



Part 6: Canada 1924-1959

Lawren Harris

LAWREN
HARRIS

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Part 6 Highlights

*Part 6 relates the movements and stories of the **S Frank Bruce family** in Canada, after they survive Japan's catastrophic earthquake on September 1, 1923. 'In A Nutshell' provides the chronology.*

- *A broken engagement leaves a young woman shattered and distraught*
- *Farmhands fight for their lives when fire breaks out in the grain*
- *A cattle boat loses its rudder in a North Atlantic storm*
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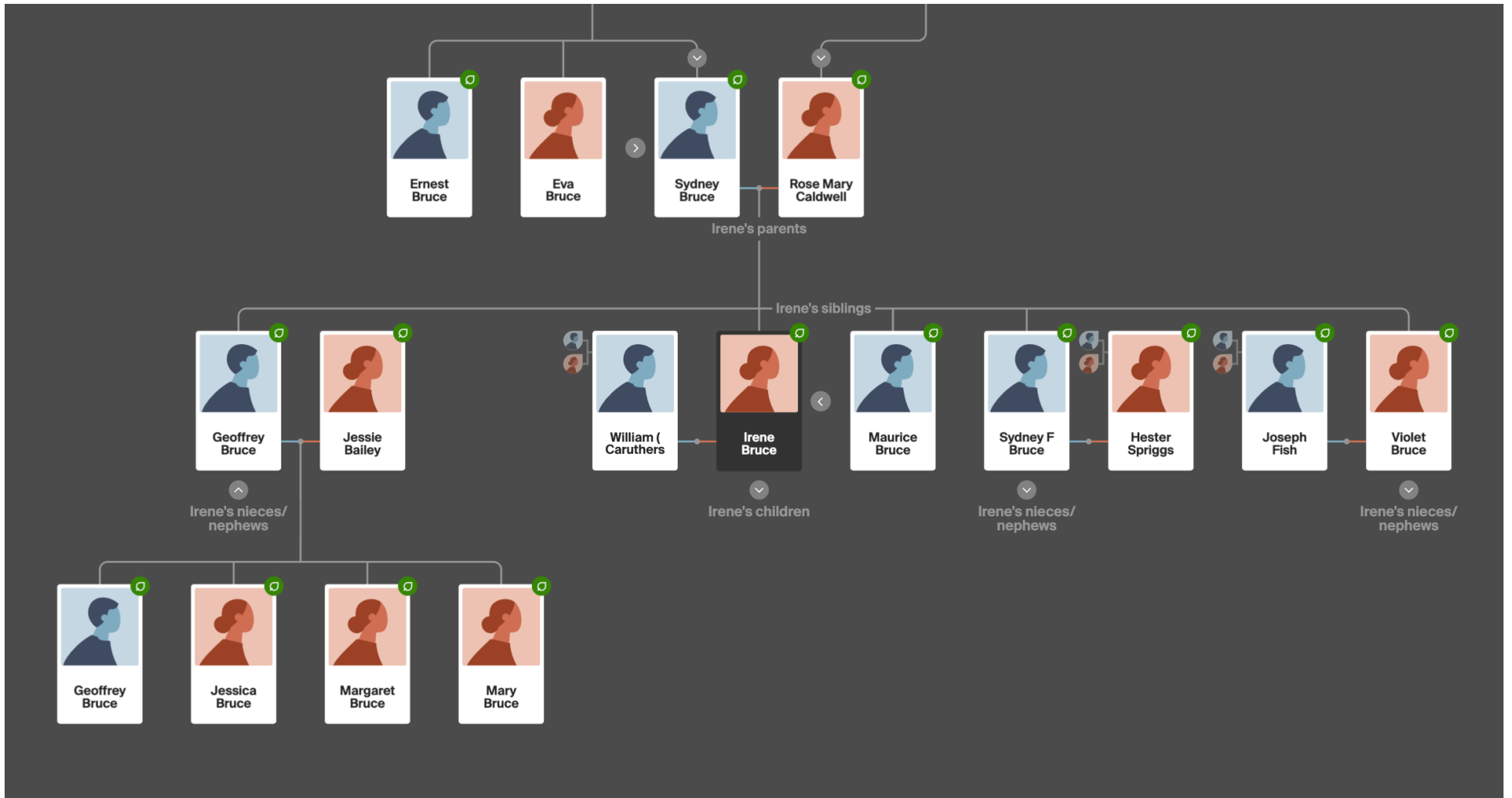
The Bruces

In relation to the author Peter Bruce:

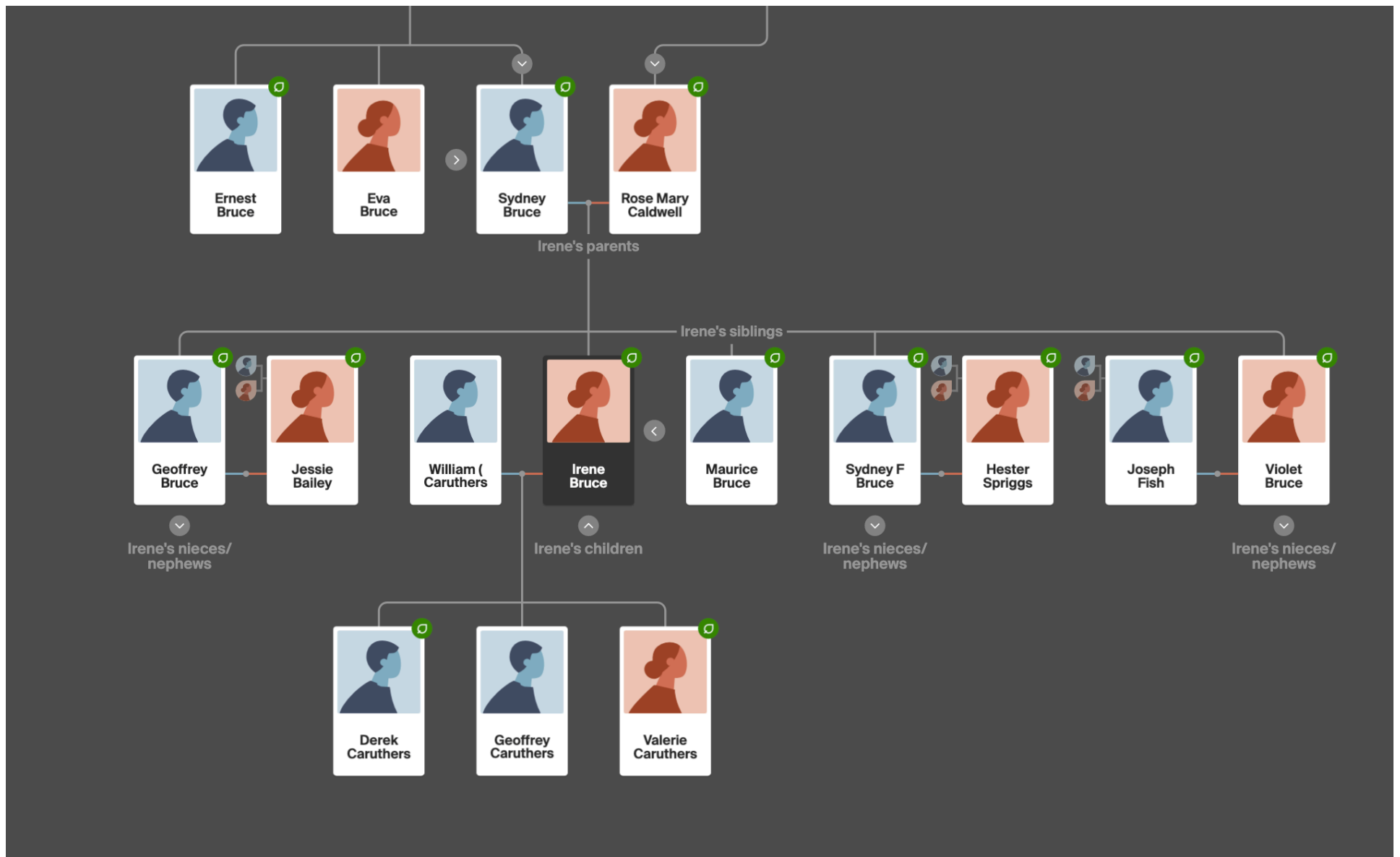
Sydney Bruce:	grandfather
Rose Mary Caldwell:	grandmother
Irene Bruce:	aunt
(Sydney) Frank Bruce:	father
Violet:	aunt
Maurice:	uncle
Geoffrey:	uncle
Eva Bruce:	great aunt
Ernest Bruce:	great uncle
Hester Spriggs:	mother
Alison Spriggs:	aunt



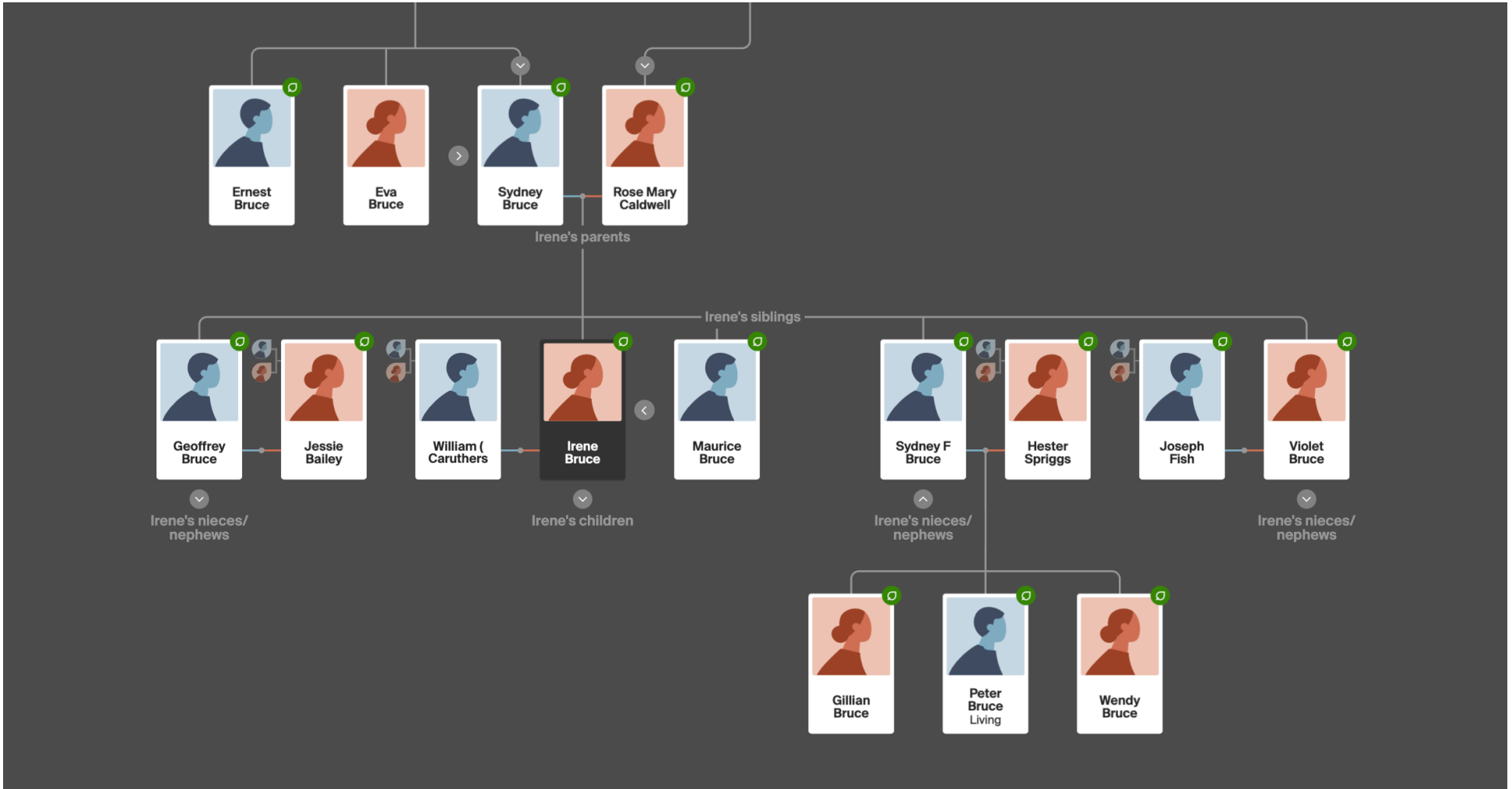
Sydney Bruce



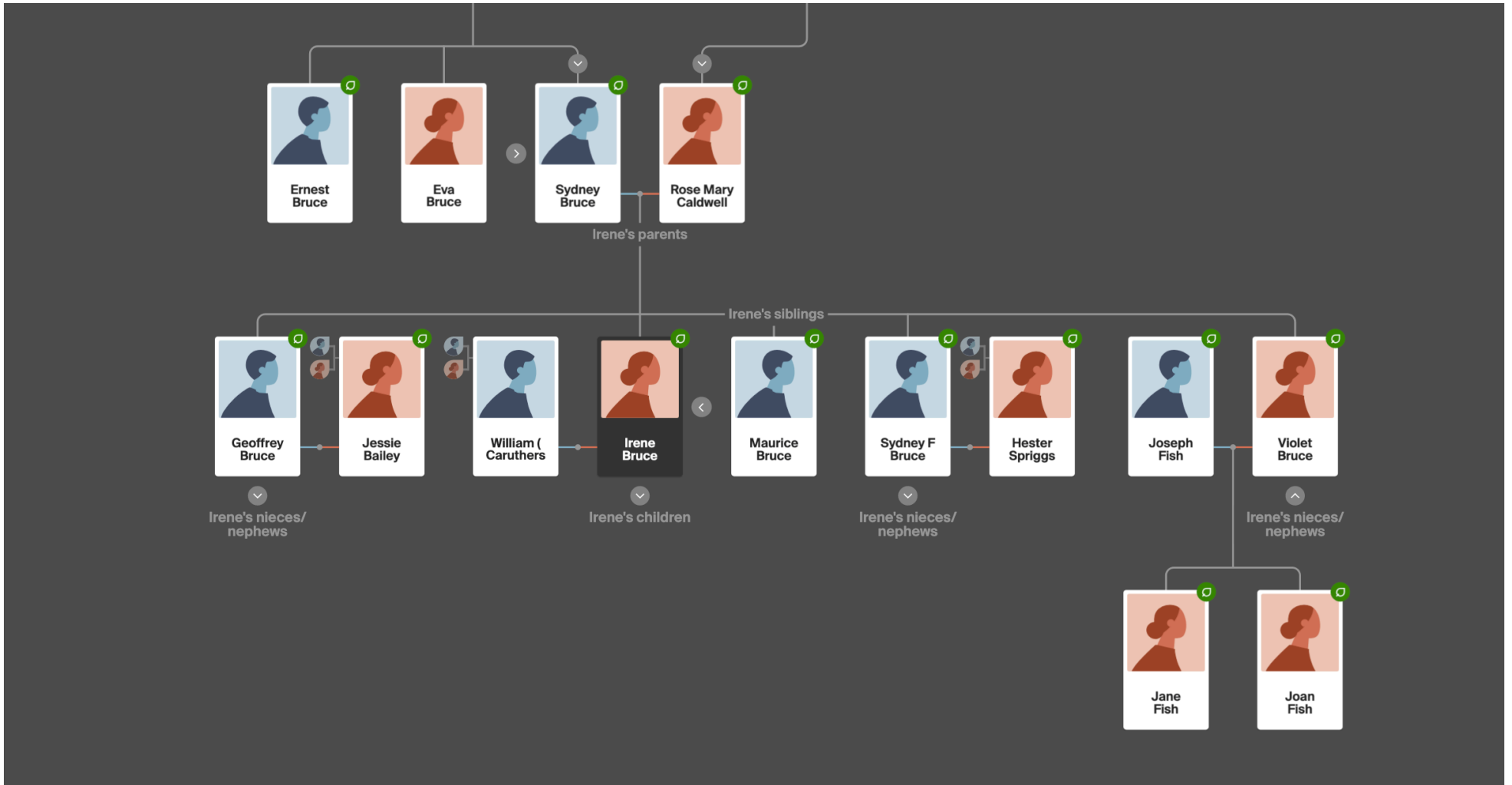
Geoffrey Bruce Family



Irene Bruce Family



S Frank Bruce Family



Violet Bruce Family

In A Nutshell

Aftermath

After the earthquake in Japan, opportunities to earn a living there naturally dried up and the Bruce family parted ways: Sydney and Frank stayed on in Japan to help their companies get back on their feet, then left for England in the spring of 1924.

Well before the earthquake, Renie (Irene) married William Carruthers in England and started a family. After the earthquake, Vi (Violet) took

shelter with her employer, Joe Fish, with whom she had a whirlwind romance and married in Japan in the spring of 1924. Maurice and Aunt Eva (Sydney's sister), were caught on a dock when the earthquake struck, but clambered onto a ship just before the dock disappeared. They found passage back to England. Geoffrey and his mother Rose Mary, left Japan one month before the earthquake. They were unharmed in England.

A semblance of family gathered back in London. Sydney and the boys attempted a chocolate business which was unsuccessful. By the fall of 1924, it must have become clear to the Bruces that a prosperous future in England was not in the cards. Jobs were few, family savings were depleted and the cost of

living in London was no doubt unsupportable.

At the same time, the Canadian government and the Canadian Pacific Railway were offering enticing deals to families willing to settle on the prairies -- subsidized transportation to Canada, 160 acres of free land, agricultural training and subsidized farm set up costs. Sydney had no intention of becoming a farmer,



Chaos at the dock following the earthquake

nor did Rose Mary, I'm sure. But it might be an answer for the three boys ...and it was affordable!

To Canada

The Bruces placed their bet on Canada. It was decided that the boys would attend the subsidized 7 month agricultural course at McDonald College. The college was in the picturesque little town of Baie d'Urfé near Montreal. Once the boys were settled at college, Sydney travelled on to Yokohama to seek work and hopefully, secure sorely needed income.

The Farming Fizzle

In the end, not much of that plan happened.

The boys did complete the course with mediocre grades which likely reflected mediocre enthusiasm for the plan to become farmers. But pass they did and west went Frank and Geoffrey who worked the harvest in central Alberta in the fall of 1925.

Maurice, however, was a sensitive man, more suited to playing grand pianos in grand ballrooms than stooking hay on grand expanses of the Canadian prairie. He was nowhere evident after graduation day. In all likelihood, he made an executive decision that this plan was not going to work and caught the first boat back to comfortable and familiar England.

Frank and Geoffrey worked the harvest to its end in November of 1925 on a large farm near



McDonald College, Baie d'Urfé

Middle left: Geoffrey Bruce; Next to Geoffrey: S Frank Bruce; Front Row Left: Maurice Bruce

Big Valley, Alberta (32 km south of Stettler). Frank and Geoffrey then headed for the West Coast. That was enough of farming — for a lifetime, despite the best marketing efforts of their very own talented Uncle Ernest, Sydney's brother and Director of Exhibits for the CPR's Department for Colonization and Development. They were heading west.

Frank Tanks

What became of Geoffrey is not known. Frank did his best to find work in Vancouver but times were hard and by Christmas, nothing had come up. Canada, he decided, had nothing to offer. He was headed home to England.

Armed with a tip from a fella in the White

Lunch Cafe on Hastings St., Frank caught the train to Montreal, then signed on as a cow handler to a ship called the Manchester Producer, a cattle boat. She was loaded, both in the hold and on deck.

It was January when the ship tossed her lines and ventured into the North Sea amid a winter storm. Well out into the Atlantic, the Manchester Producer lost her rudder. For two weeks, she drifted sideways in enormous troughs in grave danger of turning turtle. Another week later, a salvage tug secured a line to her and towed her safely to the Azores.

Frank struck 'Mariner' off his list of possible careers and made his way back to England, by

land. For a complete account, please see 'Salvage' written by Frank among the tales in this section.

Frank's father, Sydney, fared no better in Japan. There was no work on offer and Sydney returned to England empty-handed.

The family sold their London home and made a final trip to Canada, settling in Vancouver. Sydney retired and Frank and Geoffrey got work at Britannia Mine, just north of the city.

A Miner's Life

Frank and Geoffrey worked underground. The work must have appealed to Geoffrey, for he returned east to complete a bachelor of Science degree in Geology, then worked out of

Ottawa with the Geological Survey of Canada. Geoffrey was instrumental in bringing to production a large body of vermiculite in central Ontario.

Frank laboured on at Britannia from 1926 to 1934, when he secured work as a purchaser and accountant at Pioneer Mine near Lillooet, BC. As Frank approached his mid-thirties, he felt the need to have a partner and proposed to Hester Spriggs, a woman he had dated while at McDonald College. She accepted and journeyed out to the mine where they began their life together (Please see 'Wealth to Wilderness'). They married at Pioneer Mine, April 21, 1935. In 1938, , with the depression still underway, Frank found work as

an accountant for the just completed Lions Gate Bridge. There he worked for about eight years, then lost the job to a Guinness family member (Guinness owned the bridge). By that time Frank and Hester had two children, Wendy, born in 1936 and Gillian, born in 1943. and Peter on the way.

Vancouver

It was then, in 1946, that Frank attended Vancouver Art School, made possible by a generous severance package from Guinness. Following that, he found work as an advertising manager with a forest equipment company called Galbraith & Sulley. He remained there for 13 years, but in 1959, a market lull left him jobless at age 60. For two years, he looked for work, finally

Britannia, as an oiler in the mill. It was an arduous job for a man with a heart condition, but for 10 years he toughed it out until his death in 1970.

Family

During the war years, the family lived in White Rock, well removed from Vancouver, which Frank felt left us vulnerable to Japanese bombing raids. We also spent periods in the Okanagan, where Hester picked fruit as part of the war effort and Frank served as a training officer.

After the war, we moved to West Vancouver where we lived in three houses, on Bellevue Ave and 29th St, Lawson and 26th St and Esquimalt and 11th St.

For a boy, West Vancouver was a superb place to grow up. I was surrounded by 'wild' spaces — Hollyburn Ridge behind us, beaches in front of us, the Capilano River Canyon to the east and a challenging bike ride to Fisherman's Cove and Horseshoe Bay to the west. It was paradise.

Throughout the war years and into the fifties, Frank was a devoted member of the Irish Fusiliers Reserve Regiment, contributing countless hours to training and regimental management.

Duck and Cover?

Frank was also a member of the Civil Defence Force, the precursor of the Provincial

Emergency Response Team. Through the cold war years, a major initiative of the CDF was educating the public on how to survive nuclear attack. Children (and adults) were taught to 'duck and cover' in the event of a nuclear explosion. Regular drills were carried out in schools and wherever people gathered. It was nuclear hysteria.

My friend's father, a major in the armed forces, built a bomb shelter in his family's basement. No bombs came, however, and the shelter was eventually put into service as a workshop.

The kids, though, had strict instructions: "Do not tell anyone this shelter is here. Do you understand, children?" "Yes father."

However, the first thing an eleven year does is call up his friend, me, and say, “Hey, guess what, we’re building a bomb shelter in the basement but I’m not supposed to tell anybody.”

The Major was clearly anxious to avoid the messy situation wherein the bomb drops on the Vancouver Hotel and five minutes later, the Bruce family is knocking politely on the door of their shelter, the rest of the Major’s house having vaporized. “Basil, old chap, Frank here....Uh, Frank Bruce. We live across the street? In...in the yellow house. Stucco, three children. I see. Perhaps your wife recalls...I see.”

“At any rate, as one human being to another,

would you be willing to share a bit of space with us. We’d stand, of course, so as not to intrude, and just stay until the worst was over. What say? Brothers in arms and all that....Basil, old boy? Are you there?”
“Piss off.”

“Oh, look, the door’s ajar. Just look at that, a screwdriver stuck in the crack. Well, all the best, then. Ta da.



The creation of the Civil Defence Force was in some measure a response to the threat of nuclear attack.



The 20s

Mountains East of Maligne Lake by Lawren Harris

Broken Promise

In 1926, the three Bruce boys came to Canada on a subsidy offered jointly by the Canadian government and the Canadian Pacific Railway. It was an effort to draw young Englishmen to the Canadian prairies to settle and farm. The government was anxious to increase the Canadian population; the CPR was anxious to sell the vast expanses of land it owned along the railway's right-of-way.

The subsidy included tuition to attend

McDonald College in the little town of Baie d'Urfé near Montreal. Their uncle, Ernest Robert Bruce may well have been involved in Marketing that campaign, as he was Director of Exhibitions for the CPR.

Frank was 26, Maurice was 22 and Geoffrey was 19. This was a short agriculture orientation course of about 8 months, designed to provide participants with basic farming skills, then get them onto the prairies quickly.

The course started in October, or possibly the boys were late registering, and ran through the winter into late spring. All three graduated but Maurice is not in evidence afterwards. Possibly, he returned to England.

Through the winter of 1926, Geoffrey and Frank dated two sisters. Geoffrey connected with Alison Spriggs (29) and Hester (21) dated Frank. Sometime during the winter, Geoffrey and Alison became engaged. Then sometime later, Geoffrey broke off the engagement. Spriggs are organized people and Al had all in place for the wedding and beyond when the engagement was cancelled.

Al was devastated. A doctor, who happened to be Jewish, had earlier asked for her hand in marriage and had been rejected by Al's parents. And then this. It was all too much. Al took her entire trousseau and tossed it into the furnace in the basement.

Al never married. Perhaps it was coincidence, perhaps not, but Al began to exhibit symptoms of mental illness shortly after, symptoms which became schizophrenia.

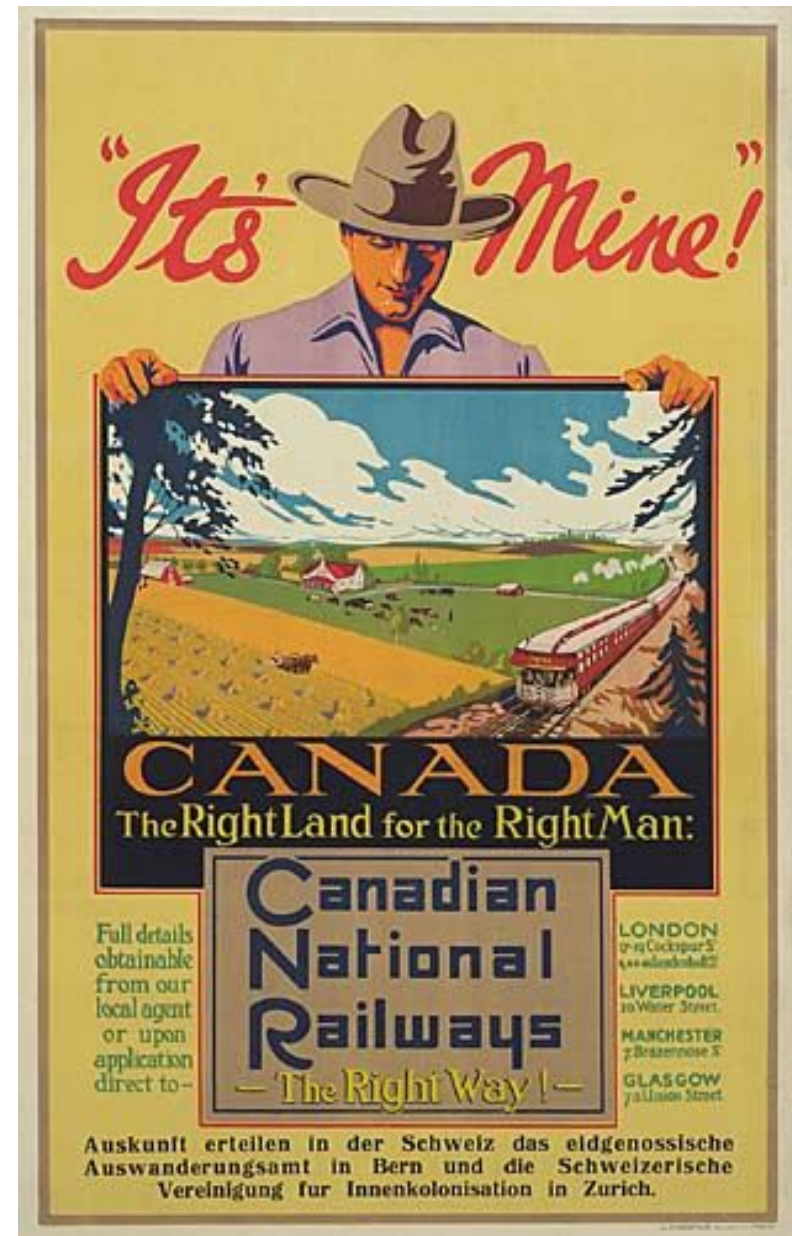
Al was committed to an insane asylum where she remained for decades. In her final 20 years or so, care for the mental ill had improved dramatically allowing Al to spend the rest of her days in Group homes. Through the years, her brother Will and his offspring faithfully visited Al and looked after her affairs.

We don't know what prompted Geoffrey to break off the engagement. There is certainly no evidence to suggest that breaking the engagement triggered or caused the mental

illness. Perhaps the significant age difference was a factor. Or perhaps Geoffrey felt he was just too young to settle down.

In any case, Al's lost life was a tragedy, for she was both a lovely person, full of life and good fun and a talented head nurse with tremendous potential.

Canada partnered with the CPR to attract young men and women to settle the prairies.





Enticing posters were produced to stir the imaginations of young English men and women.

Prairie Fire!

by S Frank Bruce

Sweating men and fear-crazed horses race the flames to save the grain.

For a month the sun had dealt with us pitilessly. The wind, robbed of its moisture by the mountains far to the west, swept burning and parching over the rolling grain fields of South Saskatchewan, drawing the last trace of dew from the stooks of wheat, from the stiff stubble and the powdery, dusty summer fallow.

From the train one could see the threshing outfits working at top speed while the dry weather lasted. The separators, half hidden by the loaded wagon on either side, lay in the hollows of the fields like sanguinary dragons, each with its long neck up-thrust, spewing straw in a fine cloud onto the straw pile.

At the wayside station I watched the train leave, trailing behind it a swirling cloud of dust. Close beside the railway track, like giant tombstones, stood the grain elevators, darkly red, springing free from a tangle of dry grass and woods to the brilliant sky. That night I slept with the threshing crew. There was a spare team and harness in the barn. I would take out a bundle-rack with the rest of the crew in the morning.

Suddenly, the meaning of it drove my heart into my mouth. It was fire! Above the great straw pile was a wisp of smoke. I jumped from the rack, ran to one side. It was fire right enough. The far side of the straw pile was 25 feet of leaping flame. It was already in the stubble, twisting, flickering, flying before the wind. The wind had depressed the smoke and hidden it from us behind the straw.

My first thought was for the horses. I swung them from the rack, turned them from the already silent separator, and with the reins slapped them into an agitated trot. The flames were over the top now. As we went, I saw out of the corner of my eye the full grain tank. Sixty bushels of grain, a box and wagon, waiting to be burnt. At a safe distance we stopped. I pulled the pin from the doubletree, and drove the unwilling horses back for the grain tank.

The whole straw pile was now blazing furiously.

The flames were low down on the windward side and reaching for the wheat, the grain tank and the separator. The horses were pretty good but badly scared. As I turned them on to the wagon tongue, the farmer's son appeared from nowhere and grabbed their heads. As a man who had a lot to lose he was pretty excited. He was white and sweating, but habit steadied his hand on the bridles and helped to slip the ring of the neck yoke on the wagon-tongue. He yelled at me all the time that the harness was rotten.

I knew it was rotten. I was the latest comer on the crew, with rotten harness and 20 year old horses. If they cracked up now it was his loss. The heat was blistering the plunging horses. I dodged their feet, hauling back on the doubletree, and got the pin in

somehow. The smoke was bad. As the pin went in, I yelled to the horses, dived clear and went for their heads. They needed no urging. They went hard and fast, away from those flames, and took with them a load, that next day took four horses to move it on the soft ground.

A Running Fight With Fire

With the grain truck clear of the fire, I unhitched and tied the horses, grabbed a shovel, and ran towards others of the crew, fantastic figures in the dust and smoke, racing the flames, beating at the dust and stubble with pitchfork, shovels, anything. One drove his horse through the flames, cut a fireguard of a few furrows before the fire ate up the filled granaries and the best of the year's work. But the wind was master of the situation, played with the flames and with us.

blasted a smoking path 200 feet wide, straight between the two granaries to the summer-fallow a quarter mile away, where the fire died on the edge of the dry soli.

Exhausted, sweating, parched, we drifted back to the outfit, and surveyed the damage. The farmer's son, in the heat and excitement, had fainted and had to be dragged out of the fire, and the threshing machine was scorched and damaged as the tractor man in a panic dragged it clear with a tractor belt, some grain was burnt, half a day lost. But it might have been worse, we thought, even as we spent the night stamping out smouldering roots, and hoping that the wind would not change. As for the horses, they had been magnificent.

S Frank Bruce

Address: 294 Windsor Rd., W., North Vancouver, BC

Phone: North 1654-Y



Fighting A Prairie Fire by Frank Machau

Salvage

by S Frank Bruce

The Crossing

I steadied myself against the edge of the iron bunk while the ship rolled heavily to port; as she regained the vertical I left the forecastle and stepped on deck into the cold wind. Inside, my fellow cattlemen slept uneasily in their clothes, breathing stertorously a close damp atmosphere loaded with the mingled smells of cow, unwashed clothing, stale tobacco, and the apples we had borrowed from the cargo below.

The night sky was brilliantly starred; the January wind still blew strong and steady over the Atlantic from the northwest. The ship, her rudder quadrant broken, lay as she had drifted for three weeks now, helplessly

rolling broadside to the heavy swell. Each tremendous

wave, rushing at the ship as she listed under the pressure of the wind, dealt her a smashing blow, and passed beneath us. Down the wind-fretted back of the wave she slid, trembling into the trough; listed again and waited for the buffet from the next onrushing wall of water.

Now or Never

Pulling up the collar of my old army greatcoat I hung over the lee rail to watch the dim white crests of the waves leave the ship's rail, and with a hiss and a heave, leap away into the darkness.

I was pretty sure it was a hail that had brought me on deck; but we were in mid-Atlantic, where hails are few. Sure enough, lights were dancing to leeward. Stately, swaying, they rode for a moment on the wind, then plunged with a sideways swing, and the next moment were again flung skyward. I dived back into the forecastle and punched a shapeless mass of blankets, clothes and sacking on an upper bunk.

“Hey Bill! Goldern you; Wake up. Here’s the tug.”

Groaning protests, Bill rolled out, yawned himself into cap and sweater. We went outside together. The watch was already on deck. The tug had come a thousand miles and more to fetch us, had found us at night in mid-ocean, She was ready now to hook on to us in a sea that we had already seen , during the pre-

vious two weeks, break like twine the three-inch steel hawsers passed to us by other ships , salvage bent.

The tug came in close, hailed us again and told us to stand by to receive a line. Her searchlight showed our Old Man on the bridge, megaphone in hand. He yelled in a hoarse but surprisingly loud voice, that it couldn’t be done — better wait till daylight. The answer, blurred by the wind, came booming back: “You take my line now or I’ll leave you.” The Old Man’s “OK” was the last word of this laconic argument.

A Mighty Flail

Up forward, the crew were already busy with the anchor winch. Spare hawsers were already coiled on the foredeck. Two days before, as another ship was attempting to tow

us, the heavy hawser had parted. The end of the steel hawser, converted instantly into a mighty flail, whipped around the bollard and disappeared over-side, leaving the carpenter's mate in a huddle on the deck, with one leg nearly severed at the ankle.

"I'll Cut Your Throat!"

I felt in an inside pocket for cigarettes. Bill and I leaned against the rail next to the cowshed and watched the crew lugging cables forward along the heaving steel deck. From the afterdeck, littered with

smashed cowshed and a tangle of wire ropes, with the dead steers still wedged between the winches and the hatch, they dragged the heavy rope. Past the galley door where we were want to sit for the inevitable stew and the tea with coffee grounds; past the engine-room door , hence the negro stoker

had flown past me for his razor the night before; while the second engineer dived into his cabin for a gun, appealing to me over his shoulder as a witness;

"You heard that black devil say he'd cut my throat, didn't ye, hey?"

Past the fiddle they lugged the heavy cable: the fiddle where in bad weather we let go our hold on the life-lines rigged along the deck and dived for the warmth of the stokehold; only to be soaked again as we descended by flying masses of brine from windward, which plunged through the gratings and dripping steel

ladders to the shining deck of the dim stokehold below. Past the steward's pantry they dragged the cable forward, where we would go to draw rations and where the floor was still wet with the water that had flooded down from the smashed chart-room through the sacred saloon.

Bill and I smoked and gladly watched the crew working.

The wind pressed coldly upon us, but not with the solid, irresistible force it had shown during the worst of the weather. It had blown then miraculously from a clear steel-blue sky upon a grey and racing sea. It had blown with incredible intensity and steadiness; now flattening the seas with its weight, now whipping the flying spume up over the windward taffrail, heaving high as the

ship listed, whipping it horizontally across the deck.

Bill and I finished our smokes.

Fishing For The Line

Very soon the tug would send a line aboard. She would do it by the simple process of slinging overboard to windward a lifebuoy with the line attached. The ships would drift faster than the buoy and we would fish for it with lines weighted with iron shovels or bars as soon as we had drifted down upon it. We began to get cold; our interest in the proceedings waned with every chilling moment.



The sea-going tug Iroquois heading to another salvage job

Apple Pie

“Tea Bill,” I said, and we moved off in the direction of the galley. Making tea had to be done sometime between midnight and three in the morning, when the fat, vituperative, whiskey-ridden cook was snoring in his bunk. Ham, our tame, cattle man-actor, had even baked an apple pie at those unearthly hours. To be sure, the apples were stolen from the cargo and cooked without sugar; and the crust made from the cook’s flour, without fat, but in the circumstances, it was a culinary triumph. Ham himself had brought me a piece and awakened me to eat it. After the first enthusiastic bite, one ate the rest out of love for Ham and respect for his remarkable achievement.

While Bill stoked up the big iron range, with its railed top, I took a small saucepan, slid forward again to within earshot of where the mate was still grunting orders, and slipped below. I moved quickly aft along the rows of cattle between decks, assailed by the cloying smell of the animals and of wet hay, and from the already rotting apples in the hold.

Near the end of the long line of weary, weaving animals stood the little Black Angus cow that had presented us with a shiny black calf a week before. With this single gesture, she had attained a unique popularity with the entire ship’s company, who while glad of the calf as a pet, were still more pleased at the prospect of having fresh milk in their tea. Competition for the milk waxed fierce

between the saloon, the sailors and the cattlemen. Fortunately for the calf, it was a point of honour among the warring foster brothers to see that already rotting apples in the hold.

Near the end of the long line of weary, weaving presented us with a shiny black calf a week before. With this single gesture, she had attained a unique popularity with the entire ship's company, who while glad of the calf as a pet, were still more pleased at the prospect of having fresh milk in their tea. Competition for the milk waxed fierce between the saloon, the sailors and the cattlemen. Fortunately for the calf, it was a point of honour among the warring foster brothers to see that the calf was fed first. After that, it was anybody's milk. Hence, it was as necessary to do our milking while the crew worked and the stew-

ard slept, as it was to wait until the fat and unpleasant cook was safe in the arms of Morpheus before making tea.

The Calf Was Fed

It should be explained that tea, as Ham made it, or as we made it, and as the cook made it for Ham and us, was not recognizable as the same beverage.

The calf was fed. I took a cupful of milk in the saucepan, tied up the calf to the stanchion, fed the little black cow, crushed apples in a pail and hied me with my booty to the galley.

Hot, Good Tea

The tea was strong and fragrant. We sipped gratefully; warming our backs at the stove, which had been generously stoked by the big-hearted Bill. My hands at the cup smelled of the apples and the cow. Over the cups we regarded each other with pleased and perfect understanding. Tomorrow, we thought, after three weeks adrift, we shall be limping south to the Azores. Moving slowly, we shall be, it is true; moving at hardly a man's walking pace behind the tug from Queenstown that found ships in mid-ocean and made their skippers hook on at night. The sea would go down. Every day it would get warmer. Perhaps we could even lie on the hatch in the sun and watch the sailors chipping paint. Meanwhile,

the drunken cook was asleep and we had hot tea with no stale coffee grounds in it and made too, with fresh milk.

S Frank Bruce

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1925

Morning In The Forest

by S Frank Bruce

I spend my days now in the woods and on the mountainside, and share the deserted trails of the black bear with the occasional deer, and a still less frequent visitor, Brere Rabbit. Early every morning, I leave behind me the blue spirals of breakfast fires in the valley, and with two companions, strike out along the railroad to where the forest comes down to meet us.

We are three silent men in the morning, and

trudge along with mailed boots crunching on the trodden snow. Charlie, as the man in charge, goes ahead. With hands in pockets and bent head beneath a battered hat, he lifts his feet as though he would leave his footprints deep in the iron ground. Youthful James, in his old green mackinaw, with a piece of his twenty-first birthday cake in his lunch-box, ambles mentally from breakfast to geology, from his mother's last letter to the prickly spruce we found yesterday; half bemused by these waking thoughts and the faint persistent vestiges of dreams from which he had been torn not an hour before, he stumbles occasionally in his heavy boots. The rails at our feet slide by in monotonous procession, alchemised by a frosty nacreous patine from common steel to a dull

The air is still and cold. Morning is detained as yet by dying night, though the stars have faded half an hour since. A cold transparency washes the shadows from their last tenebrous refuges among the trees and in the westerly hollows.

At the shed, we leave the track and take a steep and snow-covered trail through the slashing. Here, the protective influence of the trees has extended a little way on all sides into the clearing. Where the snow has dwindled, the foot sinks into the moist, re humus of the trail. Presently, no more than an occasional patch of snow lingers by a moss-covered log. Jack Frost, with his silver brush, has here laid a Parthian touch upon the farthest dead leaf, and fled upon the wind to the open hillside. The

fairly come night has half stolen upon us under their leafy roof. To us they are now the innumerable pillars of a dim and damp cathedral, guarding the dark arcana of nature.

A squirrel, alarmed at our invasion, chatters at us suddenly from a great hemlock. With tail erect, he jerks his small body from one frozen attitude of defiance to another. Where our trail crosses a tangle of fallen trees, we find ourselves upon an old pack trail, broad and evenly covered with brown leaves. In places, young trees stand insolently in mid-road, vanguard of the silent sylvan army waiting on either side to close ranks in ineluctable reclamation.

Where we stop to rest, warmed now and out of breath, the air is full of the sound of rushing



Morning Mist in the Mountains

ter. For many days now we have worked within earshot of this heedless, hurrying mountain stream, with its swift passage in contrast to our own deliberate moves.

Later today, in a stony spot near the water, we shall build a fire of dry cedar, lit from dead twigs with their parasitic murderer, the beard-moss, dead in turn and still clinging. The water for our tea, in the old black and battered pot, will have been caught in its flashing leap between the glistening, spray-drenched boulders. Thin sunlight will be in the tree-tops then, hardly filtering to the mossy ground; while the faint blue and fragrant smoke of our fire, starting with an eager leap from the flames to the moving air, will float leisurely between the trees.

S Frank Bruce

Box 176, Tunnel Camp, Britannia Beach, B.C.

Come Underground

by S Frank Bruce

Breakfast

Same old breakfast — corn flakes and powdered milk, eggs and bacon, thick toast, browned hastily on top of the stove, hotcakes and syrup, black coffee. I gulp down the coffee, take a farewell forkful of hotcake, grab from a bench en-rollee to the door my dirty old waterproof jacket, and dinner pail in hand, join the passing stream of miners headed towards the mine portal.

Shift Change

Here, in an open-fronted part of the warehouse building, I become a link in the chain of men passing a wicket. As I pass the small window I call out my identifying number to the clerk within. When the shift comes out of the mine the numbers are checked to ensure that no men are missing. I take a time-card, and carbide for my lamp, and join the other men waiting outside for the train that will take us nearly a mile underground to the main shaft.

The miners stand in small groups, smoking, passing around a salty joke, or hailing a late-comer. Their work-clothes, stained a greyish-black with the mixture of oil and rock-dust from

the drilling machines., distinguish the miners from “non-producers” — track-layers, timber men, electricians, mechanics.

With the arrival of the train, the office is besieged by the out coming crew, the “graveyard” shift, dirty, tired but still vociferous, grinning, glad to be out, ready for breakfast and bed.

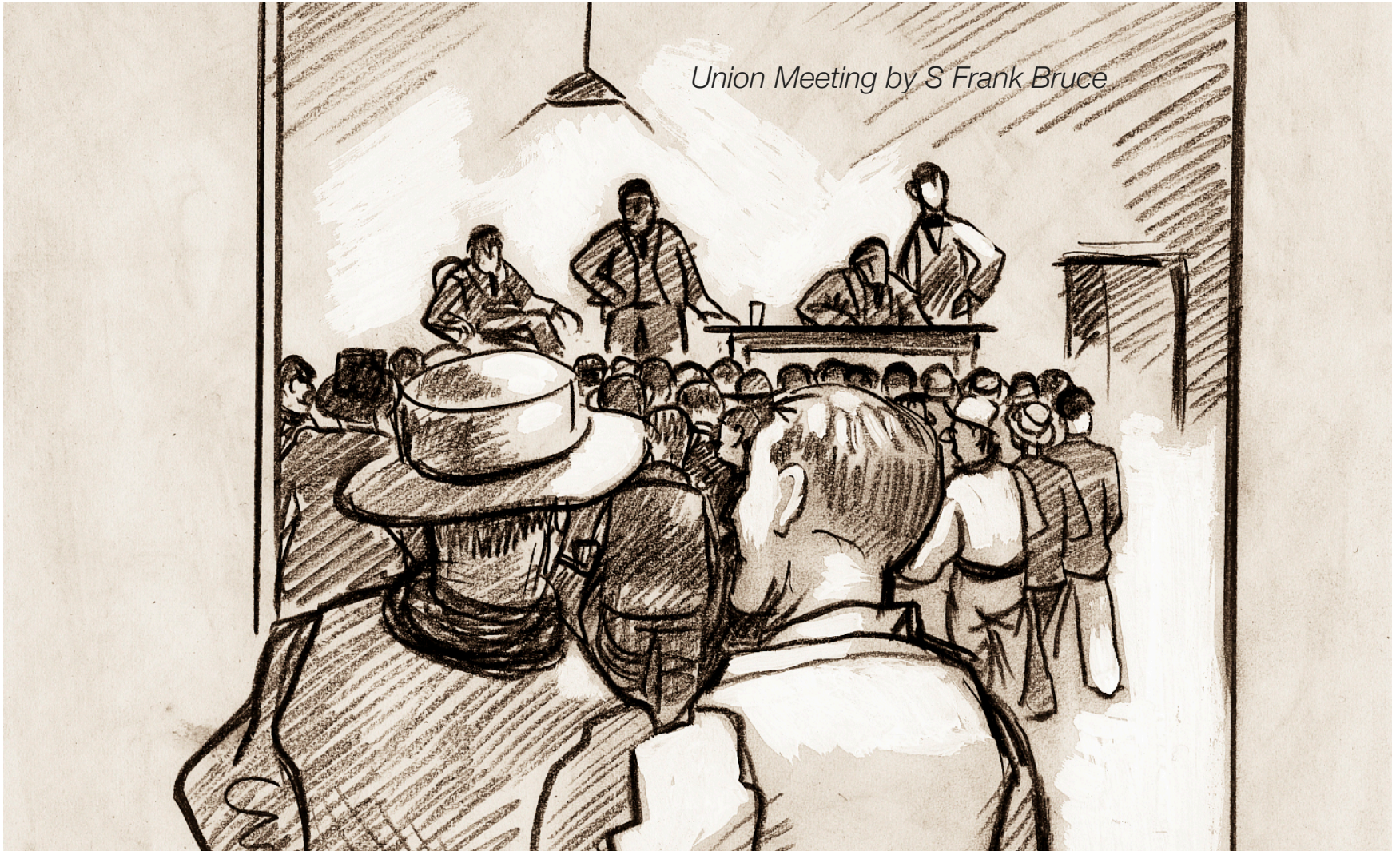
The Lift

We climb on to the rough cars, leaving a seat at the end of each car for the bosses, who emerge from the office stowing papers in their pockets. As the big whistle on the powerhouse nearby blows seven o’clock we start into the tunnel. The air is cold and dank, musty and sulphurous. At about ten miles an hour we trundle along in semi-darkness; the roof, illumined faintly by an

occasional lamp to one side, seems low enough to touch. After the early morning rush I can now relax. The dim figures around me are silenced by the noise of the wheels, and sit hunched up against the cold draught. It is true that the imagination is most active when the senses have least to do.

Pipes and Wire

Cut off from companions by the noise and darkness, I compose a fiery speech, or explain to an imaginary and dumb disciple the cause of economic depressions. Almost immediately, it seems, we arrive at the shaft station, brightly lit, blasted from the living rock, with the marks of the drills on walls and roof. Underfoot is heavy planking. The roof is about four feet from our heads and carries a maze of compressed air pipes,



Union Meeting by S Frank Bruce

Caption

flumes carrying drainage water, of power lines and light and telephone wires, the nervous system and sap stream of this dendritic growth reaching into the heart of the mountain. At the far side of the station, heavy timbering and extensive iron gates mark the foot of the shaft; a short ladder and a platform give access to the top deck of the cage, which now stands waiting.

Swift Ascent

The cage carries 20 men, ten on a deck. I join the general movement towards the gates, which close behind us. With his hand on the bellhop the cage handler waits to signal the hoist man 1200 feet above us."All clear" comes from the top deck, the bell rings, we rise slowly from

the light into sudden darkness and feel the speed increase until the cage with its freight of 20 men is rushing upwards at a 1000 feet a minute. The movement is steady, powerful and silent but for the sigh of the shoes on the guides, and the rhythmical drumming of air on the shaft timbers, passed by the cage with little more than an inch to spare. Cold draughts of air blow about erratically. A leap into light, and again into darkness; we have passed the first level, 200 feet from the bottom. The flashes come at 200 foot intervals every 12 or 15 seconds.

Arrival

With the swiftly increasing altitude my ear-drums respond to the lessened pressure and crackle uncomfortably. I swallow hard in the darkness,

hold on to my dinner pail, and listen to the shiftless in his easy confident tone giving the men their instructions for the day. He says nothing to me. I think, that's all right; I'll be working in the same place. The cage slackens speed, slows down, slides upwards into the lighted station, and stops with nice exactness. The iron gates fold and swing before us. We have climbed 1250 feet in less than a minute and a half and are not even out of breath. I look out for my partner, light my lamp, and walk gingerly in my worn rubber boots on the muddy planks between the tracks, start out along the level for our working-place.

S Frank Bruce PO Box 176, Tunnel Camp, Britannia Beach, BC

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Waiting for the lift

On a forested bench about a 40 minute hike from Britannia Beach in the 1920s lay a pretty little lake. It was then called Browning Lake, now Murrin Lake, which served as a favourite summer get-away for Britannia residents. The Sea-to-Sky Highway now runs along the east side of the lake but the lake and its surroundings are now Murrin Lake Provincial Park.

Frank was very taken with the beauty and tranquility of Browning lake and wrote this poem to express his feelings. He was 29 years old.



The Lake, the Jewelled Lake, remote from
Curious eyes,



Embosomed by the Hills ~
Serene and secret lies. ~

Here might have knelt Narcissus,
While the Breeze,
Mocked the faint voice of Echo,
In the Trees . ~ ~ ~

1929.

S.F.B.

Communities Apart

Resource Towns. From the turn of the century into the 1950s, they were the life blood of British Columbia. They were everywhere — up the 33000 km of West Coast fiords, tucked into quiet coves and wherever they dropped anchor. Some were full-fledged communities with all the amenities, some semi-permanent floating and land-based logging camps, others fleets of fish boats and canneries, and still others were sidings of railway workers and tent camps of mineral exploration crews. British Columbia, it seemed, was a never-

ending source of lumber, fish and minerals, there to be exploited.

Britannia was such a town. Its workers extracted the ore, searched for more and milled the ore onsite. Their families lived there, their children attended school there, they attended church, swam in the pool on hot summer's days, played tennis, and chatted with friends in the clubhouse.

The men worked shifts. They sat quietly together in the lifts and trains which sped them to their worksite. It was a dark and filthy world, and demanded much of the body, but it was a living. It put food on the table and free time was filled with friends and memorable gather-

ings. Spare cash was non-existent, but no one had any so it was of little consequence.

By circumstance, there were no roads, no cars, no float planes, no way in or out except by Union Steamship's passenger ferry to Vancouver. You lived in each other's pocket, knew their issues, heard their heartaches and joys (and they yours) and if you were lucky, you lived together like family.

Britannia was actually two communities, Britannia Beach, known locally as 'The Beach', was at the coast. There, was the ore processing mill which clung to the steep rock side of the mountain, and the dock to accommodate ore carriers and ferries to transport people in and out. There was also the

Upper Townsite, well up the valley behind at perhaps, 500 metres elevation. Each was a self-sufficient community. Access to the Upper Townsite was by cog railway, with open air cars to take one up and down.

In the late 1960s, when I was a teenager, the mine was barely operating. Its days were numbered. It had had a good run, operating continuously from 1904 to what would be its final year, 1974. When my father worked there in the late 1920s,

Britannia was running at its peak with 1000 workers. Interestingly, unlike many if not most

resource towns of the day, Britannia was not racially segregated.

The Upper Townsite had long been abandoned, offering an interesting afternoon for the curious, namely my friend Dave and me. Up the rugged service road we drove in Dave's 1954 Austin A40. We found the town vandalized but still well intact. We wandered the streets, poked into the long vacant houses and administrative buildings, threw stones into the empty community swimming pool and pondered days gone by. We stopped by the mess hall. Signs offering the standard menu and the last blue plate special were still affixed to the wall behind the serving counter.

Major layoffs had occurred, prompting the mine to close the Upper Townsite. The occupants left almost everything, for the passenger ferry could only oblige people and what they could carry on their backs. For them, moving on was indeed a fresh start.

No, it was not an easy life, but for many, it was a deeply meaningful one. In later years, perhaps when they've long left Britannia for the big city, they will tell you, "Those were the very best of days."



[Click to see Britannia Gallery.](#) Above: Union Steamships ferry at Britannia dock.



The 30s

Lawren Harris

Wealth to Wilderness

Moving On

It was 1934 and jobs were hard to come by, but Frank Bruce needed work that would take him out of the gut of hell at Britannia Mines. He found it as purchasing agent at the highly lucrative gold operation, Pioneer Mine, near Lillooet, BC.

Origins of Pioneer Mine

Miner, prospector and amateur geologist Arthur Noel discovered the vein at Pioneer. He focused his attention on the placer finds of the Fraser Canyon at the mouth of Bridge River, tributary to

the Fraser River. Placer mining had been ongoing throughout the Bridge River area since 1858.

When California placer miners became disenchanted with the dwindling payloads there, they moved north to the Cariboo. Chinese miners took over and for a few more years, made a good living. Women from the Lillooet tribe were the most ingenious of miners. Letting themselves down into the waters of the creeks up to their necks, they felt around the crevices with their toes, grasping and retrieving nuggets.

By 1918, two million dollars of placer gold had been recovered in the Bridge River area.. Noel concluded that mother lodes must exist up the creeks flowing into Bridge River. He narrowed his search to one particular Creek, Cadwallader Creek and there, discovered veins of gold which became Pioneer and nearby Bralorne Mine.

By the time Frank arrived, Pioneer was a major gold producer. A BC Minister of Mines report stated that

“Two tons alone taken out (of the Pioneer Mines at Bridge River) in the last two weeks of December (1932) produced nearly \$200,000 worth of gold. Another pocket taken out later produced 400 pounds of gold from 900 pounds of ore, which is probably the richest half-ton mined in the province, if not in Canada.”

In the first half of 1934, Pioneer Mine yielded well over one million dollars in profits. The nearby Golden Cache Mine, the first vein discovered by Noel, was rich as well. Arthur P. Woollacott, writer of the article from which this information was taken, states that he recalls seeing a 500-pound mass of quartz from the Golden Cache Mine in a jeweller’s window in Victoria.

It was shot through with heavy stringers and masses of pure gold.

Only two miles down the road from Pioneer Mine was Bralorne Mine, then the richest mine in Canada. Ultimately, the two mines amalgamated to become Bralorne-Pioneer Mine. From those two mines, over four million ounces of gold and two million ounces of silver were extracted from eight million tons of ore.

Through the 1930s, Pioneer grew to about 600 residents. It had its own own schools, theatre, hospital and recreation facilities. Removed a bit from the townsite Frank secured a small cabin. There was a creek nearby for water, a wood stove provided heat and oil lamps were used for light. It was basic living, but nothing Frank wasn’t used to and likely preferred.

Proposal

Frank, I suppose, got lonely though. In 1936, he wrote to Hester Spriggs, a girl he had dated back in Baie d'Urfé when he and his brothers attended McDonald College. Frank must have made discrete inquiries as to Hester's marital status, then, discovering she was still single, he proposed. She wrote back and said yes! Frank was 36; Hester 29.

At age 29, this was likely to be Hester's last chance for marriage. Her parents probably held grave doubts about Frank's prospects, but they knew the man as a person of character, English bred and Hester's last chance.

Hester was raised in a Quaker family in England. She was born into wealth. Her father and his

father before him were in manufacturing. The family had cooks, nannies, house maids and chauffeurs, a ride-on steam train in the back yard and quality boarding schools. Then in 1915, her father did an extraordinary thing. The business was sold and the family packed up, said goodbye to their Quaker family and friends, and emigrated to Nova Scotia. There they bought an apple farm in the Annapolis Valley and put in the hard, physical labour to revitalize the neglected farm and make it a success, But success was not to be. World War I had devastated the apple market and the farm went broke. The Spriggs retired to Baie d'Urfé.

Hester was only nine when the family immigrated,. Thus, she had minimal exposure to farm life, as much of her time was spent at boarding

school. At Baie d'Urfé, her life of privilege continued, including an extended trip to the continent with her sister Alison. And so, when Hester climbed aboard that CPR passenger car, destined for a life in the wilderness of British Columbia, she had experienced little to nothing of the real world. That was about to change.

A New Life

Hester packed her trussard and warm clothes, said a tearful goodbye to her siblings and parents and, alone for the first time, boarded the train for the five day trip to Vancouver. From there, she caught a Union Steamship to Squamish, perhaps a two hour sail from Vancouver, then rode the E&N Railway to Seton Portage, at the base of the mountain range upon which lay Pioneer Mine.

For the final leg, it was a several hours ride by motor coach up a switchbacking, rough mountain road to reach Pioneer Mine. Frank was there at the bus stop, waiting to greet her in suit and tie. Arrangements were made for Hester to hurriedly change into her wedding dress, and before the sun had set that evening, the couple were married by the Mine Superintendent to the cheers of a dozen friends.

The couple retired to the cabin. Hester's heart dropped at the sight of her new home. Frank gave her a tour, then said he had some quick errands to run in the town. When Frank returned, he had a man with him. Frank explained that the man had just arrived in Pioneer and had no place to stay. Would Hester mind if he camped on the floor for the night? The marriage never

recovered.

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Source for the mining info above is from the article "Gold in Lilloet by Arthur P. Woolacott, MacLeans Magazine, 1934 <https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1934/3/1/gold-in-lilloet>

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The painting features a landscape with rolling hills. The hills are rendered in shades of blue and tan, with visible brushstrokes. The ground is a mix of grey and blue tones. The overall style is characteristic of the Group of Seven.

The 40s

Lawren Harris

The Art of S Frank Bruce

In 1918, at the age of 18, Frank joined the Artist's Rifles in London, England. Armistice was declared and fortuitously for him, there would be no war. What's interesting about his choice of regiment is that it tells us that he viewed himself as an artist at an early age.

Through his twenties and thirties he dabbled in art, but he lacked two important requirements: 1. time and 2. training. In 1946, he

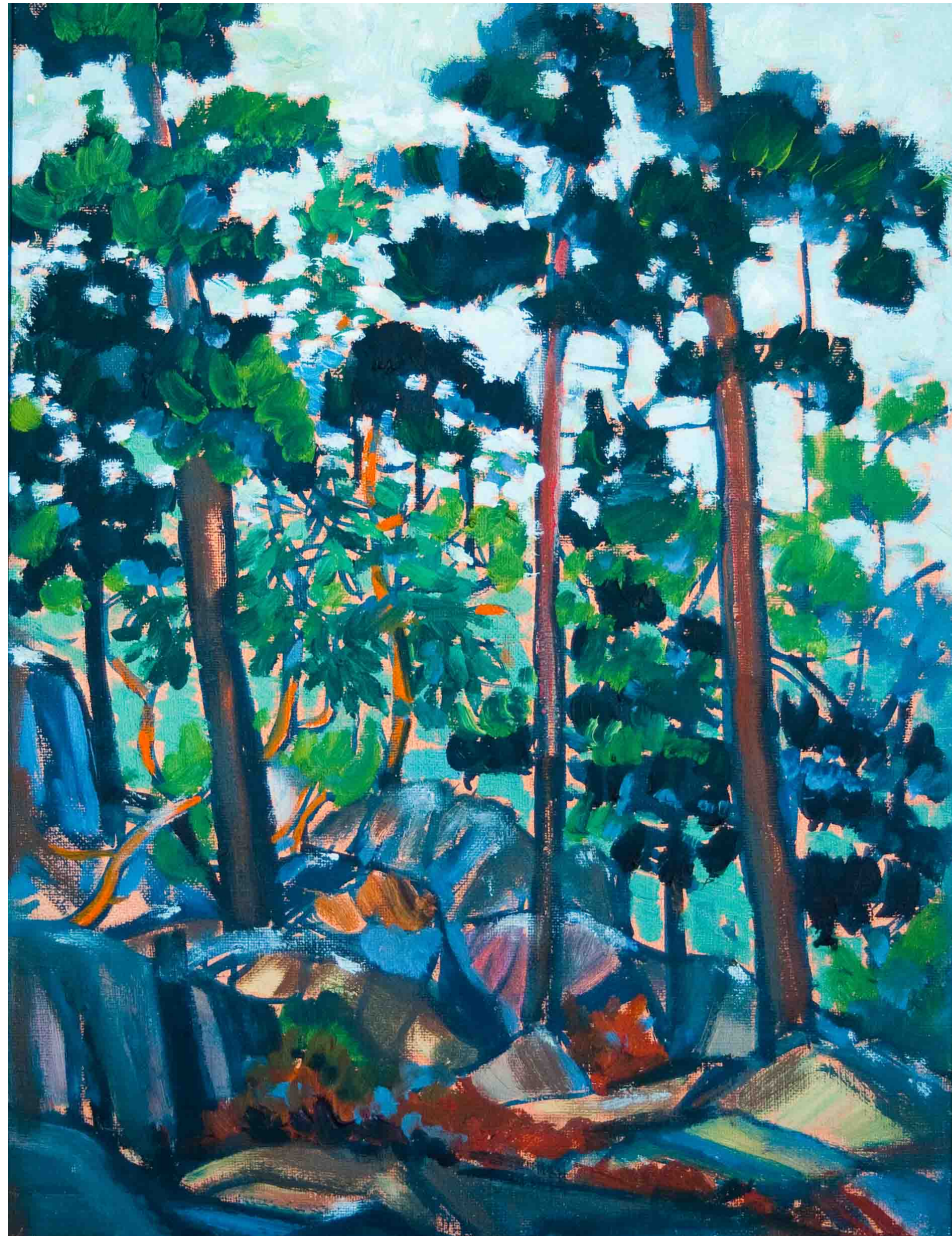
unexpectedly received both. He was working as an accountant for the Lions Gate Bridge Company, owned by the Guinness family of beer fame. One day he was advised by the company that a relative would be replacing him and that he, Frank, would receive a year's salary as severance.

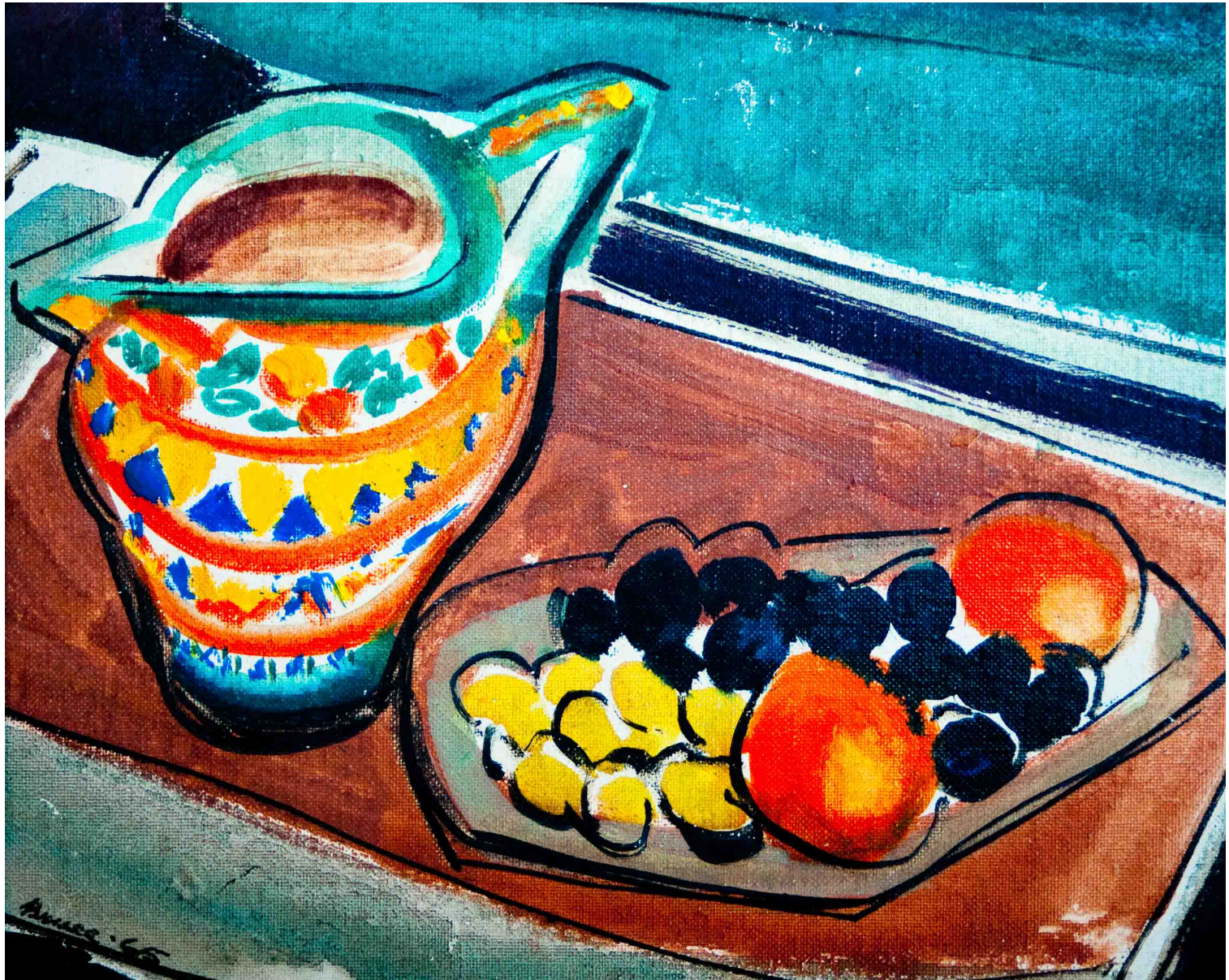
That gave Frank the time and a year at the Vancouver Art Gallery gave him the training. There, he mentored under a soon to be famous painter, Llewelyn Petley-Jones, whose style of painting appears to have been influenced by the Group of Seven. Frank's style, although decidedly his own, seems to follow suit. In the pages that follow are a selection of Frank's paintings and drawings.



Horseshoe Bay, West Vancouver, BC by S Frank Bruce

*Unknown location, possibly
Copper Ridge, Horseshoe Bay,
West Vancouver, BC*





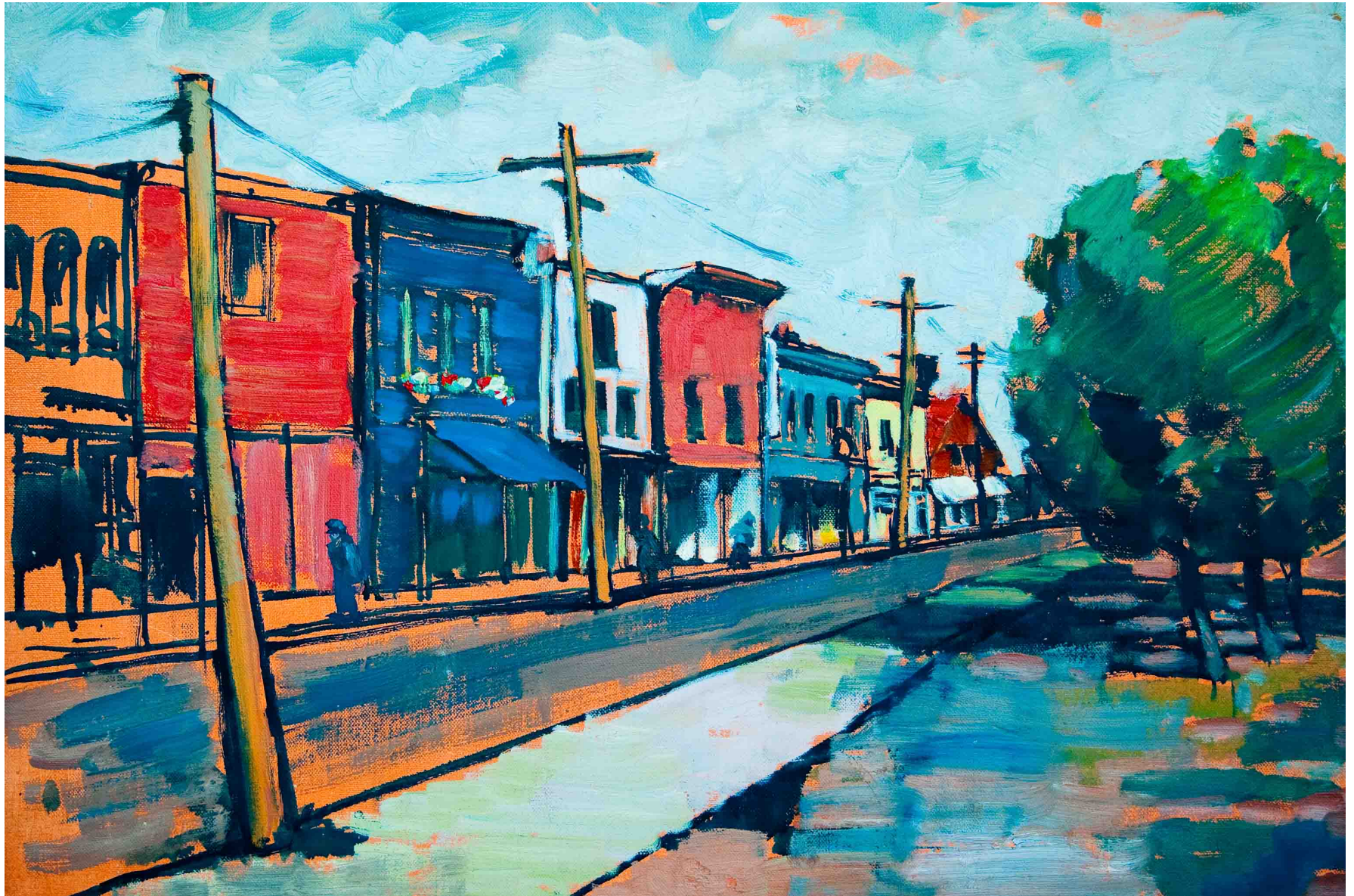
Still life of items on hand around the house



Abstract: Faces by S Frank Bruce

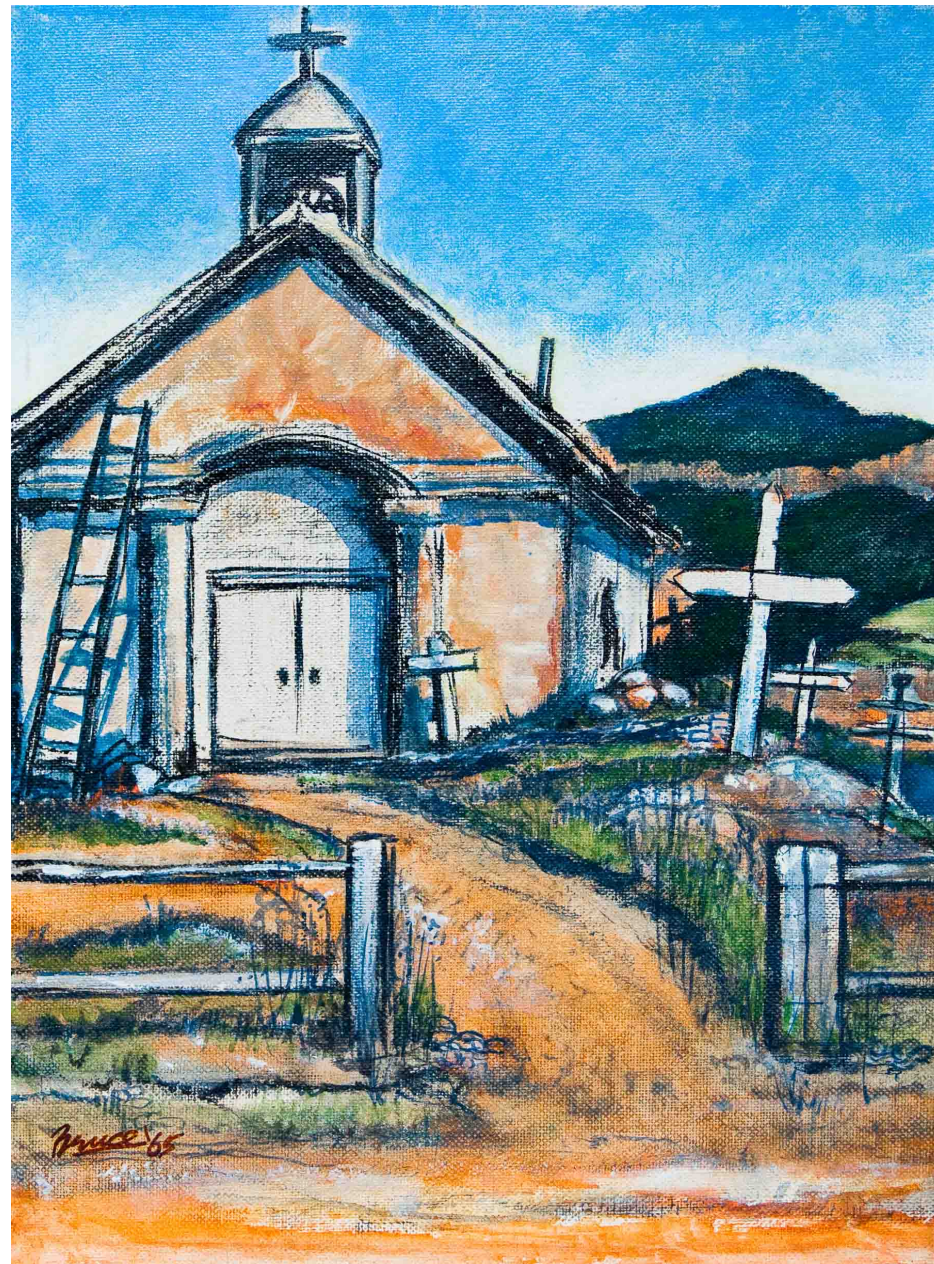


*Unknown location, possibly
Copper Ridge, Horseshoe
Bay, West Vancouver, BC*



'Japan Town' East Vancouver

Painted from a photograph of a church in rural Mexico





View from S Frank Bruce's office window, Vancouver , BC

[Click here to see a gallery of select paintings and drawings of S Frank Bruce](#)



Caption



The 50s

Lawren Harris

Life with the Gang

Something snapped. From Age 13 on, the helpful, obedient, high performing Peter Bruce turned helion. Herein are some memorable events.

The Hat Trick

When I was 14, summer days were typically spent at the beach to chat up the girls. Tanya was happy to allow views down the front of her top and that alone made the trip to the beach worthwhile. On one such day, friend Robin approached me. “I found a box with a brand new hat inside and the

receipt with it. I turned it in to the cop shop, then I thought, why’d I do that? I could have taken it back to Woodward’s and got the money for it. But we can still do it. You’d have to go to the cop shop, they know me, and say you were the owner’s son, and ask if a hat’s been turned in. Then I return the hat to Woodward’s and we split the 15 bucks. Are you in?”

We next find Peter at the counter in the cop shop.”Uh hi. My mother left her new hat on the beach and asked me to see if it had been turned in ...”

“Oh yeah, she just phoned. I’ve got it right here.” The cop pulls it out from under the counter. “Here you go”

“Thanks a lot” I start to walk out with the hat.

“Just a minute son.”

I’m a dead man.

“You have to sign that out. Your mother is Mrs. Johnson, right?”

I’m a dead man. Is he testing me with the wrong name? What now? Well, I guess I go with it. “Yes sir.” Wait for it.

“Okay. Sign right here.”

No wonder I had heart valve issues as a kid.

Robin took the hat to Woodward’s. We split the money. The perfect crime had just been committed on the police themselves. Not too shabby.

Well, not quite perfect. Just after I left the cop shop Mrs. Johnson dropped in to claim her hat. The jig was up. The cops brought Robin in for questioning. He folded, named me and the men

in blue were soon knocking on my door. Note to self: partner with a more experienced man.

Court House. The Prosecutor stands to speak to the crime.

“Your Honour, this is a most unusual and disturbing case. This boy had the nerve to walk into the police station and steal a hat from under the nose of the police. He made a mockery of the police and the justice system!” Were he an adult, I would be asking for a sentence that money. The perfect crime had just been committed on the police themselves. Not too shabby.

Well, not quite perfect. Just after I left the cop shop Mrs. Johnson dropped in to claim her hat. The jig was up. The cops brought Robin

in for questioning. He folded, named me and the men in blue were soon knocking on my door.

Note to self: partner with a man with a relevant rap sheet.

Court House. The Prosecutor stands to speak to the crime.

“Your Honour, this is a most unusual and disturbing case. This boy had the nerve to walk into the police station and steal a hat from under the nose of the police. He made a mockery of the police and the justice system!” Were he an adult, I would be asking for a sentence that reflected the audacious and disrespectful nature of the crime. However, considering his age and the absence of a juvenile record (just wait, it’s coming)…”

Movie Goers

We were 13. The end of summer holidays was nearing. Boredom had arrived big time. We were on the hunt for something to do. Lanes were always interesting, particularly the lanes behind the stores in the village. Once, we spotted an open back window at the Bank of Montreal and reported it to the police. Another time we found the back door behind the long closed Hollyburn Theatre open. This time, we went in. Pitch black inside it was. Hmm. We’d have to go back with flashlights to carry out a thorough investigation. It was agreed that we’d sneak out at 1am that night, (Note to self: a ladder would be needed to get out the window) rendezvous and walk the lanes down to the theatre to avoid being spotted by roaming cop cars.

We weren't newbies, you know.

Into the theatre we went. The seats had been pulled out so there wasn't much to see until...we got to the projection room upstairs. Wow, bonanza. Reels of cartoon films, posters, miscellaneous memorabilia. We split the booty and returned home. The next day we decided we should mess around in the theatre again, during the day this time and armed with flashlights. We found the entry to the roof and ran all over that. Good fun but stupid. Someone spotted us and called the police. We heard the police pulling up and ran for cover. "Under the stage" someone whispered. Under we went. Just made it when two cops walked in. They checked out the entire theatre and found nothing. A call for reinforcements. It was a whole force Easter egg hunt and we were

the eggs.

Four more police cars arrived in riot gear (just kidding. The cops came but riot gear? Not yet). Eight cops are now on the hunt. Three terrified boys are quiet as church mice under the stage. It took them an hour or more but find us they did. Interrogation at the police station followed. These guys were as bored as we were. Confessions were made, items returned and I received my punishment by the ultimate authority — mother.

Air Heads

It's Tuesday. But it could be any day. It doesn't matter. Time has stopped. The five of us are slumped in sofas. Nothing to do. We're fourteen on summer break. What could be better than that?

And hey, it's been great. We've had good times, man -- biking, hiking, shooting TV aerials, watching westerns, launching balls at the bowling alley, stuffing newspapers, playing pool, tossing mud at the neighbour's house, playing pool, tossing mud at the neighbour's house, hopping freight cars, climbing the bridge girders, sneaking out at night, war games, baking crabs alive and masturbating the dog. We've done all the

cool stuff. Now what? The summer's not even half over

and we're bored stupid.

Robin speaks. "Come on guys, think. There's got to be something to do. What about something we've never done before. You know, high adventure stuff. Maybe a trip somewhere."

"What about a bike ride to Sandy Cove," suggests Robin's brother Reid.

"Done that," I counter.

"A hike up Hollyburn Ridge. Do the cabin trail from West Lake."

"Done that, I repeat."

“Capilano Suspension Bridge. Jump the fence,” offers Dave.

“Different, for Christ’s sake. We need different.” Robin is losing it.

Neil, the thinker, breaks his silence, “Okay, what about this. We take air mattresses from Ambleside Park to Stanley Park.”

“Cool,” effused Robin. Now we’re talkin.’

Dave wasn’t so sure. “I dunno guys. It’s a long way across Burrard Inlet. It could get pretty rough out there. And where would we land? It’s nothin’ but rocks on the other side.”

Neil realizes he’s latched on to a winner and he gives it both barrels. “No problem, we

just paddle a little farther to Third Beach.

Nice and sandy. Piece of cake. Take about an hour..”

“And it’s calm today,” adds Robin. “I’m in.”

“Me too.”

“Me three.”

“Me four.”

Uh, count me out on this one, guys. I can’t swim.”

“Oh yeah, right,” commiserates Robin.

“Well, come and see us off anyway.”

I breathe a sigh of relief. The water terrifies me.

It’s a plan. We meet back at Robin and Reid’s house in an hour. It’s late morning when the guys push off from the beach in



L toR: Peter, Neil, Reid, Robin

West Vancouver. I watch them get smaller and smaller as they head into Burrard Inlet.

For those of you not familiar with Vancouver, here's a primer. The North Shore mountains, which overlook the city of Vancouver, rise two to four thousand feet from the sea and run west to east. We lived on the slope of those mountains in West Vancouver.

Paralleling the mountains is Burrard Inlet, a long dogleg of water, perhaps 30 km in total, which serves as an incomparable harbour for the Port of Vancouver. At the mouth of Burrard Inlet is First Narrows, which as the name implies, is narrow. A whole lot of water must squeeze through it on the flood tide and again on the ebb. Between the ebb and the flood is maybe 20 minutes of 'slack

water.' Currents can peak at 6 knots and standing waves are standard fare, and when the wind is blowing against the tide, well look out.

Across the narrows is the Lions Gate Bridge, connecting North and West Vancouver with Stanley Park and the city. The bridge is arched, suspension bridge and at its apex is, or was, the marine traffic control centre – the folks who direct ship traffic through the narrows.

A salient point is that the Port of Vancouver is one of the busiest on the west coast of North America, at least it was in those days before frequent and protracted strikes left it sucking



the hind teat to Seattle. Freighters in large numbers move both ways through the narrows all day and all night. And they move.

The air mattress flotilla, now, is well out in the middle of the narrows. I learn later that a strong flood tide (incoming) was flowing, requiring them to paddle as if their life depended on it (it did), to prevent being sucked under the bridge and into the worst of the standing waves.

As if the boys didn't have enough to contend with, Marine Traffic Control gets on the loudspeaker and in a voice seething with frustration (I heard it from the beach) the Traffic Controller belted:

"You boys on the air mattresses. You are in a restricted and dangerous shipping lane [duh]. Get

out of there NOW."

Just how was the question.

Eventually they landed in the New World (Stanley park), but not before Mother Nature had had her fill of them. Neil, Reid and Dave made it to Third Beach. The fourth, Robin, was swept under the bridge and through the narrows, and managed a landfall not far beyond the narrows at Lumberman's Arch.

By the time the foolish foursome had walked barefoot across the bridge and home, they were sore, exhausted and very sober. That was one adventure not worth repeating...or mentioning to one's parents.



First Narrows and Lions Gate Bridge. Boys on air mattresses? You must be kidding.

Rock and Roll Brother

It surely was a big rock. And round, like Scotsmen are prone to tossing about. As luck would have it, Neil McLardy is a Scotsman.

It's Neil's idea. Honest. See, no crossed fingers. Neil and I are ten. He lives on a steep hill a few houses up from me. We're standing on the road outside Neil's house. It's a hot summer day. And we're bored.

"Betcha I can roll this boulder right down to 11th Street." Eleventh Street crossed our street at the bottom of the hill. It was a feeder for the neighbourhood and a bus route.

"No way."

Now Neil is a big boy, chock full of porridge and Scots genes. He's half a head taller than me and

has the heft of a twelve year old. He tosses the rock hard. It's a good roller, no question.

Round, the size of a grapefruit. It flies.

"Oh Jesus, there's a car coming." My pre-pubescent brain is sharp enough to ascertain that the next second is not going to go well.

When the rock and the car come together with a thunderous crash, time ceases to exist. We are tele-transported to another dimension. We stand there on the road -- transfixed, mouths agape, numb.

The driver, regrettably, still lives in the here and now. "Here's what I'm going to do to those little SOBs when I catch them and now I'm going to catch them. He slams on his brakes

and belts up the hill towards us. Not good. Time to switch dimensions. This one is definitely not working.

“RUN,” says Neil

A reasonable plan, I think.

We bolt down the lane beside his house and slip into the backyard of Sharon’s place. Sharon is in the back yard, sensibly playing with her dolls. Pig-tails and a dress are looking pretty appealing right now. I wonder if she has a spare set close by.

Neil takes command. So he should. He got us into this mess.

“Sharon.”

“Oh hi, whatcha doin’?”

“Never mind. There’s a guy chasing us and if he catches us, he’s gonna rip our heads off. Tell him you haven’t seen us, okay? OKAY?”

“Okay.”

We take off for her garage. In it is a small loft, a few planks placed across the trusses to form a platform -- one of our high quality hidey-holes. We clamber up and lie there, absolutely still, save for the pounding of our two little hearts.

About three minutes pass, then sure enough, a man walks into the garage. He looks around, slowly and carefully, waiting, perhaps, for his eyes to adjust to the dark. Listening for the slightest sound. An agony later, he leaves. Fearing a trick, we stay put until we can stand the silence no longer. We climb down from our life-saving perch and on legs of rubber, we wobble home, just as fast as we can.

It was a lesson learned: When Murphy appears, move it.



*Left: Neil in my uncle's
Frontiersmen uniform. I am
clearly outranked.*

*Right: Peter. Not certain
who he is. That would take
a while.*

Well, bowl me over

Much of my teens were spent in smoke-filled bowling alleys, at first setting pins and later playing pool and just hanging out. I had a propensity for choosing friends on the periphery of society, perhaps because that is precisely where I was. One of those friends was a fellow by the name of Wayne. At 16, Wayne was a big strapping lad with a large disdain for authority figures and a rap sheet a mile long. School for Wayne was a distant memory.

I eventually graduated high school with 51%. It seemed I was heading in the same direction as Wayne. At 18, I was convicted of minor theft and sentenced in adult court. That same year I joined the Cossacks Motorcycle Club, complete with jean jacket and patch sporting a skull with

pony tail. Something about all this did not feel right. So I sold my motorcycle and on a shoe-string, travelled for a year. Eyes, now wide open, I returned home to complete university, then, oddly enough, trained to be a Probation Officer. I lost track of my bowling alley buddies.

Part of the training required us to spend three dayshifts at Oakalla, the provincial gaol. On one of those days, I shadowed a guard, whose job in late afternoon, was to frisk the men returning to the prison from a work detail. One by one, they came through the door, and raised their hands above their head to allow for the frisk. Then, who should walk through the door but Wayne. He was stunned; I was stunned. We said nothing but chatted later in the open area of a cell block. He stole a car. Wayne did not survive. He was killed

in a motorcycle accident.

Now just how, you might ask, does a guy with a criminal record get a job as a Probation Officer. The hiring committee thought that a good question to ask as well.

“Peter. You state on your application that you have a criminal record for theft Under \$50. Why should we hire you to be an officer of the court?” Think fast Peter. “I was drawn to kids on the other side of the tracks. I still am. I felt for them, identified with them. Like them, I was going through emotional stuff that I didn’t fully understand and still don’t. But I cared for those guys. We were a family of the misunderstood. That life experience is what will make me a good Probation Officer — understanding, caring and a willingness to really listen that comes from

being there. I’m no airy fairy social worker and I’m no uncaring bureaucrat. I think I’m just the person you want.” They agreed. I worked in probation for 13 years.



"We really must stop meeting like this."

Canada by CPR

It was 1951. I was 4. My grandparents had kindly offered to pay our way on the train to their home in Baie d'Urfé near Montreal. That was a five day trip, for we lived in Vancouver on the West Coast. My father was obliged to stay behind and work but in truth, I suspect he was tickled at the prospect of having time alone. I suspect my mother was tickled to have time without my father and I was just tickled to go for a train ride.

The trip began at the train station in Vancouver.

We must have departed sometime in early July. In length, the trip would be multiple weeks long, but time had no meaning to me.

The railway station was cavernous. I'd never been in a building of such enormity. The voices of hundreds of people left me speechless, speakers called out pending departures and all together, it was a cacophony of chaotic sound and frenzied people.

Mother stood in line at a ticket booth, got our boarding passes and off we went to the appropriate landing to board our train. The train was already in place, an immense engine was idling, ready to go.

We waited patiently on the landing's benches,



*Some CP posters
were very alluring*

well ahead of the scheduled departure time, as it was mother's habit never to be late. When the time came, doors opened at the end of each passenger car and little staircases dropped down. Mother checked our boarding pass to confirm the number of our assigned car and off we went down the landing to find it.

At each staircase was a sight entirely new to me — a man had appeared with black skin dressed in black pants and a white tunic. He was standing next to the stairs helping people board and telling them the whereabouts of their stateroom. It came to our turn. The man had a lovely welcoming smile and gave us a warm greeting as we boarded, lifting me up the staircase in the most gentle way.

When all were aboard, the same man, whom I was told was a porter, knocked on our state-room door and introduced himself. He said he would be our assistant for the duration of the journey. If we needed help with anything, would we please just push the button and he would be along forthwith. He was a fine man, mannerly, gracious and friendly.

Next to our train in the station was another train. Suddenly it started to move. I watched, fascinated while the train slipped out of the station, pointing out to my family this new event. "Peter," said sister Wendy, "That's us. We are the train moving"

We were off. Our every need was provided. Each day at 5pm sharp, let's call him Tony, knocked on the door and came in to pull down the upper berths and ready things for the night.

Meals were provided in the dining car at specified times and oh my, what a grand event was eating. On each side of the dining car was a row of tables. Each table was covered with a white linen tablecloth; each setting at each table was graced with a white linen napkin folded meticulously into a hat-like shape. Silver utensils, silver creme and sugars, silver milk jugs. Every setting seemed to speak 'royalty' and for five days, that was us!

On and on went the train. By 7pm, I was tucked into my berth. Out the window in twilight, I watched the telephone poles flash by in micro

hypnotic blur, and listened to the clickety-clack of the train's wheels until my head could take it no longer and I fell into slumber.

In train stations, we sometimes stopped for one or two hours, giving passengers a chance to stretch their legs and in my case, an opportunity to run around the platform and explore.

At Golden, on the west flank of the Rockies, we switched to a steam locomotive, a giant of a thing, which would power us up the steepest sections the Rockies had to offer.

At the back of the train was an observation car. In essence, it was a regular passenger car with no window panes. A head stuck out the window for mere seconds

(Sister Gill: "I wouldn't do that if I were you."
Brother Peter, "I'm gonna.") came back in filthy.
Soot from the steam engine plugged every
crevice and facial opening. There was no ca-
boose, so a little boy could stand at the rear of
the observation car and watch landscapes and
towns disappear.

Massive mountains, big enough to swallow whole
the ridges we called mountains at home, drifted
by. Then a lengthy stop at Banff and a chance to
explore the town. There were buildings made of
log with river stone foundations and quaint bou-
tique stores which ran the length of the main and
only commercial street. As the time for departure
neared, but still well before, we returned to the
train. Tony, with his lovely smile, was there at

the stairs to greet us.

The foothills followed, then the prairies, For two
days it was vast lands and endless vistas. My
sister Gill and I played games, walked the corri-
dors, and with a helping lift, I looked out the
dutch doors between cars.

Finally, the prairies gave way to the lakes of
Manitoba and the forests and rock of the Cana-
dian Shield, until , at last, we arrived at Mont-
real, our destination. Family were there to greet
us and summer days at Applecroft, our grand-
parents rambling Victorian home on the St
Lawrence River, had begun.

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The Fifties

Postwar. For those with education or connections, it was a remarkable time. A man with credentials could afford a very comfortable life. He and his wife could own a home and a car, and she could stay home and raise the children. The at-home spouse, of course, was always the wife.

There was no global village. Few travelled more than a 1000 miles from home, and they did it with car and travel trailer. For the comfortably off, there was skiing in the winter, country club offerings and road trips to Banff.

For my family, things were different. My father

earned a pittance as an advertising manager for a forest equipment company called Galbraith and Sulley. There was seldom a spare dime. Mother kept meticulous books which allowed us to meet our monthly obligations and no more. Money was the topic of many heated arguments between my parents, carried out beyond bedtime and children's ears. So they thought.

Both my parents were loners. My mother had no friends; my father had one — Norm McLean whom he palled with regularly. They each had a motorcycle and often they got away on weekends and summer holidays for trips to Washington State or the BC interior.

Dad was a hobbyist. Motorcycle parts could

commonly be found strewn across the garage floor. He spent hours in his workshop downstairs, making things of wood — a birdhouse, a walking stick or a school project for us kids. Periodically, he pulled out his clarinet and practised in the workshop or brought his drum set into the living room to practise there. I got lessons.

As well, Frank was an artist, and from my untrained eye, a very good one. From 1938 through the war years, Dad worked for the Lions Gate Bridge as their accountant. However, about 1946, the owners, the Guinness family of beer fame, replaced him with a Guinness family member, but graciously, they gave Frank a year's salary on departure.

Dad took the opportunity to attend the Vancouver

Art School where he mentored under Llewellyn Petley-Jones. 'Petley,' as he was called, eventually returned to England, his home country, where he became a renowned painter who was invited to paint the Queen.

On occasional weekends, he and Petley spent an afternoon painting atop Copper Ridge (now a park) in Horseshoe Bay, West Vancouver. Petley lived in Horseshoe Bay with his family of five children in a house in the woods where the BC Ferry Terminal is situated today.

As a small child, many of my memories are of household things, for the house is where little ones spend their days. Mother was constantly doing chores, for we had few labour-saving

devices. Laundry was a huge job. We had a wringer washing machine. Thankfully, the agitator churned the clothes in soapy water, then rinsed them. But then they needed to be manually fed through the wringer to remove the water.

The wringer, positioned across the top of the tub, was engaged with a lever which connected the whole to the motor. Clothes were fed through two rollers, heavily sprung, which squeezed out every ounce of water. It was very effective, but, labour intensive and as mother discovered, dangerous.

One laundry day, she caught her hand in the rollers. Her entire arm was pulled through. The pain was excruciating. Mother was able to pull the reverse lever before she fainted to the floor. No

bones were broken but it was a painful recovery.

Once wrung, the clothes were hung on the washing line. My job was to pass the clothes pegs. The weather in West Vancouver was often unpredictable. Correction: the rain would predictably start just as the clothes were hung. Down they came to wait out the weather. Items required in the short term were hung in the basement to dry and laundry day became laundry days.

Following laundry, of course, was ironing. Everything was ironed including sheets, towels, socks and underwear. Dad's white shirts for work were starched. Mrs. McLardy up the road had a mangle or rotary iron. She sat down to iron. To

use the mangle, you fed the item onto a heated roller, then pushed a lever to bring a heated, curved top onto the heated cylinder. A foot pedal rotated the cylinder to move larger items like sheets to the next ironing position, then, with a push of the lever, the top would be brought down to iron the next section. It was quick and easy, if you could afford the mangle.

We had a car which Dad took to work. That meant all shopping was done by bus by mother and I. A more together father and mother would have shopped on Saturday with the car (mother didn't drive). However, my father did not possess the patience to shop and my mother did not possess the patience to shop with my impatient father. So we did it the hard way.

Because a shopping trip was limited by the groceries that my mother and I could carry, we weren't able to get much. Nor could we afford much. But in those days, you see, all manner of things came to the door. There was the Chinese vegetable man, the fish man, the milk man, the Fuller Brush man and the World Book Encyclopedia man. Anyone else who came to the door was persona non grata and mother dealt with them — perfunctorily.

The milk man was a friendly fella, sufficiently friendly that when I contracted a horrific case of worms, she asked his advice. “Just crush up some eggshells and put them into egg sandwiches for his lunch.” said he. “The shells will cut the worms into little pieces and that will be that.”

A tremendous amount of food was grown in Victory Gardens through the depression, wr and post-war periods



Well, perhaps a worm or two got the chop on the first bite of the doctored (I use the term loosely) egg sandwich, but another egg sandwich never touched my lips.

Fresh food, I suppose, was expensive or the truck didn't come by in a timely way, so canned food was often on the menu —canned corn, canned peas and beans. canned mixed vegetables, you name it, it came in a can.

And whatever was served from a can, was boiled, well boiled. Mother was English. In England, and thus in our home, for my father too was English, little touched the taste buds that had not been boiled or fried. And that which was fried, was well fried. To the English, mushy peas are a

delight, and on Rabbie Burns Day, are hailed as a royal dish. In the Bruce household, mushy peas were a staple.

The daily menu was largely dictated by our slender pocket book. With the exception of major holidays —Christmas and Easter, when astonishingly good turkey and ham was served, edible meats were frequently supplemented with the odd parts of myriad mammals, such as pigs, cows, chickens, horses and rabbits.

These kindly creatures gave up their brains, hearts, livers, stomachs, intestines, necks and feet that we children might live to be full-fledged human adults. Still, partially fledged would have worked for me.

Few things in the life of a small boy were more

irritating than small bones in the mouth — fish bones, neck bones, rabbit bones and lest we forget, egg shells. Stones from the gullets of chickens were equally annoying.

My father was raised in the early 1900s when the family had servants to prepare meals, meals which involved sequential courses. Dinner began with aperitifs, moved to soup, then fish, then the entrée, followed by palate-cleansing cheese and fruit before, at long last, desert and smokes on the veranda.

Had we of my childhood home waited for the servants to bring in from God knows where, a 6 course meal to our tiny kitchen with its tiny kitchen table, I would assuredly not have reached

full or even partially fledged adulthood. Nevertheless, fish was served. Odd fishes were common— skate, black cod, ooligan (a seasonal delicacy unique to the Fraser River which father would, with zeal, fry up for breakfast early on a Saturday morning.

Saturday morning breakfasts. How my old man loved them. It was a classic English breakfast: two or three eggs, thickly sliced bacon, tomatoes and thick-sliced bread. Into the pan went the bacon until it floated in fat. Eggs next, deep fried in the bacon fat along with the tomatoes, then finally, the coup de grace, bread fried in the bacon fat, and aptly named 'grease toast' (I confess, it's delicious). Finally, there was the requisite 'camp style' Maxwell House coffee —



Similar to father's breakfast, but this one will kill you just as fast

grounds tossed into a pot and yes, boiled.

My parents and perhaps yours, lived through the depression and war years. We lived in Canada during the war, not Britain, thankfully. Food shortages there were acute. Meats and dairy products were the stuff of the black market. In Canada, things were tight, but tolerable.

Throughout the Commonwealth, food stamp rationing systems were in place, as were Victory Gardens. 'Victory Gardens' was a campaign by the Canadian federal government to ease the strain on the food supply during the war and it was also viewed as a way for homeowners to feel that they were contributing to the war effort right in their own backyard. A Victory Garden was

whatever you could manage to grow in the space you had available. Many folks already had extensive gardens left over from the depression, mature fruit trees in particular. And many of those food-producing gardens remained on into the fifties. It was so with us and our neighbours. Some still had chicken houses and vociferous roosters.

We grew all manner of foods. Fruit trees included — Bing cherry, Italian and green plum, pear and apple. There were strawberries and raspberries too, and a large vegetable garden with rhubarb, beets, potatoes, carrots, squash, peas, beans, the whole enchilada.

Neither of my sisters felt compelled to help in the garden, so gardening fell in good measure

to me and mother. The root vegetables were easy enough to harvest. Fruit was another matter. Apples and pears had to be peeled and cored first and all fruits were canned. Dozens of jars of fruit were put by for the winter.

When I was about five and my sister nine, we had a memorable harvest event. One Saturday morning, mother was busy canning apples. Sister Gill was chatting with her in the kitchen as she processed apple sauce at the stove (the term 'range' was yet to appear). Mother used a pressure cooker to quickly soften the apples. She had taken to coring the apples but not peeling them, both to save time and capture the nutrients of the peel.

On one round, the pressure cooker lid would not budge (the lid and pot came together with a lens-type bayonet arrangement to withstand the enormous pressure required for pressure cooking). On top of the lid is a weighted valve designed to prevent pressure from exceeding a safe level. Mother had removed the weight to allow the pressure out of the pot and left it to cool for a while.

What she didn't notice was that the pressure did not release. Apple peelings had plugged the hole and the pressure was preventing the lid from rotating off. When she gave it a good crank, the lid came off with explosive force, covering everything including mother and Gill in boiling hot apple sauce. Screams and crying

brought me scurrying to the kitchen but there was little a five year old could do. Mother was severely burned, Gill less so. It took months to clean the kitchen.

Cherries were not canned and were free for the taking by young boys who climbed trees. "Don't eat the green ones," warned mother, "you'll get a stomach ache." Stomach aches were routine.

Next door lived my girlfriend, Linda Norman. Now Linda's cherry tree was several times the size of ours and the Normans, it seems, were not cherry lovers. So Linda and I decided to go into business. We filled lunch bags to the brim with cherries and went door to door. A bag was 25 cents,

a considerable sum, but the cherries were excellent, so we felt it was good value for money.

By the time we got to the Hayward's house at the top of Sentinel Hill we had amassed enough cash to take a cross-Canada trip on the CPR to my grandparent's house. From here on in, it was jewelry for the girl and packets of playing cards for me.

Linda knocked on the door. Mr Hayward appeared. Mr Hayward was not himself. He was drunk. "Well, hi there shildren, what can I do for you?" A loud voice from somewhere in the back of the house yelled "Harold, come away from the door." "We're selling cherries sir" said Linda, "25 cents a bag." Long before we'd reached

the Hayward's, we'd figured out that making Linda the front man was more lucrative." Well, as it happens, I loff apples." "Cherries, corrects Linda" "Yeah, sherries. I'll take 'em all." We conveyed all five of our remaining bags and through the grins of Chesire cats, we said two very profuse thank yous, pivoted and snickering, returned to the road andr home to count our take. We were ecstatic, of course, for we had entered the ranks of the wealthy. Anything, we had discovered, was now possible to achieve.

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