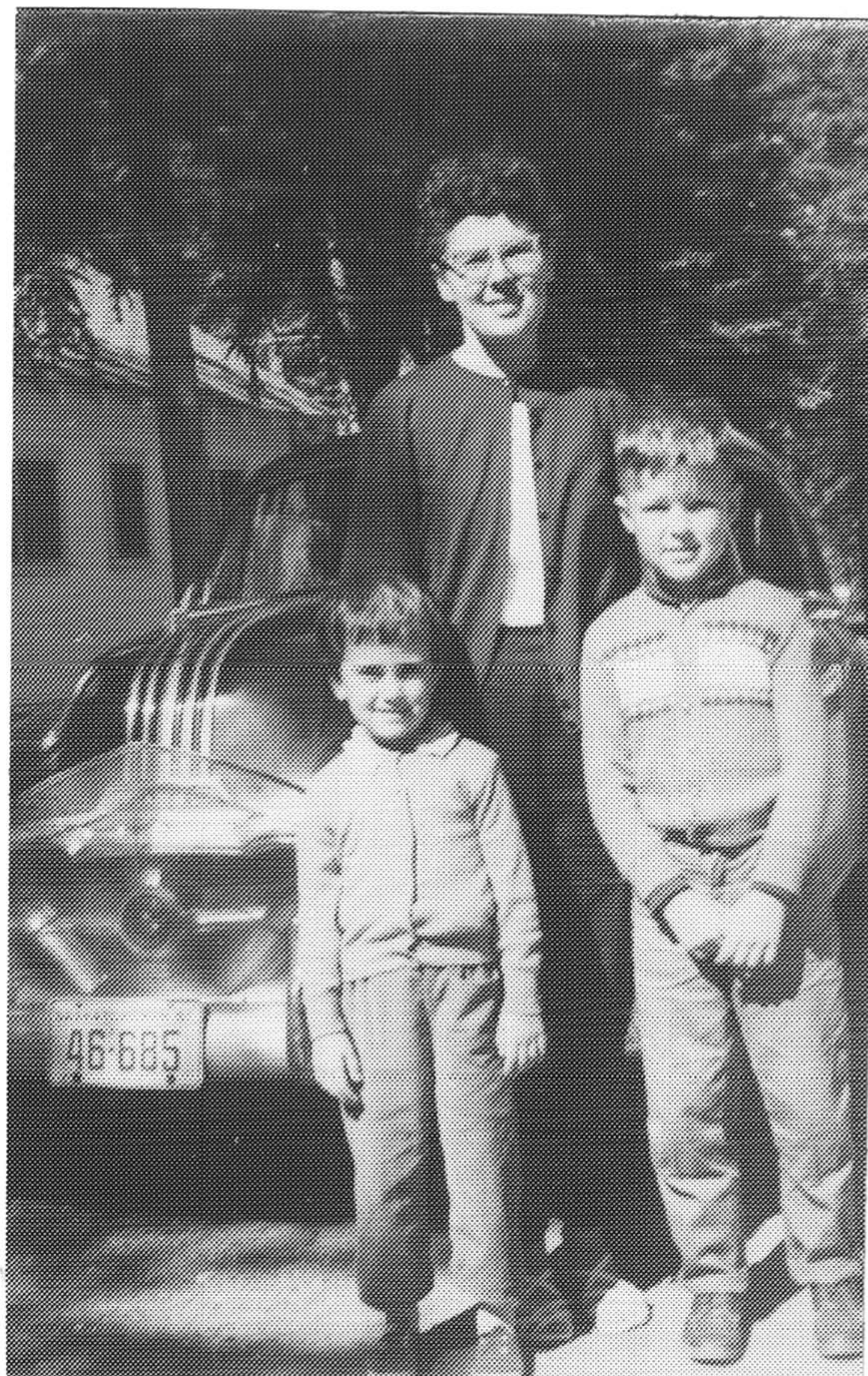
On February 27, 1958 I took Sandra in my arms and went to see Grandma and Grandpa on Maple St. They loved Sandra. She was a special granddaughter. We had a nice visit. The next day Dad had a heart attack at home and passed away to be with the Lord. It was a very sad time for all of us. He was only 71 years old. It happened so suddenly. We missed him very much. He was a happy man and loved by all of his children. He always lent a helping hand to all of his children.

Life went on and that summer I got Joe Prebushewski and some other friends to give me a hand and we poured our basement floor.

That is the time our garden got hailed out and there was nothing left but stumps, even so some of the plants came back and we did have a few vegetables to harvest that fall.

We always had a nice garden. We didn't have a deep freeze so we canned most of our vegetables, beets, peas, beans and we made lots of dill pickles. I remember this one summer Minnie canned fourteen quarts of peas and not one of them spoiled.

We decided to get a gas stove for our kitchen, so the coal and wood stove went into retirement. The wood stove we still have to this day in our basement for back up heat in case anything should go wrong with the gas line and power.



1952 Pontiac, Sandra, Minnie, and Randy

The summer of 1958 went by quickly. For our holidays, we went to Manitou Beach with the children. (Our honeymoon haven). We rented a cabin for two days. Sandra was 18 months old. She found an old fashioned wire toaster in the cabin and was having fun running around outside with it saying "making toast". Randy was 3 years and 8 mos. old and I was trying to get his feet wet in Manitou Lake which was supposed to be good for you as it is a natural salt lake. We had fun that year.

In the meantime, Fred Misfeldt and the Co-op farmers he was in partnership with went bankrupt. Fred and Janet sold their land and moved to Kitimat, B.C. Fred got a job there in a foundry. So we rented out our land to Anton and Medora Jankauskas. They were happy to have our land.

## Christmas, 1958

We bought a Christmas tree that was a little bigger than the last year, and our house was now finished inside. It seemed to me that each Christmas got better and better. Our children were getting bigger and we didn't have any payments so I thought that we should build a rumpus room downstairs. Minnie thought that was a good idea. We took a loan for \$600.00 and that winter we finished the downstairs. I made a beautiful kitchen, washroom and bathroom besides the main rumpus room. I enjoyed doing it. That was my "cup of tea" so to speak. I made closets everywhere and every nook and cranny was made into closets or cupboards. I got to be pretty good with my carpentry skills. As a result there was a big demand on my time to build cupboards, garages and rumpus rooms to name a few things. I was making extra money on the side besides working for Pinel and the C.P.R. I then started to slacken off on my job with Pinel as it was beginning to be too much for me. I also learned how to sharpen saws. Word soon got around and I had a hard time to keep up with the demand. I sharpened saws for many people as well as all of the lumber yards in Moose Jaw and I even did some saws for Canada Packers, a meat packing plant. I enjoyed this very much.

One day in the fall, Fred, Janet and family stopped by our house on their way from Kitimat, B.C. We welcomed them with open arms. Minnie made a nice meal and we had a nice visit. Fred couldn't believe that we owned our own home. At one point in our conversation he commented on "how life is", At one time he was a big farmer with everything going for him and in the next instance everything seemed to fall apart. They were now living in a rented house and I, his ex-hired hand, had his own home, a good job and a piece of land. Everything seemed to be in reverse for him. He couldn't believe how things could change so fast. I told him that I had a good teacher, meaning him. I learned from observing him what to do and what not to do. He told me how the co-op farm fell apart. We had a good talk. I thought to myself, how fortunate I was.

I liked my job and we didn't have any more payments. We started saving some money for

Randy and Sandra's education. It turned out though that they didn't use it. They practically put themselves through University. They both worked in the summer months to pay for their schooling. So the money we saved we gave to them when they got married.

So everything was going well. We had a very good credit rating, which we didn't need anymore. We had a joint savings account at the Royal Bank (no. 1557). Any surplus money that we had we invested in Canada Savings Bonds.

I learned about financing at the C.P.R. passenger station. Two guys were standing around talking about finances. I was on the job at the time. I happened to overhear their conversation. One said to the other, "If you want to be successful financially whatever you buy don't pay any interest on it. Save first and buy later." I took that advice to heart and it worked for me.

So ever since I was 35 years old I have never paid interest on anything. In fact, we received thousands upon thousands of dollars in interest on our investments. Probably about \$100,000. in our life time. It is hard to believe. In the meantime, we lived a good life and money was never a priority in my life. Good living was.

In 1962 I got laid off again, but it was no problem as I was used to it. I got a job the next day renovating a house. I also got a job at Pool Construction. They needed a man for three days and the wages were very good. At the end of the third day I started to pack up my tools. The foreman said, "Where are you going?" "They told me that they needed a man for three days and my time is up", I replied. "Never mind what they said, I need you", the foreman said. So I worked there until I got called back to the C.P.R. three months later.

Randy and Sandra were going to school already. They did very well in school and we were very pleased.

As the years went by I thought about my family in Poland. My mom and dad were just across the border in Russia behind the Iron Curtain. I wanted to see them. I couldn't go to Russia but I could go to Poland. (Russia did not allow anyone in). So in 1966 I made arrangements to meet Mom and Dad in Poland at my brother Aleksander's place. Minnie didn't want to go, as it was risky in those days.

Randy, on the other hand, was very eager to go and see his Grandma and Grandpa on his father's side. So on July 11, 1966 Randy and I took off for Poland from Regina on to Montreal, Amsterdam and finally Warsaw, Poland. Randy was twelve years old at the time. It was a big adventure for the both of us.

I was only fifteen years old when I left Poland and I wondered how many changes had taken place since then.

My brother Aleksander and cousin Wladek met us at the airport in Warsaw, Poland at 3 p.m. It had been twenty-four years since we had last seen each other. It was a very emotional reunion. We took a bus to Tarnawatka which is located about 250 kilometers from Warsaw. It was well after midnight when we got to Tarnawatka. There we were met by my brother's only son Januszek who was waiting for us with a horse and buggy.

It was so dark you could poke your eye out with your own finger. There was no electricity. We rode for four kilometers to my brother's home. There was no electricity there either.

Their home was a two room house with a straw thatched roof. It was something to behold for Randy. My brother had a nice farm with a lot of livestock. There was a litter of ten piglets running around, geese, chickens, cows and horses and lots of fruit trees surrounded the



John, Dad, Randy, Mom, Poland, 1966

farm.

Before Randy and I left for Poland for our visit in 1966, the Canadian Embassy had informed us that we would literally be going at our own risk. Even though I was now a citizen of Canada and Randy a second generation Canadian citizen, had the Polish government been so inclined, they could have detained us in Poland and we would have had to abide by their ruling.

Our second night in Poland at my brother's house was a scary one. Poland was still very much in Russian hands.

Randy and I and my nieces and nephew were sleeping in the house while my brother Aleksander had gone to the barn to sleep.

It was around 2 a.m. when I was awakened by a loud pounding on the door, and men yelling to open up the door.

My niece Alinka would not open the door to them, so they went around the house and started pounding on the window to the room where Randy and I were sleeping.

I was literally sweating. I knew how the Russians operated, picking up people in the middle of the night and no one ever hearing of them again. I was worried about Randy more than anything else. Fear gripped me.

Finally, my brother, upon hearing all the noise and commotion, came out of the barn. He talked to the men for about an hour. I could hear them, but could not make out what they were saying. They had a heated discussion and finally the men left.

In the morning I asked my brother what that was all about. He tried to avoid talking about it, but he did say that it was a good job that we didn't open the door. The whole episode had something to do with Randy and I being there and why we were there. The Communists were suspicious of us and probably thought we were spies.

I think my brother paid the two men off. Anyway, I felt very uneasy for the rest of our stay in Poland.

The next day my mom and dad came from Russia. It was a very joyful and emotional reunion. Mom wasn't sure that I was her son. At one point during the war when she hadn't heard from me for many years she went to a fortune teller who told Mom that I was lost in the

war and most likely not alive. We reminisced about my childhood adventures. I thought that would convince her that it really was me, her son, John. We had a beautiful time together.

My brother butchered a calf and a pig and made a lot of sausages. There was plenty of vodka. We had a big party and many people came for a big celebration. The Prodigal Son had come home!

It was harvest time. We helped my brother with the harvest. They had an old diesel driven threshing machine out in the field and we hauled the sheaves to it, and bagged the grain, then hauled it home. One day we were threshing and Mom was cooking for us. She brought the meal out to us in the field. It was chicken borscht and with it a bottle of vodka 95% alcohol. We had to have an appetizer! I picked up three glasses and filled them up with three ounces each of vodka. We touched glasses and I said, "Here we are, back together again." Dad said, "Thank God for that."

I praised Mom for the delicious borscht that she cooked. I said, "You never lost your touch." She modestly said, "It would have been better if I could have cooked it in my own kitchen." I said, "Mom, this is so good it can't be any

better." We had a lot to talk about, and so many years to catch up on. It was great and too soon the two weeks were over. On the weekend a party was held in our honour in the village. It was subsidized by the Government of Poland to show us how well off they are. Some people were turned off by this as most of the people are very poor and here they were spending money for propaganda's sake. But it was fun while it lasted. I commented to one of my school friends that they lived pretty good and he said, "Yes. That is because you are here." I knew that myself. They couldn't fool me!

We spent about two weeks at my brother's place, then we went to my cousin Wladek's place in Chelm. My mom and dad came with us. We stayed there for one week. We enjoyed our visit the most at my cousin's place.

He lived in a city of about 40,000 population. He had electricity and running water in his home, but even so Randy and I were getting homesick for Canada. That was the time it hit me as to how fortunate we are here in Canada.

We had a nice visit with Wladek and his wife Genia and their two boys, Wisiek and Zdzisiek. They were great hosts.



Wladek, Genia, Aleksander, Lotka (top): Dad, Mom, Randy, John, Danusa, (bottom). 1966



Randy, threshing in Poland, 1966



John and Randy: Majdanek concentration camp. 1966



Wladek and John, Majdanek concentration camp, 1966



John and Randy: Majdanek concentration camp. 1966