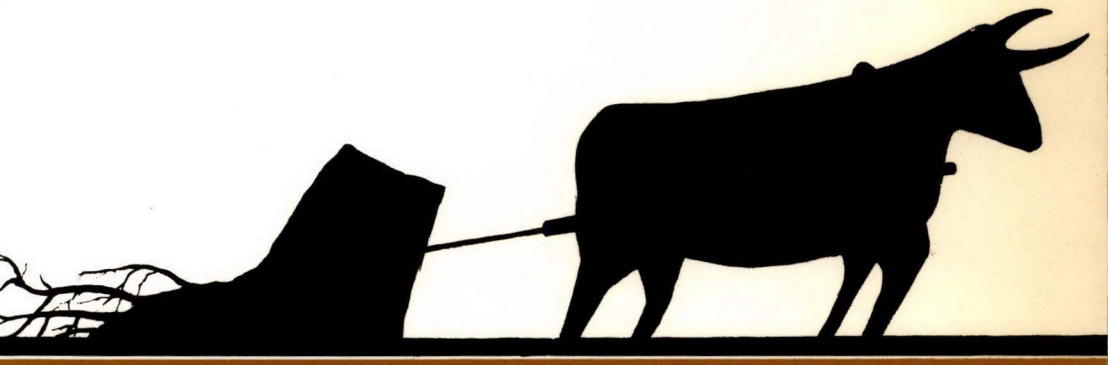
Uncle Mike's Edenbridge

Memoirs of a Jewish Pioneer Farmer

MICHAEL USISKIN



Translated by Marcia Usiskin Basman

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translated from the Yiddish
by
Marcia Usiskin Basman

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1983

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Uncle Mike's Edenbridge

PREFACE

Uncle Mike came to live with our family when I was six years old. He taught me to read and write Yiddish, but more than that he shared his wisdom. For a young child to have had the daily companionship of a loving, non-judgemental adult is a precious gift never to be forgotten.

My Uncle died when I was fourteen, but the things he shared with me became so woven into the fabric of my own life that it seems he has never left. There are times when I miss both my father and my uncle, and wish that I had them back.

It was during one of these times when I decided to re-read *Oksen un Motoren*, to feel their presence more closely. I was so moved by the stories depicting their struggles, I decided to translate the work. It seemed a pity that friends who could not read Yiddish would be unable to share my pleasure. Since then, of course, the idea has expanded to include the larger English reading public so that they, too, can experience the spirit and wisdom of this man.

The prominent French Canadian novelist, Gabrielle Roy, published an interview with Mike Usiskin following a visit to Edenbridge in the early 1940's. It appeared in her book *Fragiles lumieres de la terre* (*Fragile Lights of the Earth*). She has kindly allowed me to include a part of this work here, translated by Dr. Ben Z. Shek, Professor of French at the University of Toronto:

> "...Mike Usiskin was silent. His voice, as fragile as the chirping of the insects, remained still... Then the man lifted his two hands, with their worn out knuckles, and placed them on his knees. His eyes filled with a faraway look. He said: 'You see, I haven't really succeeded in life. You're looking for news and you've wasted your time coming here.'
>
> How could I find the words to tell him that never, never would I forget our meeting!

> I remember him pushing aside his books and the scraps of paper that he had ruffled on the table in a dreamlike way. He came to see us off at the gate, which had been made from a barn door, with a little opening in the lower part so that his cat could go in and out at will. The master of the house bent down to help a larkspur which had been knocked over by the rain. When I turned back for the last time, I saw more clearly than on arriving how miserable was this threshold in the midst of the forest, and how solitary this man whose hands sought the company of flowers. And yet it seemed to me then and still does today, that this poor colonist had achieved a level of happiness that thousands like him had searched for since God knows how long."

It warmed my heart to know a fine, sensitive woman like Gabrielle Roy had shared the same exchanges with Uncle Mike as I had and to know she remembers him to this day. In a recent letter she says: "It is a pleasure for me to return to someone close to Mike Usiskin some of the wonders of living I took from him. I still remember him vividly."

It also warmed my heart when the Saskatchewan government made the Synagogue in Edenbridge an historical site.

This is not a literal but rather a loose translation of *Oksen un Motoren*. It seemed the only way to stay true to the meaning of the original and yet retain as much as I could of Mike Usiskin's wonderful flavour.

I have called my version *Uncle Mike's Edenbridge*, for it is his story of the colony as he experienced it and as only he could tell it.

I want to thank all my friends who stressed the value of making this work available, with special thanks to my brother and sister-in-law, Larry and Roz Usiskin, Joshua Gershman, Ken Kirkby, David Boland and Irving Abella.

Marcia Usiskin Basman

Toronto, Ontario
1983

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Michael and David Usiskin

to the memory of
my father, Dave Usiskin, and his brother
'Uncle Mike'

FOREWORD

In one of the many adventures described in this book, Mike Usiskin tells of his chance meeting with an old farm woman deep in the bush. She looked at him suspiciously. "A Jewish farmer?" she asks. "A Jewish farmer just can't be."

The importance of this book lies in the fact that Mike Usiskin reminds Canadians of an aspect of our history long forgotten but worth remembering. He brings back to life the Jewish farmers, those thousands of penniless but hardy immigrants who came out of the shtetls and ghettos of eastern Europe or the hovels and sweat-shops of London to begin a new life in a new land—a land of forests, swamps, insects, blizzards and windstorms, a land almost uninhabitable. They came unprepared, but undaunted, to isolated homesteads, miles away from civilization and brought nothing with them save the skimpy clothes on their back and an indomitable will to survive. They, like their counterparts in the United States, Argentina and Palestine, were resolved to prove to the world that, given a chance, Jews could farm and prosper.

'Uncle' Mike Usiskin was one of these courageous settlers. His description of those difficult but heady years makes compelling reading. He brings to mind names—Edenbridge, Hirsch, Lipton, Bender Hamlet, Sonnenfeld, amongst others—names that, though now no more than ghost towns, were once part of a number of thriving Jewish farm settlements in western Canada. The men and women who built these towns were, in Usiskin's words, "Jewish heroes."

There can be no better testament to their tribulations and achievements than this book. Both the historical and Jewish communities of this country should be deeply indebted to Mike Usiskin for writing it and to his niece Marcia Usiskin Basman for translating it from the original Yiddish.

Glendon College,
York University,
May, 1983

Irving Abella

FOREWORD TO THE YIDDISH EDITION, 1945

I'd like to begin by introducing you to the author of this unique book.

Mike Usiskin is now an elderly man. He was born in the village of Leshvida, in the district of Haradok, a province of Vitepsk in Tsarist Russia. Lashvida was a lord's manor. There Mike's father, Eliezer, earned his living by working in the distillery and as an innkeeper.

Reb. Dovid, Mike's grandfather, had been a prominent rabbi in Haradok.

Mike's early education, like that of his brothers and sisters, came from tutors who were brought into the village. This didn't seem to satisfy the young lad, who from a very early age, was intensely interested in nature and more worldly concepts. So began his self-education. He read everything he could get his hands on in Russian, Hebrew and Yiddish. His parents and his grandfather had a healthy influence on him. They were not fanatically religious, and understood the importance of a secular education, which they unfortunately couldn't offer their children. They didn't, however, interfere with their children's own zealous pursuit of knowledge from 'foreign' sources.

As a young man, Mike left the village and wandered around Haradok, Vitepsk, and other cities in the area. In 1906 he left Russia. He escaped from the hellish regime of the Tsar, just as tens of thousands of other Jews were doing at the time, curses on their lips against the deadly pogroms. Filled with revolutionary thoughts and spirit, he arrived in London, England, where, although he encountered more political freedom, he also encountered the extreme poverty that existed amongst the masses, especially in London's East End.

It was here that Mike grew more and more familiar with the class struggle. He became a fur cutter. He read a lot and went to meetings. He began hating man's exploitation of man. He looked for a solution. Because he was steeped in anarchist thought, the Marxist solution to exploitation wasn't one that occurred to him.

Mike's inherent love of the soil and his romantic longings for the village led him to think of escaping from the dog-eat-dog life of the city, from the foremen and from the bosses. It seemed better to settle among the wild animals, the birds and the cows than among two-legged creatures.

While still in London, he met a group of people who also were intrigued by the idea of working the land. So he, his brother, Dave Usiskin, and this group of like-minded friends, tried their hands at poultry farming on a site not far from London. They did not succeed.

It was through this experiment that Mike came face to face with the Jewish philanthropists.

His experiences with these so-called providers left him feeling very pessimistic about that kind of assistance. And so he decided to find a way, using his own initiative, to escape from tumultuous London and become a farmer, where he hoped to live by his own hard work without worry of suffering.

After they'd lived in London for nearly five years, an opportunity presented itself to Mike and his brother, and others like them, to go to Canada. And that was how Mike Usiskin came to Edenbridge, Saskatchewan. He tells this interesting and personal story in this book.

Mike, many call him 'Uncle Mike,' is a very tall and stately man. He has light blue eyes which reflect the colour of the sky in the northwestern region of our mighty country, Canada. (Very often though, I remember the sky there was cloudy.) Mike is a very good-natured, modest man. His constant easy smile somehow seems to hold an apology for smiling at all when there is so much evil all around. And Mike seemed to experience this evil through all his senses.

Mike has a very special love for children. Many children who were born and raised in the Jewish colony felt he was not only their teacher, but also an uncle to them. All of them spoke Yiddish fluently and for this knowledge they thank Uncle Mike. They are very proud that they can speak the language so beautifully.

In the person of Mike Usiskin we find the most beautiful and the best characteristics of the Jewish farmers' colony. On his initiative, and with the help of the poorer progressive Jewish farmers, a hall was built. This hall was used for meetings, as a Jewish library, Yiddish theatre, readings and teaching the children Yiddish... all the things necessary to keep Yiddish alive. All these activities took place after a twelve to fourteen hour day's work in the bush, in the fields, or in the stalls.

Mike is a legendary figure. One could write a book about him. His house, his horse and buggy, the various objects that were precious to him and that he carefully and systematically collected and displayed in his 'palace', are all material for a writer's pen.

This book, *Oksen Un Motoren, (From Oxen to Tractors)* reflects the author's own life. But it is more than this.

Mike is a splendid storyteller. Like farmers generally, he has the habit of referring back to a story he has already told. That's how farmers tell their tales. In the middle of telling one story, they must refer back to a previous one. But everything in their lives is like that. Life goes on for them like one continuous unbroken thread. And this unique farmer's style is found throughout the book and is what gives it its particular charm. It is not 'pretty writing,' one critic suggests, but, he adds, what is most important is not how you say something, but what you have to say. Nearly every chapter begins with the folk tale style of: "It happened in..."

Oksen Un Motoren is a piece of history detailing the superhuman life struggle that a group of Jewish farmers endured for a period of 38 years because they didn't want to succumb to capitalist exploitation. They also chose not to become involved in *Luftgeshaften* (non-productive occupations). Indeed, they managed to avoid *Luftgeshaften*, but exploitation is still with us. This book is only a part of Usiskin's memoirs. He hasn't written about the later years when signs of the collapse of this great project, to organize Jewish farmers into a co-operative Jewish colony, was beginning to take place.

The transition from oxen to 'motors' (tractors) had finally taken place. But it was in this motor period when the structure of the colony, which had been built by the blood, sweat and tears of the pioneers, began to crumble.

In this book, Usiskin doesn't show the role of the Jewish Colonization Association (J.C.A.) in this project. More than one Jewish farmer carries some bitterness in his heart toward this organization. There was a reason that after 38 years of pioneering the Jewish farmers left and went back to the cities. It was not just because of the young people, though this was a considerable problem for them. It was mostly because they received such little help and almost no encouragement from the Jewish community in Canada that they couldn't stay on.

From time to time, over the years, I have visited Edenbridge and each time I relive the tragedy of this far-flung little corner of Canada. On my first visit, there were fifty Jewish families; now the figure doesn't reach thirty. More and more are going back to the cities. Since my first visit, and after each subsequent visit, my joy diminished and I left feeling saddened and pained.

And in all those years I never heard the subject of Jewish farmers being discussed in any Jewish organizations. It didn't seem to be anyone's concern. The Jewish farmers have had to suffer alone, uproot a thousand year old forest alone, build barns and houses alone, and in the end they'd have to surmount all these new hardships alone.

And so a splendid dream, which could have become a reality, was shattered.

This book is dedicated to the young people of Edenbridge. Mike didn't mean this to be only those young people who are still there, but also those who spread out all over Canada and the United States. Even those who had to leave the colony for unavoidable reasons, are no doubt different from the average Jewish youth brought up in the cities. In their hearts and minds they carry with them the swampy waters of Edenbridge, its black earth, fresh air, and the taste of honest work. These will stand them in good stead in every

walk of life, even the hardships they will have to overcome in the cities.

Mike is also keenly aware of those young people of Edenbridge who went off to fight the war against Fascism. The youth of Edenbridge have always been anti-fascist and progressive in their thinking.

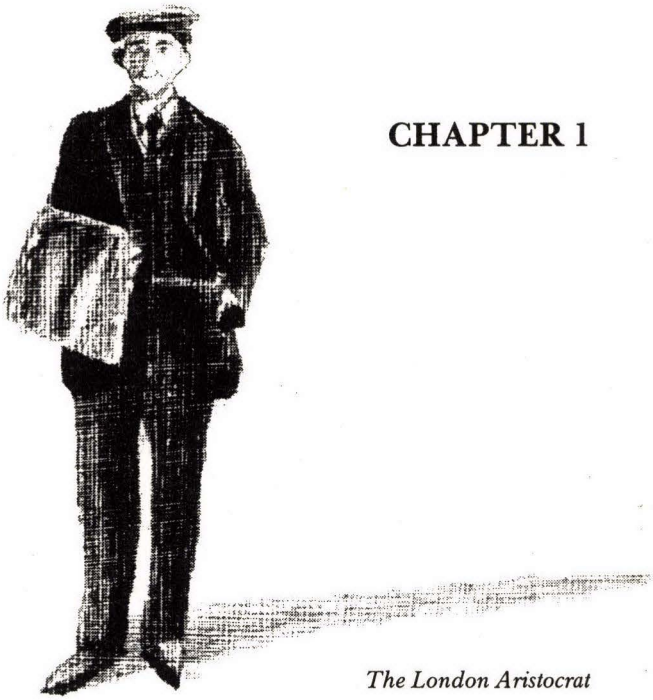
This book is an important document for every Jew. There will come a time when we, the Jewish community, will have to revise our attitudes and values. We will have to give an account of ourselves as to the kind of help we offered to just one little corner of the world, where we could have set an example showing that Jews could be good and productive farmers. When we are ready to do that, Mike Usiskin's book will be of great value.

Once we are ready to use our own Canadian text books, parts of M. Usiskin's book will have to be included in the collection. Jewish children will be able to learn that Jews aren't only doctors, lawyers, labourers or clever businessmen, but that there were also Jews who made an honest attempt to add dignity to our community by being Jewish farmers.

Jewish literature is enriched by this important book. It gives us an opportunity to see into a corner of Jewish life that is totally foreign to us. The reader will read this book with great interest and curiosity and will be thankful to M. Usiskin for this gift. We are all eagerly awaiting the second book, which hopefully won't be too long coming.

Toronto
1945

Joshua Gershman



The London Aristocrat

CHAPTER 1

A Magnetic Attraction to Farming

Here before me lies a large bundle of letters. Friends from the big cities of the world want to know why we, nearly all of us from the bustling major centres of Europe, Africa and America, have come to such a deathly still wilderness. Why, they want to know, have we stayed on here without even a thought of returning to those vibrant centres? Why did we leave those splendid large cities and come to Edenbridge, in north-western Canada? And why we have stayed on to endure a life that, since we got here, has been one continuous chain of suffering the like of which can be compared to no other Jewish colonization in the whole world? What kind of devilish power has kept us here all these years? They also want to know what it is about Edenbridge as a Jewish colony that makes it so unique.

It had never occurred to us that we'd be asked to answer such baffling questions. Learned scholars and theoreticians, who understand about the paths of history, are needed to answer these kinds of questions. But since we don't have such men here, we'll have to make the effort ourselves: set aside

the theory and make use of the practical. We can draw upon all that we have gone through here, from the beginning until the present time. But, to even take from the practical and tell the story in a coherent way, also requires learned men. Since we don't have these here either, the reader will have to forgive us and read instead the simple, unpolished language of a farmer, just the way it happens to come out.

One friend, whom I have never met, but whom I know only through his letters, writes:

"You, dear sir, are an extremist. It is hard for me to understand a man who could leave the spicy life of London and voluntarily take up life in a deathly wilderness."

He also wants to know what diabolical power drove me out of London in the first place, and what magnetism Edenbridge has to have kept me here these thirty-three years.

A very good question, dear friend. Many others, just like you, have asked the same question. Even we here have furrowed our brows in an effort to understand this mystery. I will try to convey to you and to all those who are interested, whatever I know and perhaps that will help you to understand.

Dear Friends, do you know what it means to be the slave of a slave? Have you ever met people who place less value on a whole human life than they do on the tiniest screw of a machine? Have you ever had to witness a tiny child, whose mother was forced to send him out to work in a factory, run down in the street and crushed by the wheels of a vehicle driven by some drunken charlatan? Have you ever seen men fighting off dogs for a piece of bread or a bone in a garbage can? Have you ever had to listen to God-fearing folks who preach of the good things to expect in the hereafter while taking what they can for themselves in the present? Have you ever met fighters for peace with guns in their hands? Have you ever had to witness the outrageous contrast that exists between the poor working classes who live in the dirty, smelly noisy East End of London, and the idle rich of the clean, quiet, cheerful West End?

Have you ever, dear friends, given any thought to the worries suffered by one class as opposed to the carefree lives

of another class? Have you ever had to pass drunken women with babes at their breasts lying in the gutters outside of saloons? Have you ever met preachers of morality who are, in reality, the worst kind of exploiters? Is there enough paper to reckon up the endless lessons that I learned in that great seat of civilization, London? But, be patient, my friends, and I will soon get on with my tale...

One day I came across a small advertisement in a London daily newspaper. It seemed that anyone who was interested in buying land was to come, five pounds sterling in hand, to a meeting, three days hence at a designated place. Another forty-five pounds were to be paid once the land was finally settled on. A million thoughts flashed through my mind. I could barely contain my excitement, and eagerly showed the ad to my brother who was then also living in London. And we, then and there, decided not to let such a golden opportunity slip us by.

At the meeting we got to know a few other Jews (who are now also Edenbridge farmers). We quickly mustered together 25 members (though we felt 50 was a more realistic number). The excitement generated at that meeting gave rise to ideas and fantasies such as you'd find hard to imagine. Such plans we had! And our hopes soared when our chairman, Mr. Rice, announced that he had read an advertisement in the *Jewish Chronicle* which claimed that a well-known philanthropist, Mr. Herman Landau, promised to assist prospective Jewish farmers in any way that he could. It was a very persuasive call to all the pedlars of London to throw off their dirty, downtrodden jobs and become pioneers of the soil with the help of the philanthropists. Our fantasies ran away with us. Names like Rothschild and Goldstein ran through our heads. Jewish men, just like us! Who in the world was as lucky as we? In very short order we had a constitution drawn up in both English and Yiddish. There were 23 clauses and the impressive emblem of a plough and the Star of David. We called ourselves the English-Jewish Farmers' Colony.

1. The colony shall be made up of 30-50 Jewish families who are all familiar with the art of farming.
2. Each family must have 50 pounds Sterling in cash.
3. A training farm shall be purchased in England, as close to London as possible, large enough to sustain all 50 families.
4. Each family shall receive 20 acres of land, a horse and wagon, some chickens and seeds and tools for the initial planting.
5. A contractor shall be hired to build all the necessary buildings to ensure the settlers of the utmost convenience.
6. A co-operative dairy shall be instituted by the Society and operated by 3-4 paid employees.
7. A co-operative store shall be set up to provide the farmers with their household needs and be subsidized by the dairy fund.
8. All families shall be entitled to shop at the general store on credit for the first three months.
9. The 50 pounds initially paid by each member shall be used merely as a deposit on all the aforementioned, and the remainder shall be mortgaged, to be paid off over a period of time by the dairy fund.
10. When the debts are all repaid, each member shall receive an official document showing his share of the assets.
11. Every transaction shall be made with the guidance of a lawyer who shall be appointed by the colony.
12. The colony shall obtain a standing mortgage for the first 3 years to be used for the purposes of development.
13. The Society shall take out fire and accident insurance for the people and the cattle.
14. Aside from the dairy and general store, each farmer shall work his own land to ensure its development to the best of his ability.
15. No member shall be allowed to sell any goods provided by the general store or the dairy within 5 miles of the colony.
16. The Society shall be responsible for providing schools in both Yiddish and English for the children and a recreation hall for adults.

17. The Society shall obtain a contract with a wholesale marketing agent from whom we shall purchase goods for the general store. The agent shall also set up a receiving depot in the colony where the farmers can bring their goods for him to sell for them in the cities at the going rates.
18. Should a member withdraw from the colony before becoming actively engaged in farming, he shall lose only 10% of his investment and the rest shall be returned to him by the Society.
19. If a member chooses to leave the colony once he has settled on and begun working the land, he shall lose only 5% of his deposit, providing he brings in a Jewish family in his place that meets with the approval of the Society.
20. The Society shall have the right, by a majority vote, to expel a family found to be working against the interest of the colony. This family, however, shall not lose any of its original deposit.
21. The organizational work of the colony shall be carried out by a committee to be elected annually.
22. A treasurer shall be elected and will be bonded to the amount of 500 pounds and entrusted with bank books and other valuable papers of the Society.
23. All officials, that is, the treasurer, the trustees and the secretary, shall also be bonded.

(Signed) A. Rice (Secretary)
By order of the Committee.

And so our fantasies grew. Remembering all the promises of help in the *Jewish Chronicle*, of all the 'Rothschilds,' we again joyfully celebrated the anticipation of thousands answering the call to throw off their shackles in the dirty city and move with the freedom of nature to be free men. Our spirits soared!

A Dream is Shattered

We sent Mr. Rice, our secretary, off to relay to Mr. Herman Landau our enthusiasm and eagerness to partake of the wonderful opportunity his advertisement offered us. We waited for the reply with anxious hearts, for we were afraid

that the meagre amount of money we had been able to accumulate might not be enough to carry out the plans we made for an experimental farm near London. Land in England was not cheap.

We didn't have long to wait. Our delegation came back with such sad, long faces that each and every one of us got that sick feeling in the pit of our stomach that told us that the news was going to be very bad. What had they done to our Constitution? A stroke here; a stroke there; here; there...clause after clause struck out with an angry red marker, until our glorious Constitution looked as barren as a ploughed field in spring. Our hearts sank. It turned out that the philanthropists were not quite prepared for our "co-operative" approach. To them, co-operatives reeked of anarchy. If they had only known some of the wilder plans we had for the future! One of the members of our group, a butcher, and his friend the cantor, had suggested that we and our 50 families would certainly be able to provide skilled workers of every type so that there would be no need for hiring outside contractors for many of the structures that would have to be built. And what's more, they suggested that we have our own musical choir to provide us with entertainment. If only the philanthropists could have heard one enthusiastic young man expound his ideas: that we should all have a distinctive costume to wear so that wherever we went we would be recognized as members of the English-Jewish Farming Colony; that we should have songs to sing for every type of job...songs to sing for milking cows; songs for ploughing the land; songs to sell produce by; even songs to sing while cleaning the stalls! Such was the enthusiasm that flowed from this joyous young man.

The news brought back by the delegation dampened our spirits but we could not allow our hopes to be dashed. Mr. Rice would not rest. It was incomprehensible to him that rich Jewish men, whose wish it was to see less Jewish pedlars and more Jewish landowners, could not understand that this could not be done without outside help. "This can't happen to us," he raged. "We shall not give up our dreams so

readily." We needed help and decided to ask for it of the well-known humanitarian and author, I. Zangwill.

I can still see his face before me: a patriarchal figure with warm, knowing eyes. One could feel the gentleness of this man. His love of mankind welled up and out of him like a rolling sea. It seemed as if he could actually feel our sorrow, and he suffered along with us. He spoke to us with his eyes and we understood his every look. (We knew then that we could no longer depend on the philanthropists for help.) Most of his life he had been trying to arrange some territory for his Jewish brothers. He knew the philanthropists too well. He recalled to us the quotation from the Bible: "Depend not on the generosity of the son of man."

We were beginning to realize that all the money that we had gathered together for the purchase of land near London was soon to be lost. It would not be long before our money would be spent on lawyers' fees, mortgages and interest rates. We would be working simply to pay off debts. We began to understand how we would continue to be milked until we became completely dependent on our philanthropic 'friends', until we were of no further value to them, finally to be sold out for some trifling sum. Our eyes had been opened by our new found friend. We had been saved from certain catastrophy. That is even clearer to us today.

Though our co-operative fell apart before it even came to fruition, our hopes lived on. Our fantasies would not die. The enthusiasm and brotherly love we experienced at the meeting with our friend, Mr. Zangwill, fed our hopes, so that even if we couldn't carry out our plans with 50 members, we felt that we must carry on with whoever was available.

We purchased a small parcel of land from a saloon keeper, Mr. A. Dross. There were only 12 lots, which were not too far from London. (The train fare was 3 pounds and 2 shillings return.) There we hoped to establish a small community and a chicken farm. We settled on a price of 33 pounds for the 12 lots, 4 pounds to be put down as a deposit and the remainder to be paid when we could raise it. No deadlines.

I am sitting here looking through some old letters dated October 20 and October 23, 1909. Among them are the official documents stating that the purchaser (my brother) Dave Usiskin, paid to the vendor, Mr. A. Dross, 2 pounds, 10 shillings as the down payment on the land, and the promise to pay the remainder when the agreement was completed.

It was beginning to look as if we were on the verge of actually becoming farmers, and before long we'd be starting to build our homes and our chicken coops. We were very eager to begin. We wanted to do our own work and decided that this could be done if the craftsmen amongst us were assigned helpers so that the project could proceed with greater speed. The rest of us would stay at our jobs in the city and assist the project financially. Our hearts were pounding with the imminence of success. Very soon our dreams would be fulfilled. I won't begin to tell you of the myriad of financial burdens that we somehow managed to overcome before we actually began to build. But hold...stop everything! We were once again faced with unforeseen problems. There were lawyers' letters which we didn't count on or understand.

What were these new disasters, you may ask?

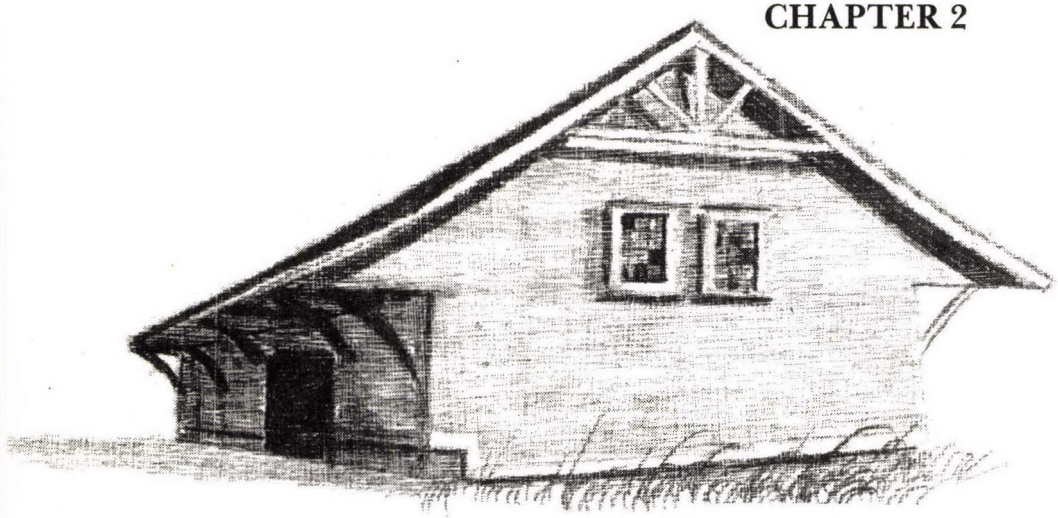
Very near to the land which we had purchased for our chicken farm, there lived a very rich farmer, who had settled there three years prior to our arrival. He was also engaged in chicken farming. You can then imagine the obstacles that were set up against us. We were forbidden to raise chickens on our land. It seems that our land was too close to the village. Why us, and not the rich farmer? "Go complain to the heavens." We, and our meagre funds, just couldn't stand up to these obstacles.

I am remembering an old friend, Mr. Molshan, a virile, giant of a man. One day he sat down and told us his life story. It broke my heart. The cursed system! You are not free to do within it as you please; to make of yourself what you like. If you feel more at ease surrounded by nature, the system insists you stay in the city. It takes away your self-esteem by deciding for you where you must live and the work you must do.

It was then that we decided to run away from civilization as far as the eye could see. We were ready to go anywhere...ready to live in the wilderness with the wild animals...anywhere at all...to the moon if need be. We must flee. Even the hardships endured by Robinson Crusoe sounded less difficult to overcome than those we had to endure in this society.

So, my friends, now you know the magnetic power that drew me out of that glorious city of London, as you called it. Now you also know that I wasn't lured, but forced out of London. How I came to Edenbridge and why I stayed for 33 years will be told as my story unfolds.

CHAPTER 2



Star City Station

How We Came to Know About Edenbridge

The first people to set foot in Edenbridge arrived in 1906 from Africa. There were about ten men to begin with. They said they found the weather unbearably hot in Africa and decided to come to Edenbridge where it was said to be cooler. (It was certainly cooler...40 degrees below freezing temperatures in the winter.) They hadn't expected to find the land so uncivilized. They were having difficulty getting used to the vast impenetrable forests of central Canada, and the great distances between neighbouring properties. They felt very lost and lonely. They longed for human companionship and decided to advertise in newspapers all over the world for more people to come and settle this empty land with them.

Back in London we learned of this settlement through an article in a newspaper and jumped at the new opportunity it seemed to offer. Re-infected with enthusiasm, we couldn't be cured. We had to know more. We quickly set off for the Jewish district of Whitechapel in London to see if anyone there had any friends in Canada...'Eskimo Land', and if they knew anything about the pioneering Jews there. We came across a man

whose sister and her family were actually living in Edenbridge. Her husband was not only a farmer, but the butcher, the teacher and the religious leader of the little community. We were shown some letters he had written and his enthusiasm made the magnetism of this faraway land become unbearably strong. I recall one very powerful letter of his:

"Flee, my friends, from the London fogs and the chaos that eats away at your hearts. Flee from the confusion of busy streets where some maniacal driver may run you down; flee from the tenements and the bosses that live off your blood, sweat and tears; flee from that two-faced society where politicians don't say what they think, and don't think what they say. Come to Edenbridge. Come where the air is fresh. Everything is so peaceful here that you can lie down to rest in the middle of the road, and no one would even wake you, let alone run you down. The forest here is so vast that personal expansion has no bounds. You can live here by your own resources, but our people are still eager to help you and will greet you here with open arms. Come help us tame this wild land. Come help us settle our colony...we need you. Come, please come! You will not regret it."

What hard-hearted fool could ignore such an appeal? The magnetism of the soil pulled hard at our heart strings. After all, we were sort of amateur farmers already from our escapades around London. Besides, we were only too familiar with the empty promises of wealthy Jews who vowed to help poor Jews become land-owning farmers. There was perhaps one exception to all this deception about the generosity of the self-acclaimed philanthropists, and that was a man called Baron de Hirsch. He, in fact, did help poor Jews acquire land for farming, but he was probably the only one who ever did.

Perhaps we really did worry those rich men of London. Perhaps our ideas were too revolutionary for their day. Perhaps our plans for co-operative societies posed a threat to them. But thanks to our friend Mr. Zangwill, we were able to see through the sham and realize that millionaires would never part with their millions on our behalf. And so we decided to fulfill our dreams by emigrating to Canada.

The First Expedition from London

It was in May 1910, when the first expedition set out from London to Canada. My brother was part of that group. We decided that he should go first, and that I would stay behind and continue to work at my job as a fur cutter until I had saved enough money for my passage. In those days, fur cutters made only enough to keep from starving. The only way to save a few pennies was to leave the table hungry.

The letters we received from the first expedition were very perplexing. What shall we, here in London, do? Was it wise to leave London and go to Canada after all? Were the conditions encountered by the expedition temporary or inherent in that kind of life? Would things improve with time? Would they be able to tame that wilderness or at least learn to live within it? Only a wise man could answer those questions.

I was apprehensive about leaving London. Here, I had experienced some spiritual freedom for the first time. I had emigrated to London from Czarist Russia where freedom was non-existent, especially for the Jews. The restrictions were endless. To deviate from the rules in any way meant paying off some petty official. By contrast, London was a well of contentment. Here, at least, my spirit was free.

Nevertheless, we left London. I was happy to leave the London fogs, and I was very lonesome for my brother. Besides, the eloquent letters of that farmer, teacher, religious leader from Edenbridge echoed in my head. Also my brother had sent me a clipping from a local newspaper reviewing a performance the little colony had put on of an old favourite Jewish play. The account was complete with names of members of the cast and my heart went out to them. (I have the clipping to this day as a treasured 33-year-old document and testament to the potential capacity of the free spirit.) That clipping convinced me that this band of Jewish men were not ordinary men, but men who were concerned with cultural and spiritual matters though they were set down in a vast empty land with a wilderness to conquer.

We were young, strong and enthusiastic. The hardships of nature didn't frighten us. The hardships imposed by capricious bosses did. The latter we were familiar with. The former we knew little about, but we felt sure they could be overcome. And so we set off for Edenbridge...

I Leave with the Second Expedition

In May 1911, a second expedition left London for Edenbridge. My friend, Alex Springman, and I were part of it.

I will never forget that Friday evening at the station when we were leaving London. It warmed my heart to see that so many friends cared enough to come out to wish us well in our adventure. It bolstered my hopes. If we had made so many friends in England, why shouldn't we be able to do the same in Canada?

The ocean voyage was no picnic! Our ship, which looked like a New York skyscraper in dock, when let out to sea, bobbed up and down like an empty nutshell. Compared to the vastness of the mighty sea, our great vessel and its hundreds of passengers were quite insignificant. The hustle and bustle of the crew frightened us. Sailors ran up and down; signals flashed, and danger seemed imminent. Someone said the ship was sinking, and that rumour spread like wildfire among the passengers. We couldn't understand it: it was mid-day; the sky was clear; the sea was calm... why all the signals? A steward then announced that the ship was on its maiden voyage to Canada and that signal drill was all part of the testing. Checks had to be made to see if the waters were deep enough to proceed out of the harbour. He assured us they were only complying with maritime law.

The ship stopped in Iceland for nearly six hours, but our mattresses continued to move about like evil spirits. As we neared Canada we were called out of our (4th class) cabins and invited to look through the telescopes. We could see giant icebergs that, to us, looked like beautiful man-made sculptures, but to the sea captains were potential danger and had to be avoided at all cost.

The immigration authorities in Quebec gave those of us proceeding to western Canada no trouble at all. They were probably well aware of the privations we homesteaders had ahead of us and didn't have the heart to burden us with any unnecessary obstacles.

Star City... My First Canadian Railway Stop

The conductor called out "Star City", and I realized that I had arrived at my destination. I had to get off the train. The trip was really over. I found myself in the middle of a vast, uninhabited country. The only evidence of civilization was the tiny rooftop of the railway station jutting out to greet me. I was alone at the final stop as Alex Springman had been detained in Quebec because his son had a foot infection. My other companions decided to get off at the previous stop in hope to finding some employment. I stood alone with my mixed emotions: joy, on the one hand, for having completed such a long, arduous journey without mishap; on the other hand, great loneliness.

It was 4: a.m. as I stood in this Star City station not knowing where to go. I had expected to find a 'city' of a few thousand inhabitants, but from where I stood, there was no city in sight. I couldn't understand why my brother, who surely had received my letter telling the date and time of my arrival, was not at the station to meet me. I knew that letters sent were letters received. What I didn't know was that there are places in this world where weather determines the delivery date of the mail. If the weather was bad, the postman, who had miles to travel from one post office to another, postponed delivery for some day when the roads were more passable. It turned out that my brother received my letter only one day prior to my arrival, and at the end of May, it was not possible to cover the 20 miles from Edenbridge to Star City in so short a time.

Standing there under the overhang of the station roof, I felt a presence moving not far from me. A human being here in the wilderness could indeed be a friend. I looked closer

and saw two oxen, tied to a contraption the sight of which I had never seen before in my life. And horns... my God, how could they carry those awkward looking things on their heads? They seemed oblivious to their surroundings, and stood there quietly chewing their cud.

My first view of the man was a pair of big feet hanging out of overalls so dirty that it would make a riddle to answer what their original colour might have been. Looking still more closely at the only speck of humanity anywhere near me, I saw that he had on his head a heavy hat with ear flaps pulled well down, and on his shoulders a sort of garment that is rather difficult to describe. Was it made of fur? But why a fur coat in May? There I was in my London 'getup' of thin pants, light shoes and a summer coat, observing this peculiar picture with envy. The only two sounds that could be heard in the still of the morning were my teeth chattering with the cold, and the snores of warmth and comfort of my sleeping friend.

This man had been farming 9 miles from the station for the past 8 years. He delivered his cream to the train which carried it to other towns. He had to leave his home 6: o'clock in the evening, drive all night, and wait there at the station for the train to arrive. He outfitted himself as he did so that he could at least wait out the night in some comfort. He converted his wagon into a hotel room for the night.

This farmer, as I soon learned, was a well-educated man. He seemed to know many of the Russian and American classics by heart. Right there and then he delivered quite a long lecture on political economics. When I told him that I had brought with me about 200 books and magazines from London, his eyes lit up and I felt sure that he would eagerly devour my entire literature lying right there in his wagon.

My first encounter with this man made the anxiety I had previously experienced in London, return. Is this what can be achieved in this land? After 8 years of farming one can expect to be the proud owner of 2 oxen (harnessed together with ropes)... one can travel 20 hours to deliver his goods for the profit of $1.50 (that is if one is willing to sleep in his wagon). If one bothered to eat, there would be no profit

left at all. If one had to sell cream and butter in this way to make a living, the only thing left for oneself would be the whey. Why, after 8 years of farming couldn't one enjoy some of the cream for oneself? You can imagine the multitude of doubts that marched across my mind after my first encounter with Canadian farm life.

"Hello, hello"...someone's hand was extended in welcome. Someone was hugging and kissing me. I felt as if I had been awakened from a bad dream. These people seemed familiar. My God, were these the broad shoulders of Isaac Cohen? I couldn't believe it! What a change! The same kind of dirty overalls, earmuffs and fur coats were covering my friends as were that farmer I had met at the station. What's become of the soft white hands? Where are the gold rings that used to be on these fingers? Where were the immaculate London clothes? All they seemed to have amassed since coming to Canada were suntanned faces, calloused hands, friendly smiles on their lips and warm hearts. "Never mind all the ugly surface coverings that you see...there is goodness here." And within five minutes, I felt very much part of a growing family of friends.

It was decided right there in Star City that I should travel another 14 miles to the nearest Land Office and apply for a homestead, so that by the time I arrived in Edenbridge I would be the lord of 160 acres (of solid bush).

I travelled with three other Jews who were familiar with these parts. The ride took place with no sign of a road anywhere. We bumped along through bush and muddy swamps, periodically being splashed from head to foot. Suddenly the wind changed direction and there, on the 26th of May, we were caught in a terrible snowstorm. We were stranded in some small hotel for two days, until the snow stopped and some of the drifts could be removed. It was good material for a story, but who would believe it?

You may ask why we had to continue this trip when the weather was so bad. Well, one of my travelling companions, Jake Ratner, was taking his horse to the veterinarian. He had bought his team of horses for $575.00 and one of them

had become ill immediately. In those days the new settlers didn't breed their own horses. It was too cold to raise them out west, so they were brought in from eastern Canada where the climate was not so severe. Once the horses were brought out west, they fell like flies. This wasn't only because of the cold weather, but more likely from the fact that the 'green' settlers knew so little about horses, they couldn't recognize inferior ones when they were sent them. There was no one to advise them on the value of a horse and so whatever was sent, and whatever price was asked, they accepted. Because the horses were so badly needed, they were bought with a deposit of whatever was on hand, and the balance was paid off at very high interest rates. Unfortunately, most horses died long before all the payments were made. Years after those horses were no longer on this earth, the poor farmer was still paying for them. And so that explains why Jake Ratner was travelling this great distance (a week's journey in all) in such inclement weather. He had to make sure that his second horse was attended to by the vet before it, too, died.

The other two men on this trip, Chaim Eli Kotchoff and Dave Stein, were going to Melfort, the city of our destination, to try and get a loan from the Jewish Colonization Society (J.C.S.). Once in Melfort, we each set off to attend to our personal business. I headed straight for the Land Office, eager to acquire the quarter section of land that would, once and for all, assure me of my permanence here. Unfortunately, things didn't move quite so quickly. There was some confusion about my funds and documents, which took three days to finally get straightened away. Another unexpected snowstorm kept us in Melfort one more day, and finally we were able to leave for Edenbridge.

No one need envy us our return trip. The mud came up over the wheels of the wagon; the horses could barely drag themselves forward; we were splattered in mud from head to toe as we sat in our bare, open wagon, with not so much as some straw to take the pain out of that bumpy ride. We

would doze off between lurches and, from time to time, would wake up to find that a wheel was stuck on a fallen tree. We'd then have to get out, push the tree out of the way, and get the wagon back in its proper ruts.

The horses, tired of standing for days in town, were eager to run. Once on the trail, they sped along quite quickly, and soon we were at a little house of a Jewish farmer. The horses seemed familiar with the place. They headed straight for a pile of hay which lay near the side of the house. They were not only weary, but also very hungry. The sudden halt of the wagon awakened us. Our bones ached from the all-night journey in the bare wagon. I'm sure if it wasn't for our clothes, our bones would have fallen off our bodies onto the wagon floor. But wait... a friendly voice was calling: "Welcome! Welcome! Come in brothers!" Did I say hard wagon floor? The hospitality of our hosts made us instantly forget our trying journey and their happy greetings filled us with such exuberance that not one of us felt the least bit tired.

All at once, my hands were encased in a pair of hands twice the size of mine, calloused and hard, but so warm and gentle. I looked up and saw smiling lips and white teeth gleaming at me.

"So you're Dave Usiskin's brother from London? We have been waiting for your arrival. Who else came with you? We need Jews out here. Strong able-bodied workers who won't be frightened off by a little hardship. The size of the job we have ahead of us is overwhelming. Trees must be felled, swamps drained, and roads built. Roads are very important to us here. We must be able to travel about freely so we can enjoy life. That is, after all, why we came."

"But who are you, dear friend?" I asked. In the excitement of having found more Jewish settlers, he had forgotten to tell me his name. "My name is Joe Pullman. I know your brother very well. We have become close friends. I am working here for this farmer now, but as soon as I am finished this job, I will come home again and we can all see each other more often. I am sure our section will flourish. Our young people won't sit around twiddling their thumbs."

I found myself wondering about their accommodations. Where do all these people live? The woman came forward and graciously invited us in for a bite to eat. I couldn't see the house, let alone the entrance to it. There was a square box nearby large enough to hold a couple of dozen geese, but no house. So I held back and waited for the men to go ahead of me. We had, after all been invited "in", so it must be somewhere. And there in that box lived the farmer and his family. Whenever travellers passed through that part of the country en route from town to town, they too felt free to stop over. Many a time, as weary travellers passed through during the night, one could overhear the farmer call to his wife: "Rose, let's get out of bed and offer it to these weary travellers. We can rest tomorrow night." And she would answer "Of course. You help them unharness the horses and I'll get some tea and a bite to eat ready for them."

The young, handsomely tanned, broad shouldered Joe Pullman, was anxious to please and entertain me, and so he decided to describe the home my brother had built for himself on the homestead. It had the reputation of being the nicest home of all the bachelors. He began to tell me about it in great detail—its size, the architecture, the materials used, and how much it had cost to build. He sounded very proud of it.

The *palace* was all of 14 feet wide by 18 feet long, made of one inch boards and lined with single ply paper for insulation against the wind. The ceiling was made of ¾ inch boards that were found lying about. However, the boards were covered with paper to keep the rain from dripping into the house. The cost for lumber was $21.10. The window panes, nails, door knobs and hinges came to $2.29. The total cost of the house was $23.39, and even so he was unable to pay for it all. There was enough wood left over for my brother, Dave, to make a table and benches, and these I have kept to this day. They are fine examples of the type of sawmills that existed in those days. A board could be 6 inches wide and 1 inch thick at one end, and 1½ inches thick and 2 inches wide at the other. It was of this kind of material and enthusiasm that Edenbridge, especially our 'Londoner' section, was built.

CHAPTER 3



My First Walk to the Post Office

One day, not long after I had settled in Edenbridge and was still unfamiliar with the bush, I got the urge to go for a walk, and made the post office my destination. I felt lost without a newspaper, and I was also hoping there might be some letters. The bush was alive with wildlife. The birds, which had migrated for the winter, had returned, and were joyously singing in the warm spring sunshine. All the little animals were romping about, giving one the feeling of people bustling about in a large city. The swamps were alive with croaking frogs. This made walking very treacherous. In order to make any headway, I had to circumvent them, thus tripling the distance.

My brother warned me not to go. "You're sure to get lost," he threatened, "and then we'll have to send a search party out for you like we had to do for Jack Brody, who was lost for two days in the bush" (though it turned out that he was only a mile away from his house). "Secondly," he continued, "you could slip into a swamp for an unscheduled bath and catch a miserable cold. Thirdly, you'll never walk those six

miles in one day, and since you don't really know anyone yet in these parts, where will you be able to stop for the night? Most ridiculous of all," he went on, "is the idea of you setting out for such a long walk in shoes that are suitable only for a stroll down an avenue in London."

"I didn't come here for comfort," I argued. "And I'm not afraid of minor mishaps like wet feet."

My brother, who had been here for a year, and was by now somewhat familiar with the district, began giving me landmarks to look for.

"Start here," he began, pointing out the direction with his index finger. "Continue through this field, westward, until you come to a broken fence post. Turn left there and continue on until you come to a swamp. At the swamp, turn right, and continue on until you come to a hollow. Walk around the hollow until you come to a huge tree which was broken in a storm and is now leaning on another large tree. Continue past the broken tree until you come to a larger swamp which is full of tall reeds and is the home of our local muskrats. Turn left at this swamp and continue on until you come to a grove of willows. Turn right, and you will know, either by the sound of crowing roosters or by the singing voice of Isaac Cohen, that you have completed ¾ of a mile and are very near to Isaac's home. Isaac will then map out the next lap which will take you to the next farm, and so on, from neighbour to neighbour until you get to the post office. Don't ever try to follow the sound of a barking dog. Dogs love to chase rabbits and so run off in all directions, and that will lead you off course. Most of the farmers here sing while they work, and the surest and safest sounds to follow in order to stay on course are either their singing or the sound of their wood chopping."

"Don't be frightened by the animals in the woods," my brother's warnings continued. "If you don't bother them, they won't bother you. You may come across some large animals with expansive antlers. They are a type of deer called moose. You just go along your way and ignore them and they will ignore you. To them you are just another

animal of the bush and have every right to be here, just as they feel they do. If you encounter a muskrat, leave it alone. Don't even stop to look at its ugly hairless black tail. They get nervous if they feel trapped and can jump at your face. Another creature to steer clear of is a little black type with a white stripe running down its back. It won't bite you, but defends itself by ejecting a spray so foul-smelling that it takes 3 to 4 months for the odor to dissipate if it permeates your clothing. You will probably meet up with some deer, rabbits, gophers, badgers, coyotes and many more inhabitants of our forest." And so my brother went on with his long lecture in zoology.

I set out early Monday morning with all my new found knowledge of the local flora and fauna. I had the whole forest at my fingertips and the entire geography of Edenbridge committed to memory. And it was a good thing too. I came to realize it was indeed invaluable information. I went from neighbour to neighbour as instructed; out of one thicket into another; out of one swamp and into the next. Oh, how I missed those English trolley cars! I'd even have settled for a team of oxen. My city shoes had worn down as thin as pancakes, but I couldn't throw them away. I still needed them. I tried thickening the soles with wads of handkerchiefs, and continued on with the patched pancakes tied to my feet. I soon felt that I couldn't go another step. I sat myself down on a tree stump and began to wait for someone to come along. Soon I was fast asleep. What a delicious sleep it was! The wealthiest of men, having just consumed a sumptuous meal could not have slept as soundly as I did there on that tree stump in the middle of the wilderness, though my stomach was rumbling with hunger. I don't know how long I slept, but I was suddenly aware of someone shaking me. I was somewhat bewildered at finding myself there. She was speaking to me in a mixture of broken English, bits of Russian and quite fluent Yiddish. It was probably the Yiddish that caught my ear and woke me up.

I looked up and asked how she came to be there in the depths of the forest. The woman laughed. "Deep forest!

Why, only a few steps from here beyond those willow trees is our house."

It turned out that this woman came from my home town and knew my whole family.

I saw no evidence of a man in the house. There was a pile of wood near the door which was obviously the work of either the woman or the little children. The pieces had been broken up rather than chopped. They were most likely picked up off the ground rather than cut from the trees.

Her husband, also a countryman of mine, had been gone for six weeks. He had found work at a farm thirty miles away. He had to work elsewhere to make a living. He had been a labourer in England and came to Canada penniless.

"See this house," she said, "it's our second one. The first one burned down in a forest fire. We had not yet cleared a field to hold back the fires. It's a miracle that we are here today. Now that my husband must work as a hired farm hand, the work here falls upon me and my children. They gather up the wood from the bush, and I chop it up." She showed me an axe that hadn't been sharpened for six weeks. It was so dull that it was impossible to chop wood with it. She went on to tell me of her three cows that wander around all day through the woods to graze, and how worried she was until they wandered back again at night. Whenever she left the house, she worried that it might burn down again. Whenever she went out, she put out the fire in the stove and hid the matches from the children.

"If my husband could only live at home, I'd be happy to live on bread and water. I'm not a very strong woman and really can't stand this life much longer."

I suggested that she write him to come home.

"Where shall I write? Do you think I know where he is? Do I know which farmer employed him? I have no telephone and I don't know who to ask. Life is very difficult."

"And yet," she continued, "when I think back to when my husband worked in a factory in London and came home exhausted and downtrodden by the miserable foreman, I am grateful even for this life. Here at least we don't have

to answer to the tyranny of the bosses. True, we had hoped for better conditions, but it seems that it is the poor man's lot to live with this poverty."

And her poverty was very apparent in her house and its furnishings, her clothing and meagre pantry. But the fresh bread and hot tea that she served me was flavoured with such generosity that no rich man's feast, served out of charity, could have filled me as happily.

The woman asked me to see if there were any letters for her at the post office and, if so, to bring them to her on my way back. She insisted that I take off my "dainty dancing shoes", and put on a pair of her husband's heavy work boots to wear for the rest of my journey. It was a pity that Charlie Chaplin couldn't have seen these boots—twisted and much too large for me. He would have seized upon them as valuable objects for an entertaining film.

Just then I saw a team of oxen with enormous horns appear at the window. They were harnessed together with ropes and sticks. It was a good thing that the wall was sturdy because they pulled up so close, they could have knocked it down with their mighty strength.

The woman was delighted to see the visitors. It was Mr. Brody, who my brother had described to me as living close to the post office. Every time he'd pass near her farm, he'd stop and help her chop some wood. He was a very kind man, and I too was very happy to see him. It so happened that he was on his way to the post office as well. I would be able to get a ride there with him thus saving myself the drudgery of crossing the three swamps that still lay ahead.

"Climb up onto the wagon, and hold tight so that you don't fall off and hurt yourself," he cautioned me.

Where the wagon was exactly, I couldn't tell. True, I could see wheels, but above them seemed to be a mobile garden.

"Don't be shy," he said to me. "Climb up on the haystack. This is a special wagon for carrying hay. It holds the hay so securely, we don't have to bother tying it into bundles to transport it."

We both got up onto the wagon and stood in the hay, holding on to one of the high sides. So began our acquaintance. He was full of questions. He wanted to know if more Londoners were planning to come to Edenbridge. Since they had arrived, life was more fun. They liked to sing, chat, and have a good time. The loneliness of the farms left with their arrival.

I very much wanted to ask him when our 'Chevrolet' would arrive at the post office. I felt sure we were zooming ahead at least half a mile an hour. The farmer guessed what was on my mind and answered my unasked question.

"What's your hurry? You won't be able to get back home today anyway. By the time we get there the sun will be setting, and you won't be able to set out for home in the dark. Besides, are you so sure that the mail has arrived? Sometimes if the roads are bad, delivery is detained a week, and so we may get two weeks mail at once. And that happens often enough, Lord knows. It's quite possible you may have to spend a few days with us."

"But my brother will be worried if I don't return. He'll wonder what happened to me."

"Don't worry," he assured me. "Your brother knows only too well that our roads are not reliable. He too has had to visit with us for several days while waiting for the mail. But if you are concerned that your brother will not be sure whether you completed your 'maiden voyage' to the post office, we can send word with a young man who lives half a mile from your brother. He passes by here every day on his way home from work."

All of a sudden...crash! One of the oxen had fallen. I got very frightened. The poor farmer. His livelihood depended on these oxen. My God! What could we do?

I suggested that we jump down off the wagon. Perhaps there was a chance that the beast was still alive. Mr. Brody, however, didn't seem perturbed at all. He kept up with the ongoing conversation more concerned with losing his train of thought than losing the animal. I was convinced that he must have been aware of the creature's ill-health all along

and was quite prepared for its death. Otherwise, how could he have stayed so calm? Oh well, I may as well not worry either... except, of course, about the long trip which still lay ahead of us, that I would now have to make on foot. I wondered what Mr. Brody would do about the wagon. He couldn't very well leave it here in the middle of the narrow trail. No one would be able to pass by. Then I saw my driver, quite calmly alight from the wagon, unhitch the tongue and neck yokes, grab a heavy stick and begin to wave it wildly about, cursing the fallen ox. Smack! Smack! Smack! He whipped the animal and slowly it began to rise. Soon the ox was standing, backing its way into the harness, and presto! we were off and running.

"The animal's first owner," explained Mr. Brody, "trained him very poorly and now I must suffer from that ox's laziness."

By the time we 'flashed' by the third and final swamp en route to the post office, the sun could barely be seen over the tree tops.

"You can thank God now," said Brody. We're almost there."

The Jews of Endenbridge Enter Politics

The building that housed the post office was about the size of an average bedroom. I was sure that if you put the entire building onto a sleigh, there would still be room enough for a few extra passengers. The building was divided up into three different areas. One area contained sacks of letters. Another, larger area, was the waiting room for those who came to collect their mail. There was a stove in the middle of this area. On a cold day, everyone huddled around it, like geese, trying to keep warm. There was no furniture... not even a stool to sit on. When it wasn't too cold, people would sit on the floor. Very rarely would one see a woman at the post office in those early days. It was too difficult for them to cross the deep swamps. The third area was where the postmaster lived. The entire structure could easily have been swept down by a strong wind, had it been built in an

open field. At that time, there were still so many trees around to act as wind-breaks that even if a house was made of paper, it would have been adequately protected.

There, in that waiting room, I encountered Jews who came from all over the world. There were Africans, Europeans, Americans, and a new breed called Canadians. Each had his own distinguishing feature: the African wore a light shirt; the Lithuanian, tall boots; the American wore a leather jacket; and the Canadian, a fur cap with flaps pulled down over his ears, and Edenbridge-style overalls—a checkerboard of patches. All of them had one thing in common—beards; some short ones, and some long, full beards.

The room was as smokey as any local bar. The fire wood was too long for the stove, and stuck part way out. It would have been too much trouble to start chopping all the wood by hand to make it fit into the stove, so no one bothered themselves about it. So what if some pieces were short, and others too long? We weren't, after all, keeping up with the Parisienne fashions here, so why be fussy about a thing like that? To add to the smokiness of the room was the smoke swirling up from the cigarettes that dangled from nearly every mouth. What other solace did these lonely parts offer? (so rationalized the smokers.)

In this small gathering of people, I overheard four separate discussions, and from the snatches of conversation, I recognized German, the fractured English of Edenbridge, Russian, Lithuanian and Polish. The only two women in the place were the ones who lived nearby, and they too were carrying on their own private conversation. One man caught my attention. He had a pen stuck between his ear and his hat, and he was gesticulating wildly. The crowd gathered around him...

"The revolution would not have been lost," he shouted, "if all the leaders had united. If all of Russia had risen up in one day, you would have seen some great changes. It would have been the end of Czar Nicholas, and then all the Russian people, along with other racial groups, Jews included, would have been able to live like brothers."

He was interrupted by a young woman.

"Why do you say like brothers? What about us women? Aren't we people too? Our men are very brave here in Edenbridge, standing around a warm fire. Here they can talk of overthrowing monarchies, or of redeeming Zion, where they could then live like kings themselves, using their wives as handmaidens. No thank you sir, I would not like to live in a land where you would be king!"

"Never mind," came some other man's voice from behind the stove as he addressed the first speaker. "I would rather be in our Holy Land even if you, sir, were to be king." The first speaker had not finished what he had set out to say, and sat there quite perplexed.

The next man to speak up was a small thin blond, a quiet spoken Jew.

"What good does it do you to argue over the merits of the Holy Land, when none of you has even been there to know what it is really like? It's quite possible that those people who live there are anxious to leave..."

"...and come to Edenbridge," added another.

"Yes, to Edenbridge. Let's talk about our own land, Edenbridge. How long are we going to live here like wolves in the forest before we can begin to see where we are heading? How long before we can read newspapers, like civilized people? How long are we going to suffer for others' sins.? Because two politicians can't agree on any one thing, do we have to suffer for it? I want you all to think about these things."

The words of the small blond man created quite an uproar. Everyone jumped up as if from a deep sleep, and a storm of words broke loose.

Being new here, I had no idea who was guilty, and of what.

The Speech of the Man with the Blond Moustache

Who knows how long this heated discussion would have gone on if a broad-shouldered young man with a thick blond moustache and a Polish accent, had not stood up. As soon as he raised his hand to speak, everyone stopped

talking. They all seemed to know that if he had something to say, it would be worth listening to. Besides, they knew that once he began speaking no one else's voice would be heard... when he spoke, he meant to be heard.

"Dear brothers," he began, "I stood here and watched you all get as churned up as an angry sea, and my heart was saddened at the sight of you arguing so with each other. You are all intelligent and educated people who have come here from some of the world's largest cities. You are people who have suffered the trials and tribulations of a dramatic move and a primitive lifestyle, and yet you don't seem to know what you want here, or who will help you to attain your goals. It is, my brothers, a waste of time to expect help from the politicians. They are neither interested in, nor capable of helping you. Brothers, the whole capitalistic system is at fault. The politicians inch themselves forward only to place themselves nearer to the larger pile of money. This is a country where you get things for yourself by learning to become shrewd and clever in grabbing the things you want out of the hands of others. And this is not only a legitimate practice, but one that is to be admired. If a man is capable of obtaining what he needs by pushing himself closest to the common kitty, he is admired and looked upon as clever, one to be considered the right type for leader of the community. But the honest and just man considers it an injustice to take what rightfully belongs to someone else. He believes it wrong to live off the hard work of others, and considers those who do exploiters and parasites. But those who are honest and just are considered to be unproductive, unimaginative, and undesirable.

"But, my brothers, that's not the worst of it," and with one sweep of his hand, the speaker with the blond moustache dismissed all the morals by which we here were guiding our lives.

"What pains me most," he went on, "is that you believe your poverty and your ragged appearances are all part of the growing you must do. You are eager to help one another in order to make everyone's lot easier. This is sheer delu-

sion. You don't understand that your poverty and your hard times are not entirely of your own making. You are being deceived. There are those in power who take the products of your hard work and make profits for themselves, and in this way prevent unity among you. Those people who are frightened by the concept of the unity of men, do all they can to prevent it. Do you realize, my brothers, that our weakness is our enemies' strength? Conversely, when we stand united, we have the strength of a giant, and they, the power of a fly."

The young man was just beginning to unwind and was about to launch himself into a whole new lecture. But, at that moment, the attention of the crowd was drawn to the open door, through which they beheld an unusual sight: a man of average height, with childlike gleaming eyes, sporting a goatee, was dancing about, just outside of the building. As he danced, he sang:

'Yiddle plays the fiddle
Yankel, the bass does play
But I will sing my song
In the middle of the roadway.'

This happy man is no longer alive. He was an outstanding example of a genuinely happy person. And here, in the lonely uncivilized farmlands, his good nature was of great importance and help to us. He made it difficult for others to complain about their lot. It made them ashamed to grumble when they saw this fellow, close to sixty years of age, so happy to be alive.

There were still those waiting for their turn to add their ideas for the improvement of the colony to those already put forth. But wait a minute... what do you know... Mazeltov! Congratulations! A mound of mud seemed to be approaching the building. There were signs of a horse and wagon, outlines of mail sacks, but no sign at all of a person. Nevertheless, this mud-covered, mail-carrying 'express' definitely seemed to be approaching. All conversations ceased. Some people had already received their mail; others

were still waiting. They stood quietly in their places, or stretched out on the floor, or sat in a corner, to wait. All that could now be heard in the room was the rustling of papers. If one person didn't receive any newspapers, magazines or journals, and if the person nearest him got several, one felt free to open the packet of another so as to at least get a glimpse of the news of the world.

And so two hours passed by very quietly as the mail was all finally distributed. All thoughts of going home were soon forgotten as the headlines in the newspapers launched us all back into the earlier symphony of arguments and discussion.

My Trip Home from the Post Office

Two young farmers approached me as I was getting ready to leave the post office. One was broad-shouldered, obviously a hard-working man, the other was a thin blond, whose eyes were devouring a pile of newspapers which had just arrived in the mail for me.

Before I left London, I prepared myself for the wilds of Edenbridge by subscribing to many journals and magazines. The daily papers included the *Jewish Journal* (from London), *The Friend* (from Russia), and *The African* (which was sent to me by a friend in Johannesberg). The weeklies: *The Worker's Friend, The Free Worker's Voice, The American, The Kintzler*, (The Prankster), *The Whip,* and *Our Health* by Dr. Reiber.

One of the two men approached me as I stood there laden down with all my reading material and said:

"We will help you with your parcels. We have horses here and it will make it easier for you if you ride with us. Besides, you really aren't too familiar with the way home. We think you should come and stay overnight with us, and in the morning we will show you a shortcut home through the woods."

I accepted the invitation, and before I knew it I was up on a horse's back, holding on with my right hand to its

mane with all my might as he galloped ahead carrying me through the air, for rarely did my seat and his back connect. The other horse was a slow poke, always stopping to graze or dawdle, and before long it was far behind me. The horse with which I was blessed was not too happy with me as his new passenger and continually bucked in an effort to get me off his back. I held on to his thick mane for dear life, and somehow managed to stay with him.

On the way there were a few fallen trees that we had to somehow climb over. My legs were not as nimble as my horse's, and I managed to get myself caught on a branch. I fell off the horse and landed directly in the path of the horse following me. He pressed against my shoe so hard (unfortunately my foot was still in it) that I thought he had crippled me. I couldn't move another inch. With the help of the other riders, who by now were leading their horses on foot, I made it to the house of the little woman that I had met on my way to the post office, and there the seriousness of my injury was assessed. My foot was as swollen as a barrel and no-one seemed to know what should or could be done about it. So my riding companions decided that I should stay put and that they might as well go along home. This they did, taking with them my entire stock of literature.

A Farmer's Wife Tells Her Story

"I received two letters from my husband. Both came at the same time, but one had some money in it. Listen and I will tell you how it came to pass—

"Upon my arrival to this land, my husband got a job working for a farmer about eight miles from the post office. As soon as he got there, he wrote me a letter. He sent it along with his employer who was planning to go to the post office in about a week's time. This man had a team of 'flyers' (oxen) so the trip was a relatively easy one for him. As it turned out, the poor man and his oxen got stuck in a swamp along the way. One of the oxen slipped and fell, got itself tangled in the reins and drowned. Trying desper-

ately to save the other ox, the man got soaked through and through and caught pneumonia. Another farmer came along and found him lying in the wet mud, suffering chills and fever. He took him off to the hospital. The doctor said the rough ride saved his life. The horses had been forced to run as fast as they could, and all that jostling along the terrible road, warmed the chilled man enough to keep him alive. The second farmer took the drenched letters from the sick man, and returned them to the original senders. By the time my husband's letter was returned to him, he had earned some money. He wrote me another letter and enclosed the money. He sent me this along with the original soaked letter. And so I received both letters at the same time. Life is hard here; to earn one ounce of joy, one must pay with a pound of pain. My poor husband. When he learned that I had not received his first letter, and that I couldn't possibly know his whereabouts, or even if he had arrived at some destination where there was work, was very upset. The fact that he had left me here alone with two small children, no chopped wood for the fire, no barn for the cows and very few supplies, nearly drove him mad. But I am not the only one here who must endure such hardships. Though I feel better for having had someone to talk to."

"Another incident I would like to tell you about concerns our neighbour. He was living here in Edenbridge, but his family was in Winnipeg. He hadn't heard from them in a very long time. He couldn't imagine why they weren't writing. He began to bombard them with letters, reprimanding them for not writing, but still he got no reply. He would go to the post office every week (a long, arduous trip for him) and never a trace of a letter. He managed to put together enough money to send them a telegram in which he summoned them to come to Edenbridge right away. He went to the train station a few days in advance of his family's arrival, sleeping in a stable nearby, as he couldn't afford the price of a hotel. Along with the arrival of his

family came the fourteen letters his wife had written every week. They had somehow been mislaid by the post office. So you see I am not the only person to be distraught by the inadequacy of the postal system.

"Actually," the farmer's wife went on, "if I wanted to I could tell you that I am more fortunate than many others. My neighbour, for instance, had no flour to bake her bread. Her husband went off, who knows where, to find work. It's difficult to find a farmer who can afford to pay hired help. Meanwhile, she and her children had to go hungry. Another neighbour had promised to lend her some flour. In order to collect it, she set out on a 3½ mile trek on foot. She had no wagon, and had to cross many swamps, and tramp through thick bush...a task almost beyond her strength. But her children were hungry. What else could a mother do? When she got there, her neighbour realized that she barely had enough flour left for her own family, and was only able to spare some oats and barley chaff—a product which was mainly used for horse feed. The mother of the hungry children took the chaff home, added to it her salty tears, and kneaded bread for her family. And the children enjoyed the meal as if it were a God-given feast."

I couldn't bear to listen to many more of this woman's tales, but it appeared that she wasn't through with me yet.

"Stay a while longer," she said."What's your hurry? Or are you too soft-hearted to hear any more of the good fortunes to be found in Edenbridge? I still have many more tales of sorrow and hardship which the young women must endure while their husbands work elsewhere to provide bread for their families. We, the women folk, must stay home and conquer the wilderness. There is no road from one farm to another; there are no stores where we could at least buy some coal oil; the nearest train station is so far away, that we are completely cut off from the rest of the world. The children have to walk four or more miles to school, through dense bush, without proper shoes. The mothers, sick with anxiety, wait in terror each day until their children return quite late in the evening. And how

many times do you think a dejected mother finds that she hasn't enough food to pack in the lunch box for her children?"

It was late into the night when my friend finished telling me of the hard life the people here in the wilderness had to endure. In the meantime, my battered foot began to feel better. By morning I felt well enough to set out for home.

Luck was with me. A pair of 'flyers' approached the house early that morning. I had never seen such mighty beasts nor such magnificent horns. What a team they were! The two oxen standing side by side were broader than the wagon was wide. The driver of this impressive team jumped down and greeted me with a genuine Canadian "how do you do?" I recognized him immediately as an acquaintance from London. He invited me to be his guest for a few days. I declined his offer and asked instead to be driven to a farm which was much closer to mine. I wanted, sometime soon, to get back home from my long eventful trip to the post office.

A Second Woman's Tale of Woe

The farmer, at whose place my driver dropped me off, was also working away from home. His wife and a small baby were in the house which was the size of a large box, made of planks and hurriedly plastered over. No doubt it had to be completed as quickly as possible to provide some shelter for the woman and child before the man went off in search of a livelihood.

As we sat talking, she told me many things about life in a new country. One thing she stressed as more important than any other single factor was how necessary it was for the wives of the new settlers to be courageous; to be strong; to hide their disappointments so as not to discourage their men from building this new settlement. She told of the young wives who worked alongside their husbands, helping with all aspects of chores, still making sure they had enough energy left to attend lectures, participate in drama groups,

and many other activities. She also told me of the "free advisors" who would periodically come around and give free advice on how to become wealthy farmers.

"What kind of experts are these, and what kind of advice do they give?" I asked, curious and anxious for her to continue.

She began: "My husband was out working on the threshing machines. One day a neighbouring farmer came over and told him that the Canadian government, concerned over the welfare of its citizens, was setting up a loan company. It would lend them all they needed to buy machinery and anything else necessary to farm properly. In time the farmers would pay off their loans and become full-fledged farmers. When my husband came home that day, he had worked out the perfect plan: he would borrow money for machinery from the company so he could clear a large plot of land. He would then plant a garden large enough to feed us, and even large enough to have some produce to sell. As his farm expanded, he would borrow more money to buy lumber. He would then build a decent house and a barn for the cows and oxen. These too he would have to buy, as every proper farm has cows and oxen. They would be bought on credit as well. And so, little by little, the farm would grow, and little by little, he would pay off his debts. At long last we'd be able to live like civilized human beings."

"That sounds great! What prevented you from doing all that?" I asked.

"Yes, it could have been good," she answered. "If it hadn't been for THAT young man. You see we have a visitor in our village. His name is... I'm not sure, Shapiro or maybe Gurevitz. He comes from some big city and is visiting with one of our neighbours. This young man is interested in learning and seeing for himself how we Jews are surviving here in the wilderness. He goes about visiting everyone... chatting, socializing and asking questions. One day he was visiting us, and we told him of our plan. This indolent young man burst into gales of laughter, so much so that we

thought he'd been assailed by some laughing disease. When at last he'd stopped laughing, he began to explain to us why our plan was a worthless one.

'First of all, he said, 'don't believe for one minute that in a capitalistic country the government worries about its citizens' welfare. As far as the government is concerned, you could struggle all your lives, and it wouldn't bother them at all. If the government was truly concerned with your well-being, it wouldn't entrust your welfare to a loan company. The company, for the favour of lending you the money, will charge you a higher price than the actual cost price. They will tax you with an interest rate so high you will be repaying your debt to them for years to come. And what will you use for money to pay them? Wheat won't grow in the swamps, so you will have to first clear the land. You will end up paying interest on interest. On top of all this, there will be legal fees, for you won't be dealing directly with the loan companies. It will all be done through lawyers. Besides all this,' he continued, 'you'll need a plow, at least 4 oxen and they cost twice as much as horses, a harrow, a tiller, a seeder, a binder, a mower for the hay, a wagon and a sleigh. These are the bare essentials and that would cost you a very minimum of $1500, which you could never begin to pay off in the first few years. You'd have to allot at least $200 a year for interest. Imagine having to pay $200 out of your present budget...where will this money come from? Even so, you won't have begun paying off the loan. Start by putting it all down on paper. It's far easier than actually putting out the money'."

A Controversy Between Man and Wife

On the way home, I was sidetracked by the barking of a dog. The sound led me to a farmer's house, where a very heated discussion was underway between a husband and wife.

The woman was speaking: "In the cities, where workers are organized, they are able to work regular hours, and are

well paid for their work. They have free time after work to enjoy life. Like decent human beings, they come home after a day's work, change their clothes, and go out either to the theatre or to visit friends. On the farms, there is no such thing as 'working hours'. One works from daybreak to sunset, and even then some of the bare essentials of life can not be had."

"Listen," her husband, a hard working farmer replied, "here the cows don't mind what kind of clothes we wear, and I'm just as happy not to be reminded of the dirty, smoke-filled factories of the city. I remember only too well the fear of layoffs, the bosses and the foremen and the demeaning tasks foisted upon me by them. Here there is always plenty of work, and the fruits of my labour at least belong to me. And when you speak of city-folk, who come home after a day's work and are able to enjoy life 'like decent human beings', you are deceiving yourself. There is no place on earth where people are more equal than right here. We are all dressed in patched overalls; we all smoke cheap tobacco. There is no hypocrisy amongst us. There is no wealthy class (as yet) for us to hate. Whatever may be in the future is God's worry. Who knows, maybe we will become the wealthy ones, and others will hate us... what do you think of that, dear wife? Do you think that day will come? For me at the present time, the most exciting theatre takes place when the cows dance and frolic in the fields."

Who knows how long that conversation would have gone on if a calf had not called its master back to work.

When the man was gone, the wife confided to me that she was sorry to have argued with her husband. After all, he was right. She would never want to leave the farm even with all its hardships. They had put so much hard work into it over the years. She continued telling me how handy her husband was in taking care of the various jobs around the place.

"He is our shoemaker, our glazier, our blacksmith, our carpenter, furniture maker... he built our house and cleared six acres of bush all by himself. He gathers the wood and

cuts it up for household use with the handsaw. In a word, he knows how to do everything. No job is too big for him to tackle."

When it came time for me to go, my new-found friends advised me not to go home by the road. There were too many swamps to get around, some of which I'd never be able to cross. They showed me a way which, though it was ¾ mile longer, bypassed most of the swampy areas.

I set out on my way, laden with anecdotes. Thinking about some of these stories, I became aware of a voice inside me saying "You ran away from one civilization, and have entered another... It's the same book, only the cover is different." I wanted to get back to my farm. Maybe that would help boost my spirits.

But I was destined to make one more stopover. Once more I listened to tales and theories, all repercussions of the ideas expounded by the revolutionary young sceptic, whom I had heard speak at the post office.

Soon I heard the crowing of a rooster, and knew a house must be nearby. A few steps farther, I met a little girl, with shining happy eyes, and two long beautiful braids. She was playing with a satin-smooth black haired puppy.

"Hello, hello," she shouted out to greet me.

"Hello, hello, and what's your name?" I asked her. I was very curious to see if she spoke Yiddish.

"My name is Goldie Raisen," she said.

"Raisen?" The name Raisen ran through my head. Could this possibly be a relative? Here in the wilderness it would be more than one could hope for to find family. In a matter of minutes, I found out how many brothers she had, how many chickens, cows, horses, and that her father had just rented another farm to work on. She then invited me into her home. Listening to that child's sweet voice, spoken in such easy flowing Yiddish, made me feel happy again. I went into the house with little Goldie, and discovered that her mother had already heard of me.

"Hello, you must be Usiskin. I heard that you were going to be farming not far from us. That's good. Have you heard

about that young man Shapiro, who has created such an uproar with his analysis of the government's motives for setting up loan companies? I don't agree with him. It's true that we have to work very hard to earn our daily bread, but we feel we have a chance to own large wheat farms, and that eventually we'll be able to have all we need and want. What that young man managed to do with all his gloomy predictions was to quell our zeal and dampen our spirits, both of which are so necessary in order to carry out our work."

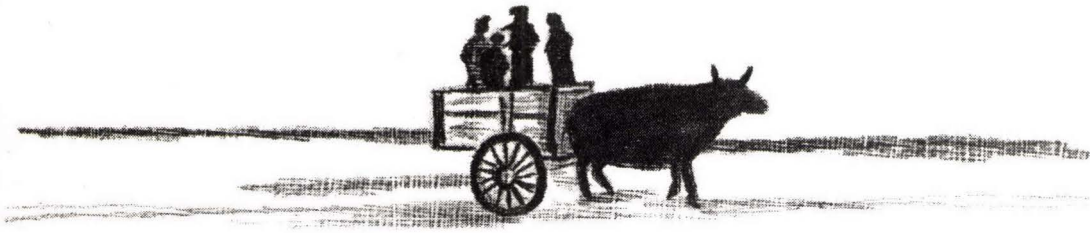
And so I went home, over the swampy roads, deep in thought about this new land, Edenbridge, this far away land where we had come in hopes of making a new home, and a new life.

Once at home, I simply couldn't rest. I kept mulling over Shapiro's arguments, and wondered whether coming to Edenbridge had been a mistake. Somehow it seemed so difficult to get settled. There were thorns in our path every step of the way. The hardships were almost unbearable. A thousand year old forest, so dense so as not to let through a ray of sunlight, still had to be conquered. The land was covered in swamps, so we had to settle miles from one another. Our houses were like boxes without electricity or running water, not more civilized than the Indians. Still, we were all so young, so strong and courageous, I felt surely we could overcome these hardships.

The idea of co-operatives was still in my head. I couldn't help feeling that if one person on his own could accomplish this much, two together could do so much more. Even if our path was not strewn with roses we still must give ourselves a chance. What would be the point of uprooting ourselves again? And where to this time? Here we are not alone, but can work and share our life with friends. Who could have dreamt of owning so much land? A hundred and sixty acres is no joke. Back home in Russia if a farmer owned 50 acres, he could reap enough to live comfortably for six months of the year. And here we were with four times that

much land. No, we mustn't give up our ideas of becoming farmers here in Edenbridge. We must discuss our problems together and surely we will find a solution. And with these hopes in my heart, I set out for a meeting which was called to try and overcome the disruptive influence of the young man, Shapiro.

CHAPTER 4



Going to a Jewish Farmers' Meeting

A Meeting of Jewish Farmers

The meeting was held at the home of Isaac Cohen. I entered his house and found him stoking the fire in his wood stove. His face broke into a welcoming smile. It was obvious that he was delighted to be entertaining guests in his own home. Cigarette smoke was so dense, it was hard to recognize the people present. From the high pitched voices and the agitated hand movements, I could tell that a heated discussion was already in progress. A tall broad shouldered young man was speaking.

"What do you people know of the financial aspects of farming? Have you ever worked on a farm as I have?" Another man with a pipe in his mouth was trying to outshout the speaker...

"Let Shapiro show us figures in black and white and so we will know for sure if it is worth while to stay on enduring these hardships."

A third young man, with penetrating eyes stood up, and with a smile on his lips said, "What are you all so agitated about? When two generals go to war, each plans his strategy

and feels sure that his is the winning plan. Still, one of them will be defeated. And so it could be with our General Shapiro. Perhaps his calculations are wrong. Why assume that his ideas are absolutely correct?"

At that point, Shapiro stood up, raised his hand, and the whole room became quiet. "Listen to me my friends. I am in complete agreement with the idea of Jews settling this land. It is time that the Jew put down his wandering staff. It is time that we Jews built a homeland where we could set down roots. I too would like to settle down and farm this land, but I don't believe this plan will succeed. The beginnings are always hopeful. But what will happen later on? I don't want to be a prophet of doom and predict a tragic end to your experiment, but the hard facts of mathematics cannot be dismissed.

"Think for a moment with clear open minds. You were given 160 acres of land. Figure it out. Those of you who have been here for 5 years, how many of those 160 acres were you able to clear? About two acres... right? How long then will it take you to clear 160 acres? True, as time goes on you will be able to build roads and bring in the necessary machinery to make the work go faster. Still, this all needs capital, a commodity which none of you has. And so you will have to turn for assistance to the finance companies. Do you think you will then be able to become big time farmers? No. You will become big time debtors long before you can clear the trees and make farmland out of this forest. Soon you will be wondering where the money will come from just to pay off the interest on the loans. The companies will try to convince you to borrow money for all your farming needs. They will explain to you just how easy it will be to pay it all back. They will be soft as butter when they approach you, but will in the end become a curse on your heads. They will insist they are doing you a favour, because you are immigrants and don't know how to help yourselves yet. Your debts will rise as surely as yeast makes dough rise, and before you know it, you will be bewildered at the size of your debts. You will feel sure that the collection agency has made

a mistake. What you don't seem to realize is that your debts grow with each 24-hour day. As soon as the company sees that they can at least make some collection from you, they will take every penny you have, leaving you nothing for your daily needs. They will no longer be the kind benefactors. Their manner will change as surely as a snake changes its skin. Remember also, that the law of the land is always on the side of the rich. The rich are always protected, but the poor man's welfare is always in jeopardy."

"Here is another thing you should be aware of," he went on. "Suppose you get a machine on credit, valued at $300. At the end of a few years, the steadily mounting compounded interest will push the cost of that machine up to $500. And when you've paid out $490, it still won't really be yours. They will have the right to sell it to someone else, should you miss a payment, even though you have paid and overpaid its original value. Should you want to sell the machine back to the company, they will charge you sales costs, and you will still be responsible for the balance of the debt. And after all that, you could be left without a machine. Your arguments saying that you could pay off the machine companies by borrowing from the mortgage companies are faulty. Sure, you will be free of the machine companies and their regular love letters, reminding you that they are the real owners of the machines. But what will be the advantage of switching from the machine company to a mortgage company? You will simply exchange one set of thieves for another. What difference does it make if one is beaten with a stick or with a cane? In reality, it is far worse to be at the mercy of the mortgage companies. The machine company can only demand the return of the machine if payments aren't made regularly. The mortgage company, on the other hand, can take your farm whenever they like. With one stroke of a pen, you can be pushed out of the place you've worked on for half a lifetime. Such is the justice under a capitalistic system. With the assistance of the shrewd trickery of lawyers, they can circumvent and bend the laws... which are sufficiently unjust without such manipulation.

"Besides all this, there is one important area that you have not considered. Suppose your crops fail... what then? You aren't well enough informed of the various other grains that are in demand, or other farm products, for that matter. You will not be prepared to provide market needs, and so you will be forced to sell your products at any price the purchaser offers. You can be sure he will try to get himself a bargain. And so you see, it isn't easy for a little lamb to make itself comfortable when there are so many wolves around, each eying the land greedily for his own share of it."

Shapiro concluded by drawing a still gloomier picture of farm life cut off from civilization, with no possibility of giving the children a proper upbringing.

We Do Not Despair

While Shapiro was talking, I would have loved to crawl into the hearts and minds of all my friends and neighbours to see what they were really feeling. Of course, this was impossible. But each one's feelings were reflected in their eyes, and it was these signs I could read. Next to me there sat a young man who, in London, had earned a fairly good living. When he came to Canada, he got a job as a shoemaker in Montreal and was earning $40 a week. But Edenbridge was a magic word. And though he had just heard this tale of woe, I saw no sign of disappointment on his face.

Then I looked over at the ever jovial Isaac. He had come from London with my brother, where they had been able to earn enough money to live quite comfortably. Their bosses didn't want them to leave. They were warned that life in that cold, far off land would not be made of milk and honey. But they were young and strong and full of the spirit of adventure. And so off they went to Canada. They arrived in Hamilton where they were offered an established farm at a very cheap price. All they would have to do there was to work hard and enjoy the rewards of their work. But no, they were drawn to the mystery of Edenbridge as if by a magnet. And though I could see pain in Isaac's eyes, there

was no sign of despair. It had perhaps been foolish to throw away good bread and go off in search of crumbs, but all was not yet hopeless.

At this point a burly young man jumped to his feet and pounded his fist on the table. He wanted desperately to express his anger, but the words seemed to be stuck in his throat. It was hard to know what he was so angry about. Perhaps his anger was directed at the establishment which protects its rich and ignores its poor; perhaps it was at the story he had just heard, and the storyteller who managed to shatter all his hopes and dreams. He had hoped to build a home here in this country where, when he was older and not so strong, he could live without fear of being driven out; perhaps he had a solution to the problem. I am no magician and couldn't possibly know what he had on his mind. And to this day I don't know what it was he wanted to say, and found impossible to do.

Not everyone present was that upset. One young man had just arrived from New York. Straight from that bustling metropolis, he came to try his hand at homesteading. He spoke very logically:

"Friends," he said, "we mustn't act hastily. Our path to progress is not strewn with roses, but rather with thorns. We must be careful every time we take a step so as not to hurt ourselves. We all came here from large cities, but we seem to be too ready to forget that we left those cities precisely because life was not so sweet for us there. We had hoped that away from civilization and all its pressures and superficial values, we would find a life that would be easier. When we got here," he went on, "we encountered hardships we hadn't counted on. Let me remind you of the story that R. A. told us about his brother.

"This brother had a wife and child, and they lived in a house that was four paces long and only three paces wide. It was made of thin boards, lightly covered over with clay. To describe the arrangement of furniture, either you could say that the bed was in the kitchen near the stove, or that the stove was in the bedroom. For both were one and the

same room. When their cow gave birth to a calf, the weather was very cold, so the newborn animal was brought into the house to be cared for. When the little calf would not stop shivering, the quilts from the bed were used to try and make the little creature more comfortable. However, the poor thing died, despite all this care, and the household went into mourning over the tragedy.

"...And take me and my family, for example. We are a large family, but our house is not. At night, when everyone is ready for sleep, the whole house becomes one large bedroom. Everything becomes a bed, every chair is used. Still we have to make room for our chickens, which we keep in the house all winter (and are kept informed of the time by the regular crowing of the roosters.) When we dreamt of living in the wide open spaces, we didn't think we'd be sharing accommodation with chickens and calves.

"I know another farmer whose colt got sick because the barn was too cold. Of course he brought the animal into the house. You can well imagine that space was at a premium in that house too. Who of us thought that when we came to the spacious, unoccupied areas in Canada, we'd have to live in such cramped quarters? Nevertheless, I don't feel that our plight is as bleak as some of you paint it. There is a solution to everything. Things can improve, and that improvement depends on what we ourselves do about it."

All heads were turned towards the young man who had just presented such an optimistic viewpoint. Everyone wanted desperately to leave the meeting with the hopes and dreams they had when they set out for this country.

"My friends," he began again with a firm voice. "It is true that we are all very poor, and can't, without outside assistance, get our farms established. But let's, once and for all, recognize that this is our home. It is here that we must set down roots. It is here that our future generations will grow. We must stop wandering. We must stop working at jobs that oppress us...enough of bosses, managers and foremen. If you don't see any hope here, where do you think we could go next? To the moon? Even there nothing is all set up for

us. It is the same everywhere. There are always rich people with full bellies who push those around who will let them do so. So where do you suppose we can go to escape?"

The man with the pipe in his mouth stood up again at this point. He was an uneducated youth, had probably never read a book, but was always willing to help anyone that needed it.

"Friends," he began, "I have travelled halfway around the world. I was born in Lithuania, worked in Paris, went from there to Africa, Brazil, Argentina and Spain. From there I came here. I saw rich people everywhere who didn't seem to have to lift a finger to work, and still lived in luxury. They all owned beautiful homes. When the weather was cold, they could keep warm; when the sun was oppressively hot, they could relax in the shade; they ate only the finest of foods. I also saw people who worked like horses, lived in hovels, freezing in the cold, scorching in the heat, and always hungry. It's the same the world over, so how do you think we can change conditions here?"

While he was speaking, my eye caught the look on the face of a young farmer. He was hanging on to every word that was being said. He was a heavy set man, and lived by his own philosophy: "If one eats well, he has the strength to work hard; and if one works hard, he will have plenty to eat." He seemed to be proficient at both, judging from his ample girth and bulging muscles. He had no interest in the cultural or social activities of the community, and answered all questions pertaining to these with a wave of his hand and the same comment: "We didn't create this world, and we can't dictate how it will be run. Whoever is responsible for this world's creation, should also be responsible for its behaviour." And his eyes echoed the sentiment of the previous speaker: "how can we re-make this world?"

The optimistic young man stood up again. "I'm not a learned scholar, and cannot expound on political or economic theories, but I would like to try and explain to you the way I see the situation in everyday terms. You want to know how we can better ourselves economically, how we can

avoid exploitation, how we can help avert wars and other such calamities. Let me ask you this: How is it that one foot can't get you as far as your neighbour's house, but two feet enable you to travel the circumference of the earth? If a man wants to become an independent farmer, he must first of all go into debt, because not one of us has enough money to do it alone. Ten farmers, for example, who each have 150 acres of workable land, must put themselves into debt to the tune of $10,000 and not one of them would have enough to cover his needs. Each and every one would have to struggle to pay off his debt, and wouldn't really be able to do so. He and his family would always be wanting for things. Because of his limited equipment, he would only be able to produce inferior products, and would have to ask a lower price for them. Every one of the ten farmers would be working his 150 acres alone. There would be ten teams of oxen or horses at work, ten families, each working to produce their own crops. They would, no doubt, have to limit themselves to one type of crop, perhaps wheat, because diversity in crops would be too expensive. If one year the crops failed due to frost, excessive rain, drought or hail, all families would be left with nothing, not even enough feed for their livestock. But if all farmers co-operated, banded together, the best of farming machinery could be purchased. Seeding would be able to be done efficiently, and at the proper time. The crops would be healthier, and so command better prices. We could then also diversify the crops. We wouldn't have to limit ourselves to wheat. We could also raise cattle, fowl, vegetables, and even have beehives for our own honey. If one crop was not successful, then perhaps the five others would be. The fear of debt would soon vanish because we would always have pooled capital from which to draw. Unfortunately, our farms are very spread out, so can't really operate as one collective farm. I'm sure this is no accident. It was planned this way to prevent us from becoming collective farmers, facilitating the exploitation planned against us. But we have other ways in which we can help one another. We can purchase

our supplies co-operatively, and thereby get them cheaper. We can build a co-operative store, where we can sell our own products. Eliminating the retailer would increase our profits. Still, you ask, how can we prevent them from seizing our machines before the last payment is made? Quite simply. We must stand united. When the sherriff comes to take someone's machine and puts it up for auction, one of us makes a low bid. No one must bid higher. This way, when the purchase is made, the machine will be returned to the farmer from whom it was seized. He will now own his machine outright. No more payments."

These words laid the groundwork for our future plans. The whole group suddenly came to life. Enthusiastic applause shook the rafters.

With Renewed Courage, We Make Plans

The constructive suggestions put forth at the meeting renewed our energy, and we began immediately to make plans for the future of Edenbridge. The plans weren't restricted only to dealing with our economic needs, but also our cultural needs. The latter got first priority on the mammoth list of suggestions put forth. We whittled them down to the following:

1. We shall build a hall where we can get together for meetings, concerts, dances, etc.

2. We shall set up a free library, with books both in Yiddish and English. The library shall offer a reading room. Until we have sufficient funds to buy new books, we shall:

   a. contact various newspapers both in Canada and the United States and request a donation of reading material, no matter how old;

   b. Lend any books that we own personally to the library (this proved to be the way the library accumulated a considerable number of its books).

3. We shall organize a drama club, and set aside special times for rehearsals. As soon as a play is ready to be performed, it shall be presented. It shall not be saved for a special holiday... rather a holiday should be made out of the day of presentation... even if it be a middle-of-the-

TUTTLEMAN LIBRARY OF GRATZ COLLEGE
MELROSE PARK, PA

week day. (We could make these types of decisions because we were, after all, both performers and audience.)

4. We shall divide ourselves into groups set up by districts, since we lived far away from one another, and since the doctor too was very far away. At least once a day, group to group contact should be made in case someone was sick and needed help. This was especially necessary as 40% of the farmers were bachelors and lived alone.

5. We shall immediately begin setting up the co-operative. The building material shall be bought co-operatively and the items we produce shall also be sold co-operatively.

6. We shall enlarge the existing credit union.

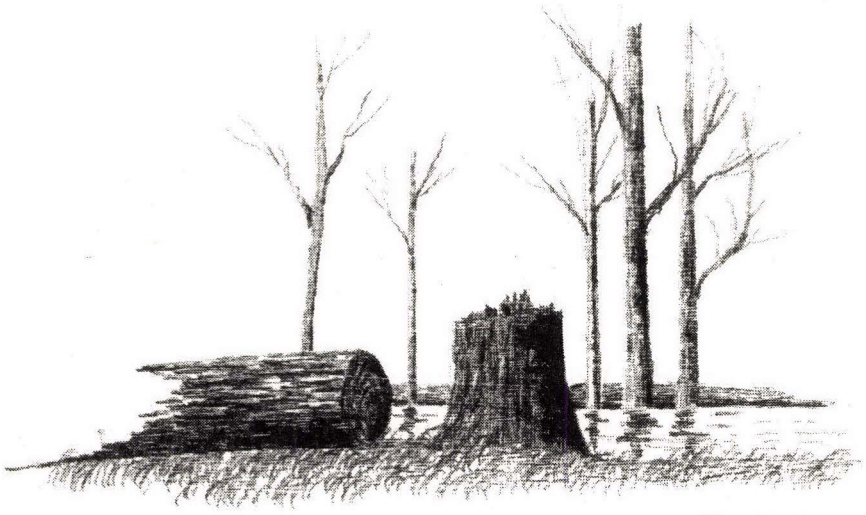
There was still a mountain of plans to be dealt with, but we knew from experience that if we bit off more than we could chew, we would end up choking. If we set up too many committees, or undertook too many projects, we might find that we didn't even have enough chairmen to go around. We also knew we could waste a lot of time laying down laws and regulations. These could wait for the long winter nights. However, there was another important aspect of our lives that we still had to consider. Most of us who came from larger European cities, were accustomed to some evening entertainment at the end of a day's work, unlike the farmers who, by ten o'clock, were ready for bed. We wanted to continue this custom, and because of this, added a new clause to our constitution which stated: "In the interest of the health of all hard-working people, our meetings shall begin early in the evening so as not to run late into the night, thus interfering with the much needed good night's sleep."

We had meetings three or four times a week. Once we had laid the foundation for our constitution, we felt we had come a long way in providing for the betterment of our lives. We were elated with our accomplishments, and rejoiced as we remembered how just a short time back we were as insecure about our future as birds on a twig in a storm. Such a short time ago our skies were hung with heavy black clouds. Now the skies were clear and blue, and our horizons were unlimited. Our spirits soared! We felt

sure there was no power great enough to drive us out of our new found home. We were growing out of the soil as naturally as trees grow out of the earth, and no one had the right to move us off. We knew we belonged here. This was our land and we had every right to stay. We were pioneers and homesteaders at last.

Right then and there, the always cheerful Isaac Cohen came forth with the suggestion that we honour this day with a celebration. His wife, Dora, spread the table with a farmer-type banquet, and presto! a celebration was in progress. There were freshly baked hot buns, schmaltz herring, and farmer's style champagne: hot tea with lemon. The champagne flowed freely for all to rejoice and commemorate this happy day.

CHAPTER 5



Tree clearing

My First Lesson in Tree Clearing

It was the middle of June 1911, just three weeks after I had arrived in Edenbridge. I was living with my brother in his 'palace' at the time. At about half past four in the morning, our neighbour from across the way came over. In those days "cross the way" meant a distance of about three city blocks through the bush. If a visitor from the city was told to go "across the way" to the neighbour's house, he would get lost for sure. But, by this time, we were as much at home in the bush as were the wolves.

And so it was that our neighbour came over and said: "Get ready quickly. Sharpen your axes. We are going to clear the bush with the road building gang. They will pay us $2.00 each a day, and deduct half our taxes for doing the work." Before he left, he warned me that the job site was quite a distance away, and that we should get there long before the starting time of 7: A.M., so that the "others" couldn't accuse the Jews of being late for work. This last statement about "others" and "Jews" irked me. But because I was new to these parts, I kept quiet.

When at last we came to the job site, soaking wet from plodding through the swamps, we found three farmers already there, two Jews and a gentile. At exactly 7: o'clock, everyone was present, and we were divided into groups. The road was to be 66 feet wide. Sixteen and a half feet of brush was to be cut down on either side, and thirty-three feet down the middle had to be cleared of trees, roots and all. Two men were assigned to each side of the road to cut down brush, while six were required for the more difficult task of rooting out the trees down the middle.

Unfortunately, My Grandfather Was Not a Woodcutter

I was assigned to cutting down the brush at the roadside. It was apparent from my appearance that great physical strength was not one of my attributes. My London attire served only to accentuate this. I hadn't yet acquired those patch-upon-patch overalls which were the distinguishing garb of the Edenbridge farmer. This, too, made it obvious that the heavier job was not for me.

I was paired off with a young gentile farmer who looked five times as strong as me. My axe only had a single bit (sharp only on one side) and weighed three pounds. His axe had a double bit (sharp on both sides) and weighed six pounds. I was sure his grandfather must have been a woodcutter and had bequeathed both his axe and the talent for the work to his grandchild. Look how the saplings slip easily to the ground with every blow of his heavy axe. But I, who had never worked with an axe before, laboriously slashed away at the saplings. I tortured those poor little trees so long that they finally gave up and slid to the ground. My neighbour, Raphael Abramsky, God bless him, was assigned to the middle of the road duty. Where in heaven he learned this kind of work, God only knows. He had arrived in Canada only six months before me from London, where he worked with shoes, not axes. Raphael kept watching us. My partner was a hard and fast worker. He never spoke and some took this to mean that he didn't want to

be paired off with a Jew. These were the immigrants from Tsarist Russia. To them there could be no other reason for his silence. I certainly had no complaints about him. He never let me at the bigger trees but handled these himself. Before I could even assess the size of a tree, it was down! The saplings that took me a long time to coax to the ground, he could fell with one swoop of his heavy axe. He never gave me the chance to tackle a real tree. He left the brush and twigs for me. This bothered me somewhat because I wanted to be an equal worker. So I hurried to try and get ahead of him. The faster I tried to work, the less progress I seemed to make, and the more tired I became.

Somehow we managed to keep pace with the others on the other side of the road. By three o'clock in the afternoon, I was so tired, I felt ready to collapse. I was used to work. Life hadn't been easy in London. But standing at a table cutting fur pelts wasn't exactly the same as chopping down trees and trying to keep up with such a partner. I thought: "I must pretend that I am sick, and then I won't have to work anymore." But after all, a man has his pride. Would I give up? No, never!

Suddenly, like a miracle, my partner, who had been accused of anti-Semitism because of his silence, turned to me and said:

"Hold your axe at an angle, like this, and chop the tree from the top to botton, on an angle, like this. Do it that way with all your strength and you will see how much easier it will be. The trees will fall easier, you won't feel as exhausted, and you won't have to hurry so. You go to the very edge of the road," he continued, "take a small strip and chop them as I've shown you. Leave all the bigger trees for me. Don't worry, we won't be left behind. If you feel tired, just hold the axe in position as if you were working, and rest yourself. I'll make sure we get our quota done today."

His kind fatherly words moved me. He was concerned that I not lose my job. How could the others have believed such ugly things about this man? Why did he decide to speak to me and offer me his help? Was it because we were

both working men? Was it because neither one of us could boast of owning much of our own? Anti-Semitism doesn't grow out of this. It comes from elsewhere.

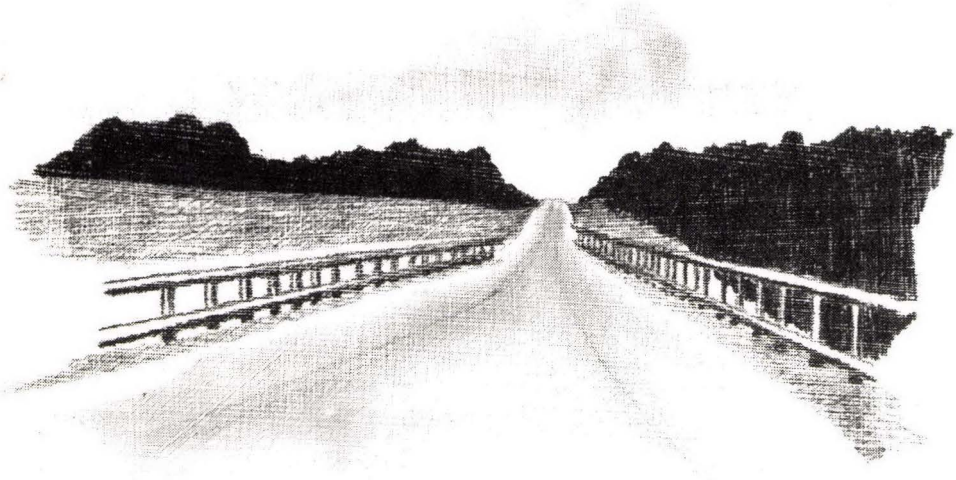
That short lecture on how to hold an axe allowed me to see the real man with whom I was working. His concern for me renewed my strength, and my energy began to flow again. I was now eager to get on with my work. My axe felled the trees easily. Now I felt equal in my work to the others. Tired? Who me? Weak? Not me! All that was gone. My partner, seeing how good I felt, fairly shone with pride at my new found strength and the progress of my work. Before I had learned this new skill, he used to hide me with his body so that the foreman couldn't see how poorly I was doing. Now he felt he could stand aside so that everyone could see how well I could do the job.

Towards the end of the day, something happened that frightened me. It was twenty minutes to six, and we were all nearly ready to go home. We came to a low lying area—a kind of gully filled with water. The trees in this water-filled area were tall and slender, but very close together. Everyone was anxious to clear it. It would be good to get past all that water and start on dry land the next day. We had set this as our goal. Having accomplished this would mean we had indeed put in a good day's work. Nearby, however, there stood a giant of a tree which had to be uprooted. No one really felt like tackling such a huge tree at the end of a hard day's work. We looked at our watches. It was still fifteen minutes to six. Someone suggested that we cast lots, and whoever lost would have the task of felling the giant alone. Everyone was pleased with this suggestion, except me. I was terrified that I would pull the losing straw and would never be able to chop it down, thus ruining my reputation as a good worker. I knew my partner would stay back and help me should I lose, but that frightened me more. For sure my reputation would be ruined then. I need not have worried. The task fell to Ruby Springman. Ruby was also a Jewish lad who had come over from London. His grandfather also never held an axe in his hand. But he

had a very stubborn pride, and was bound and determined to show everyone that this job wasn't too much for him. He could do it! Someone volunteered to help him. Ignoring the offer, Ruby stepped up to the tree, and within a few minutes the giant lay sleeping at our feet. The earth shook when it fell, and the job was done.

On the way home, Ruby gave us a lecture on how we, as Jews, must show that we aren't incapable of hard work; that we, too, can build towns and roads, and that we will do it! And from that day to this, whenever visitors come from the cities and towns, I like to take them to the place where this episode took place and tell them the story, though there is no trace of that bush there today.

CHAPTER 6



'Yidden' bridge; later called Edenbridge

Our Social Life Begins to Develop

I am writing this very shortly after my arrival in Edenbridge. On this particular day my brother was out job hunting in an attempt to help make ends meet. My neighbour was also away from home on some errand. That left me all by myself. The contrast between the tumultuous sounds of London and the absolute stillness of Edenbridge was so great I felt I had to get out and make some social contact.

I was too lonely sitting by myself in the house (if so small a structure could be called a house). I was surrounded by a large quiet world where no sounds of life could be heard. No clattering hooves of horses, no sound of human footsteps, just the rustling of leaves, the burbling of swamps, the howling of wolves and the chirping of countless numbers of little birds. Occasionally a rabbit would break the silence by hopping through a pile of dried leaves, but it was always too frightened to stay and visit. How does a rabbit know to be frightened of men, when, in all likelihood, it has never seen a man before?

I began thinking about this. But neither my thoughts, nor the rabbits could keep me happy. I wanted people around me. I wanted some contact with living, breathing people. People who had similar backgrounds, who spoke a familiar language, and with whom some ideas and feelings could be exchanged. It seemed that if I wanted company, I would have to set out and find some. That was easier said than done. The only route that I knew was the half mile to our neighbour's, and even that varied with the weather. If it was rainy, and the road was washed out, one had to take a long way round to avoid the swamps, making the half mile into a three mile hike. If it was dry, the route was shorter because the swampy areas were more approachable. So each day, according to the weather, one had to decide on the best route for an outing. I was determined to blaze a trail that would be suitable regardless of the weather.

I took my axe on this sunny day, and set out at exactly twelve noon counting on the sun to be my compass. I thought my idea to mark the trees on the road with my axe was simple and sure to do the trick. I hadn't realized how dense the bush was. I soon decided that I would only chop a mark on some of the trees, and commit to memory the characteristics of the intervening ones. Some were crooked, some were bent and some had a unique formation of branches.

Before long, the sun disappeared, and a barking dog in the distance became my new compass. I was determined to make my new "highway" and worked very fast. Suddenly I realized that the barking was coming from the opposite direction, and I knew I was lost. But as in a Jules Verne adventure story, when situations get very tense and everything seems hopeless, help arrives. My help came in the form of a rooster. A dog may be able to bark, but as a direction guide, it is useless. The dog, no doubt, was barking because it was chasing a rabbit all over the bush. And I, the clever engineer, was misled by a playful pup. But the rooster, which is a homebody, and doesn't wander the woods at will, saved the day for me. I retraced my steps not more than twenty feet, and found myself in a farmer's yard. I was

breathless when I recounted my glorious achievement, my contribution to my country of a new road (all the while secretly wondering if this road would see me home safely).

When I told the farmer of my need for more social life, he suggested I go see a man called Mr. Shallitt. There were always people there. To get there, though, I would have to get around some very large swamps, and I still had my London shoes on. But why get bogged down with such minor details? Compared to finding some human companionship, these obstacles were trivial. So away I went with the speed of a deer.

And there, at the home of Mr. Shallitt, I found the beating pulse of Edenbridge. I met several people there, and in everyone's eyes was the same concern and loneliness. But Jews will be Jews, and talking alleviates one's burden. It was good to be with people. Mrs. Shallitt was a clever and hospitable woman. She knew that one's appetite increased with every mile one travelled, and she busied herself preparing food for her guests. The topic of conversation was, of course, concerned with maintaining contact with our friends. We were all aware of the hardships of being pioneers; still, we had to somehow keep our spirits alive. We had to have a spiritual centre. We had to have some thread that we could all hold onto which would bind us together. A centre was the answer. Right then and there we decided to organize regular literary gatherings.

We would all take turns having them at our homes, and that way each person would have the pleasure of being a host to his friends and neighbours. But where shall we begin? Whose home shall we go to first? We were so widely scattered that there was a distance of at least ten miles from the farthest farmer in one direction to the one farthest in the opposite direction. How in the world would we get from one home to another? There were no real roads. Each person found his own way through trails he had cut to the central road. This central road cut Edenbridge in half lengthwise. It encompassed fifteen lucky farmers. It was hoped that this road would someday become a proper highway (hopefully before the coming of the Messiah).

We decided on the format of our first literary evening. An author's work would be read aloud, and we'd all take part in the reading. If some read well, and others not so well, it didn't matter. Everyone would participate. The meetings were to be held once a week in the summer, and twice a week in the winter. When it came time to decide what book should be read, a typically Jewish heated discussion arose. Everyone wanted his favourite author to be read first. Two authors got the most votes, I. L. Peretz, and Mendele the Bookseller (nom de plume). Grandfather Mendele got the most votes.

With the grandfather of Yiddish literature as the guide to our studies, we set down the roots of a cultural life in Edenbridge. He was the first to unite us into a family of friends and to give us the courage and spiritual nourishment without which the countless hardships of pioneer life would have been impossible to overcome. Our history will show that the entire panorama of Edenbridge was changed by adding to it the contributions of "Mendele." From an uncivilized wilderness we grew into a cultural civilization. We must include the home of Mr. Shallitt in the memoirs of Edenbridge. It was there that the birth of our social and cultural life took place.

CHAPTER 7



The Walking Library

A Child Is Born

How to spend our leisure time each day was always a consideration.

When one of the family of friends gave birth to a baby, the whole community joined in the celebration. This story takes place at the time of the birth of Izzie Segal's baby.

Our little corner of the community, the London group of 'townshippers' as we called ourselves, rejoiced at the news of the birth. I can't even remember how we heard about the news events outside of our little corner. The Indians at least had their smoke signals for sending messages from one tribe to another. We had nothing. Still, somehow, the good news travelled quickly. When any member of our community had reason to rejoice, we all joined in the celebration. One's happiness was everyone's happiness. You wonder why the birth of a child should be singled out to be written up as an extraordinary event. The birth of a baby is a joy at any time. Doesn't everyone everywhere celebrate when a child is born? Well, it was more than a simple joy to us. Our hopes for the future lay with the next

generation. We hoped that they would continue to farm and reap the rewards of the land without all the hardships we, as pioneering homesteaders, had to endure. But most important of all was that a mother was able to brave the primitive conditions of pioneer medicine, and that she and her healthy baby were able to survive. Though childbirth is a natural thing for a woman, we were always somewhat nervous because of the conditions.

The house where this child was born wasn't more than a shack. That night the temperature dropped to 40 degrees below zero. The winds were so strong that heating the place made little difference to its comfort. The doctor and the nurse were one and the same person, a woman somewhat deaf, about seventy years of age, and unable even to write her own name. The mother of the newborn child was born in London, England, and had never in all her life seen a doctor or a nurse quite like this one. Poor girl was kind of a timid soul. She was even afraid of the roosters. In London the only sight she ever had of a rooster was in a picture book. (Years later you could see this young woman driving a team of horses.) It was quite an experience for her to give birth to her first child in the wilderness.

Our joy was boundless when we heard the news of the successful birth. We also learned a lesson from this experience. A person never knows what sort of things he will have to struggle with in his lifetime, but as long as he continues to really participate in life, the possibilities are limitless.

It was at the festivities of the birth of the baby that we laid the foundation for yet another great achievement in the growing social life of Edenbridge, the establishment of a library. It was suggested that anyone who was interested should donate the grand sum of fifty cents. If this was difficult to put out all at once, it could be done in five cent instalments. The money was to go to the purchase of books. Right then and there we collected $3.85 and sent it off directly to a bookstore in New York.

There is a vast difference between a library in the city and a library in a small community such as ours. Because of the density of the bush, the lack of good roads, and the great distances between one neighbour and another we had to devise an ingenious method of circulating the books. We decided that the problem of distance and bad roads could best be diminished if we established three branches of the library in various sections of the community. One branch was to be the home of Frank Gordon and his brother. They had come from New York and brought quite a good collection of books with them. Another branch was to be in the home of Mr. Shallitt. The third branch would be in my and my brother's home. We too had brought quite a large number of books, magazines and periodicals with us from London. Since our centre wasn't built yet, we had no building for our central library. We had to decide whose home was most convenient for this purpose until the building was ready. We decided that because Mr. Shallitt was both the butcher and the teacher of our community, and because he lived in the most central section, the main library should be established there.

My brother insisted that I abstain from heavy work for the first winter, and so I was given instead the job of making regular treks to the post office. En route I passed many of the library member's homes, and also the Shallitt 'centre.' I began taking books to and from people's homes as I passed them on my outings. Before long, I became a 'walking library,' supplying the community with a never-ending well of culture.

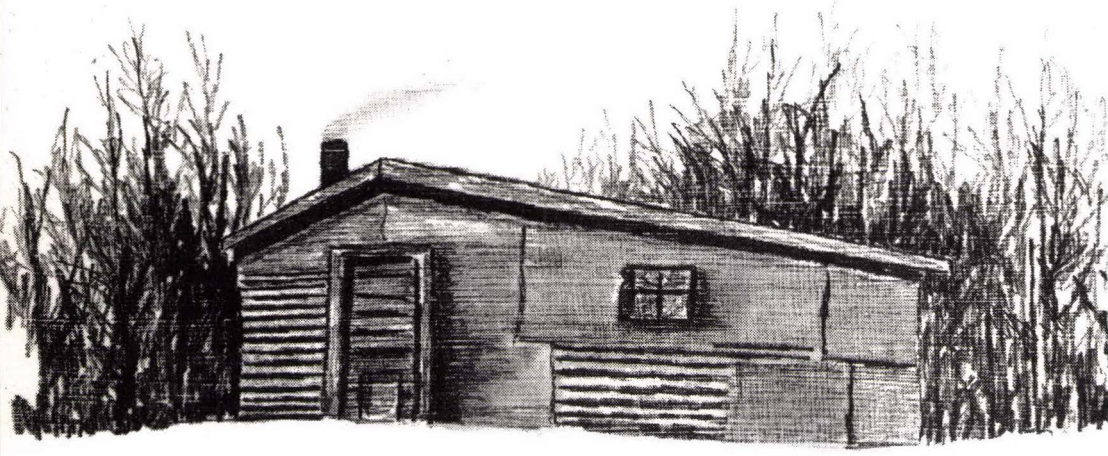
The trips to and from the post office took me from one to five days. I stopped at every home on the way, whether they wanted books or not, just to enjoy the warm hospitality. The women were always happy to have a visitor drop in on them, and prided themselves in offering the best meal their poor cupboards could afford. The borscht may not always have been enriched with sour cream, but the visitor was always enriched by the warmth and hospitality of his hosts. What the food lacked, the friendship compensated for.

And so I carried books back and forth; accepting returns and bringing new books to the reading community of Edenbridge. Some arguments grew out of this 'service.' There were some who felt that people were becoming lazy; that they wouldn't read at all if the books weren't brought to them. It was felt I was creating a pack of parasites. But mostly it was felt that though there may be a few taking advantage of the service, most people were benefitting from it. They were reading books they had no other way of getting. In the end, the walking library gained a large following of ardent readers and proved that the plan was indeed a practical one.

There were many times that my outings were extended by a few days because some of the readers were interested in drama. They wanted to get together and read some 3 or 4 act plays. These readings would take a whole evening. We'd try to cast the players so that everyone could learn their parts on their own at home. It was worth all the extra time it took, for a drama group was formed that gave the community immeasurable pleasure.

It would be worthwhile to look at all the changes the library underwent since its founding 33 years ago, especially financially. But that will come out as the history of Edenbridge is recorded. For now I would like to say that though we never got around to founding a bank or becoming Rockefellers, we never lacked good reading material. The books were passed from hand to hand, so that anyone wishing to read could do so. Not only did our little settlement benefit from our library, but the records show that many of the adjoining communities were grateful to us for supplying them with books from our famous library.

CHAPTER 8



Uncle Mike's 'Palace'

Patches, Hard Work and Books

Autumn, 1911. The first snow fell on the newly harvested fields, and for the first time in many months the men could go home from the various farms which kept them employed during the planting and harvesting seasons. This was their main source of income. Occasionally one could get the odd job hauling grain to the elevators for a well-to-do farmer. But the condition of the roads was so bad that days could be spent en route to the elevator until the hard earned dollar was realized. Sometimes one could get a job hauling cords of wood by ox team from the country to the villages. No one need envy our meagre earnings, and no one need envy the wives of these men, who were taken away from home for any work they could get. When their men were away, the women had to carry out the chores themselves. The livestock had to be fed, the cows milked, the barns cleaned and the wood brought in to heat the flimsy houses. Besides the heavy chores, the women had to make sure the clothes were kept in proper repair. The men's clothes, especially those used for chopping wood, were frequently torn, and had to be

mended. There certainly was no money to buy new ones. More often than not, overalls made in Canada were repaired with patches made of dress clothes brought from the various countries of Europe where these settlers originated. (If you happened to attend a meeting of farmers all decked out in their patched Edenbridge finery, you might think you had stumbled into an exhibition of British fabrics which were being demonstrated as durable patching cloth. Future historians will indeed be puzzled at their findings when they come across these garments).

It was well into the winter before the bachelors, who were widely dispersed on threshing crews, could come back home. In those early days, when the woods were still very dense, the ground stayed wet much later into the winter. This dragged the threshing season out much longer. The cleared areas froze over much earlier. Those working in the less cleared areas, didn't make it home before the thick of winter. Among the latecomers were my brother, Dave, and our closest friends and neighbours, Raphael Abramsky and Joe Pullman.

I stayed home alone while my brother was away threshing, but I was not idle or bored. I worked very hard at clearing the trees off our land. My endurance grew out of a vision of a workable farm of our own once the trees were all gone. Besides this fiendish job, I set about transforming our $23.00 'palace' from an ice box into a home that could be lived in without freezing to death. I cut down young saplings and put them up along the outside of the shack, filling the cracks and spaces inside with clay. In the end, the one inch walls became four inches thick. It wasn't exactly a beautiful sight. In fact, it was rather an eyesore, but the wind could no longer blow our home away, and the cold could no longer penetrate. And that had been the purpose of the job. I felt quite proud of my accomplishment. Fancying our 'palace' now quite fit for a king, it suddenly occured to me that it would be a very good idea if we invited our neighbours, Raphael Abramsky and Joe Pullman, to spend the winter with us. My brother and I were very fond of these young

men. Of all the houses, theirs was the least windproof. Besides, I knew of their plans to treat themselves to a winter off from job hunting. They planned to stay home and work on their own place.

My brother thought the idea of the four of us spending the winter together at our place was a good one. Our house would be quite warm and comfortable. There would be less wood to cut, and generally life would be easier with four of us pitching in. We could divide up the chores, and they would get done in no time. Besides, why should we live so far away from one another when we could be one big happy family? The four of us got along so well that it was possible we might even go on living together after the winter was over.

In order to divide the work evenly, we got together to discuss some of the possible kinks. We wanted to make sure we would be as comfortable as the circumstances would allow. None of us knew the amount of the others' fat bank balances, or whether we'd have enough money to sustain us through the winter. We didn't really care. We knew we could work it out. We divided ourselves into groups. The first group (of one) was responsible for keeping the supplies from the store and the butcher well stocked. The second group (also of one) was responsible for keeping the stock bought from other farmers, such as diary products and eggs, in good supply. These two groups were also responsible for the wood that would be needed to heat the house. Raphael, who was a great cook, was group three. He undertook the job of Head Chef. I, who made up group four, was the 'spare.' In other words, I had to help anyone who needed help at any time. I was also given the added responsibility of making sure that we had a 'cultural corner' going at all times. It was agreed that at no time would anyone sit idly by while others were still working. We were to be a co-operative team. When all the work was done, we would all be free to enjoy the 'culture corner.'

Here is an example of the way we lived that winter: It was a quiet winter morning. Joe Pullman sat, eyes glued to a book by R. Ingersoll called *A World Without Tears*. It was

ages since he had enjoyed the luxury of reading a book. He'd had to satisfy himself with reading newspapers. He became so engrossed in his new-found treasure that he completely forgot about eating. Our cook had buried himself in a four act play by I. Gordon. Who could think about food at a time like this? My brother was writing a poem, and I busied myself collecting material for our weekly literary evening, which our community attended as religiously as others attended church. We spent half the day this way, happily engaged in nourishing our minds and souls. My brother Dave worked away at his poem, writing and rewriting. He was the first to finish his work of art. Eventually Pullman finished *World Without Tears*. The cook completed his four act play, and I had assembled all the material I needed. We all felt very warm and happy. Joe Pullman longed to express his love for us, but he had no talent for writing or expressing himself verbally, so he drew pictures. He did one of the cook, sweat pouring from his brow as he bent over the stove making cabbage rolls for dinner. He also did a landscape which included my brother, Dave, carrying a log across his shoulders. He captured us so well with his drawings that he jumped for joy at his own success.

Our Cook Loses His Crown

Our cook wanted to try his hand at writing but was having trouble expressing himself so he began to talk in rhymes:

"Here's toast...pale as a ghost"
"Try this milk...pure as silk"
"Why does this salt taste like malt?"...
"The pudding is sweet...
if only there was more of it to eat"...
"Brothers, nourish yourselves with what you read,
because the food is scarce indeed"...etc.

And with this trick he'd sometimes help us get by without breakfast and not feel too badly about missing it. Many a morning we got rhymes instead of food.

Cook managed to get the dinner cooked and the dishes washed every evening, that is when his eye wasn't captivated

by some book or article. At those times he was hooked. If his eye landed on just one word, he simply had to know if the next word did justice to the previous one, and so on and so on...until the water he had put on the stove to heat for the dishes had turned stone cold. Sometimes he stayed glued to his books late into the night. But, no matter how late he read, we'd still get up in the morning to find the dishes washed and the floor swept. We really appreciated the cleanliness.

One day the routine altered. The cook discovered a new book and would not budge from it. Our assignment for that day was to collect large round logs for the stove instead of small ends and pieces. Round logs, he said, burned longer and that meant he didn't have to refuel the stove as often. Seeing that the cook was the king of the kitchen, we wasted no time setting off to accomplish our assignment. We did our job with such gusto and zeal that in very short order the entire floor of our 'palace' was covered in wood. Such trivialities didn't bother us. We were more concerned with making Edenbridge a model of co-operative life for all of Canada, maybe even all America! Well, maybe just Canada. Even if just Edenbridge grew into a thriving co-operative town, that would be a worthwhile achievement. And if not all of Edenbridge, at least the four of us could be happy with our little co-operative.

We awoke in the middle of the night, not because we were well rested, but because we were freezing. Why did this happen? I'll tell you: After the three of us went to bed, Raphael stayed up to read his book. We had counted on him to fill the stove before retiring, as he had every other night. We awoke to find him sitting on his log, the book in his hand, eyes fastened on the pages before him. So as not to make our friend feel badly about neglecting the fire (thereby subjecting us to freezing conditions), Joe Pullman came up with the story that a dream woke him up. It was a delicious dream, he said. He dreamt he was lying in the most comfortable bed in the world. The mattress was so soft that he sunk deep into it. The cover was eiderdown and

as warm as anything he'd ever experienced before. In his dream, he was in Rothschild's bedroom.

As he told the story, he got out of bed and lit the fire. All this was concocted so as not to make Raphael feel badly, but he was still so engrossed in his book he didn't hear any of the 'dream' or notice the fire being made. We awoke in the morning to find him still in the same pose, book in hand, sitting on the same log in the corner of the room. And so Raphael lost his crown. He was no longer King of the Kitchen, at least not until he finished his book. And for this he was grateful.

Later, we asked Joe Pullman if he wished he could trade bedrooms with Rothschild as he had in his 'dream.' He replied: "I'd gladly trade him his bed for this one of crooked boards, covered only with a sack of straw. I'd also trade this blanket made of a dried out sheep skin taken from an undernourished sheep that already had one foot in the grave. These pleasures I'd let Rothschild experience. But if it meant trading this lime plastered room, with the love and comeraderie of these special men along with that bed,...I'd give that privilege to no one!"

"Here It Is Possible to Transform a Rabbit into Roast Duckling"

A farmer once told me how he and his family were able to survive here in the wilderness without any money. It was hard for him however to get flour to make bread. This seemed very strange to me. I was still new at pioneering and couldn't understand how a producer of wheat couldn't have flour for his own use. He had his own milk; his few chickens provided him with eggs, and as for meat, that, he said, was plentiful. Deer, ducks and rabbits were all here in the bush. We city folk turned our noses up at this fare. Deer meat was probably palatable. Even wild fowl could be digested, I guess, but rabbits, ugh! How could one get it past one's lips? A heated discussion soon began.

Raphael, the cook, and Joe Pullman both felt the same way: Just as patches on our overalls were better than holes, so rabbits for dinner were better than no food at all. I didn't participate in the discussion because I was a vegetarian. The only one left to oppose the idea was my brother.

Our chef was a bit of a prankster, and decided to put one over on the only dissenter. He suggested that the three of us go off to chop some logs so we could begin making a stall for the oxen. He wouldn't be joining us that day, he said. He was too busy in the kitchen to go along. We left him to his work, and set off to do ours. As you can imagine, the job of chopping logs, gathering them up and dragging them back through the snow, did wonders for our appetites. We were ravenous and hoped that the cook had the good sense to have food waiting for us, and plenty of it at that! Sure enough we found the table set and laden with food. 'White rolls' he called those dark little buns, roast duck, with all the trimmings; and herring (cut on the bias). Our chef loved herring, and insisted that it tasted altogether differently when sliced this way. He developed quite a reputation for his preparation of herring. The housewives of Edenbridge always asked him to prepare it for any celebrations that were held in the community. Tea was served as usual. He always brewed very strong tea, even when there was no tea to be had. He'd use swamp water to accomplish this. It was dark in color and with a little imagination, we were convinced that we were indeed partaking of freshly brewed English tea.

The table was hospitably set and seemed to beckon us with the invitation: "Friends, come, eat. Don't wait to be invited." We all sat down and did an admirable job of clearing away the food, the roast duck being the tastiest of all. It suddenly occurred to us to ask Raphael when and how he got the duck. Before he had time to reply, it was noted that the bones now perfectly clean of all meat, were not duck's bones, but indeed those of a rabbit. You can imagine how Raphael chortled at having outwitted us with a rabbit he caught right here on our own property. "It's magic," he

laughed. "Here it is possible to transform a rabbit into roast duckling!" We couldn't help but join in his laughter.

Joe Pullman, the cartoonist amongst us, left the table and came back with a pen and paper. He drew a picture of the event. My brother, Dave, was in the middle of the picture, his face screwed up in disgust, and a plateful of rabbit bones in front of him on the table. The event was entitled "How a Rabbit can Magically be Transformed into Roast Duckling," and recorded for history by Joe.

To historians these may not seem like memorable events, but to us, they told the story of our lives. I have kept our drawings and poems these thirty-three years. They tell of how, though poverty stricken, we laughed, and loved, and through our comeraderie, survived. One of the poems tells of the rich man's envy of the poor man, because the poor man doesn't even need a lock for his door. I couldn't save all the writings. Most of them were written on used envelopes because paper was so scarce. But as many as I could retrieve from waste baskets and various corners of the house, I did. I always had the feeling that though they seemed small at the time, one day they could be put together into one big story—our story. Many were lost because of the rains. Our $20.00 house could not fend off any violent downpours, and all our belongings would periodically get thoroughly soaked. Though some of the material may be lost, we still retain very vivid memories of those days. Those memories are very deeply etched into our minds and will live with us always. Here is a poem I managed to rescue:

A Tribute To Our Chef

Our chef is a good natured man
He can be witty, or play a mean prank
He always wears a wonderful smile,
And loses his temper only once in a while.

Even when he gives orders, like "go get some water
Or wood for the shack"
He never is rigid..."take time and enjoy,
Don't hurry back."

True, time here is money,
It's the American way.
That applies to the rich,
We've neither, anyway.

There is no flour to bake our bread,
We can't afford to buy some.
There are no shoes, there are no coats,
And not a cent to buy them.

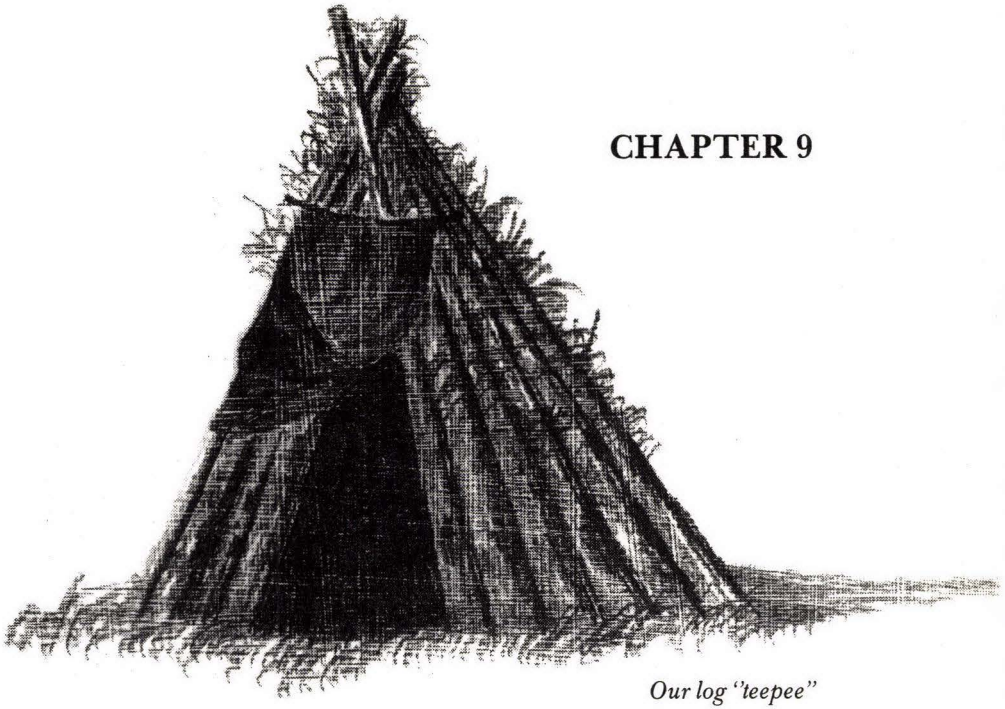
Long live our chef!
"Don't worry," says he. "You can always count on me.
A little water, a little salt too,
And a delicious borscht I'll make for you."
Quick as lightning he does his chores,
He scurries around, no 'what fors.'
There's one exception to this though
If he has a good book, everything else has to go.

Woe is us when this occurs,
No more cooking, he seldom stirs,
No more bread, no more salt,
No more soup; work comes to a halt.

Still he's very dear to us,
We love him like a cherished child,
To love a good book is surely no crime,
We've all been guilty of that, many a time.

Utopia?

In a forest, dense and vast
Four good friends together are cast.
The other three, their passions nurse,
While I attempt to write a verse.
First thing this morning, the sun rose and shone,
Then came the clouds, and soon it was gone.
Next came the wind and blew up a gale,
It frightened the rabbits; see how they pale?
Our hero, the chef, his brow dampened with sweat,
With his wonderful(?) rhymes, made the bears fret.
Our cartoonist is quiet, something is wrong.
He can't find a theme, though he's tried all day long.
Number four has no worries or cares,
He's lost in a book; see the smile he wears!



CHAPTER 9

Our log "teepee"

Our Co-operative Work

It was spring, 1912. The snow disappeared into the earth, as the bright, beloved warm sun began to thaw the life blood out of all things that lay frozen through the Canadian winter. The rabbit changed its colour, making itself safe from its enemies. The birds began building their nests in preparation for the generation they were about to create. With these changes, man too seemed to come alive. We young men began to think of ways that would make our work proceed with greater speed and ease. We decided to work co-operatively. The bush was very dense. Anyone who undertook homesteading was required, according to land regulations, to spend six months of the year on his land, and by the end of three years, have thirty acres cleared. It was impossible to clear more than ten acres working alone at it, for half of the summer, since the other half of the summer was spent working on some established farm to ensure some money for the coming year. We couldn't afford to hire help, so we decided to help one another, working together on each other's farms. Five of us banded together for this project.

Because I didn't live on my own land for the first while, but stayed instead with my brother, the land office required that I clear 50 acres in the first three years. In the summer of 1912, we decided to work solely on my land. There was no house on my property yet, and so we had to walk back and forth from my brother's each day, carrying with us our food and a six pound axe. This was very tiring and time consuming. All in all it meant a sixteen hour work day. On returning home, we'd have to prepare food for the five of us. We decided this was too inefficient. Some sort of shelter should be built on my property, so we could at least sleep over. It would be a lot easier than walking three miles every day through swamps and dense bush.

There we sat, the five of us, trying to come up with ideas of how to build this shelter without having to spend any money. Walls would be easy. There was enough wood around for hundreds of houses. Roofing, windows, door knobs, pipes for chimneys, etc. would all have to be bought. Bought! Easy to say, but none of us had a penny to our names. Besides, it would mean a trip into town, twenty-two miles away, to make our purchases. The trip was not easy. There was just a trace of a thing called a road, and our 'flyers' (oxen) sped along at the snail's pace of half a mile an hour. So we decided to build a kind of teepee out of logs. We'd make it wide at the base, narrowing at the top, and then cover it with hay. It would have to do for the few weeks it would take to finish the job. No sooner said than done. In very short order, we had the place finished with all the trimmings. It was ten feet long, and six feet wide. We got our hay (and I use the term loosely) from a neighbour who dumped a load of it because it had rotted from the rain. We put some on the 'roof,' and used the rest for beds, covers and pillows. We had to sleep on our sides to make room for all of us. We were crammed together like sardines in a can. One of the fellows was a big man with broad shoulders. He always slept in the middle. The strategy behind this was: if it rained at night, the blanket under which we all slept would be higher in the middle, and the

rain would run down both sides. As you can imagine, despite our excellent planning, it often came to pass that one or another of us would wake up soaking wet.

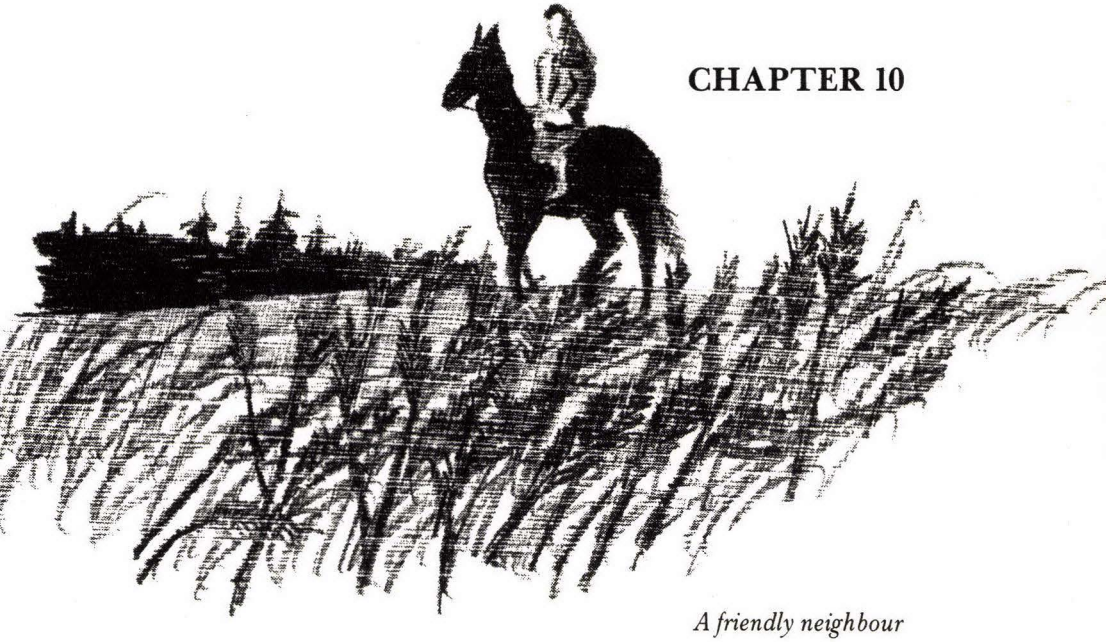
During the day, the 'teepee' was our dining room. The kitchen was outside. We had no trouble getting water. The earth was soaked, and so we dug a hole three feet deep, and could collect three of four pails of water a day out of it. We didn't dare use a light at night because it would attract mosquitoes, which lived alongside us by the millions. (They managed to find us even without a lamp!)

I wanted my land, no matter how large or small, to be perfectly level and rectangular, not wider or narrower at one end. It was easier to work a field that was symmetrical. It was also easier to reap the crops. Others didn't seem so particular about this. Sometimes, when we stood around talking about different farms, we'd refer to 'the sock-shaped' one, 'the loaf of bread,' or the 'comforter.' One of the men, J. P., used to brag that he could work three times as much land as I could. This was true. He would clear a piece here, a piece there; sometimes he'd have a parcel of land cleared at the top of a hill; sometimes a piece in a small opening in the bush. Wherever and whenever it seemed opportune, he'd clear a parcel of land. This resulted in many small isolated pockets, which he later discovered was impossible to work efficiently.

It had been a very hot day. We'd had to clear a very thick area of bush in a rather deep swamp. We drank much more than we ate that day, and fell into our bed exhausted. In the middle of the night, we were awakened by the smell of smoke and an onslaught of mosquitoes. It was very difficult to rouse ourselves, but we were choking from the smoke, and breathing was becoming difficult. The mosquitoes were so thick, we couldn't fight them off. We swung at them with towels, shirts, anything we could get our hands on. We left the shack and went into the bush. As the smoke became thicker, the mosquitoes thinned out. We went back to try and get some sleep. We were soon re-awakened by a storm. A forest fire to the southwest was advancing rapidly, des-

troying everything in its path. Trees, shrubs, branches, grass, twigs... all burning. Green trees cracked, animals ran willy-nilly, wherever their legs would carry them. The air all around us, and the skies above, were one blazing fire. We grabbed our blankets, our clothes, our tools, a few logs and boards and crammed them into our water hole. We took up our axes and stood ready to protect our home from the enemy...fire. Suddenly, the wind changed direction, and the progress of the fire which was raging some three miles away, was reversed. The wind blew away the fire and smoke, but those pests, the mosquitoes, returned full-force. We went back to bed without any blankets. We used one wet blanket to hang across the hole we called the door, and lay ourselves down, fully clothed, and felt nothing. No coldness, no dampness penetrated our exhausted bodies. Even those mosquitoes couldn't rob us of our sleep. We were used to sleeping with our clothes on. Our 'down' comforter, made of that rotten hay, only jabbed our bodies as we slept. Its absence caused us no discomfort. We slept until the sun rose and warmed our bodies. We were ready for a new day.

CHAPTER 10



A friendly neighbour

Friendly Neighbours

It was the fifth week of work on my homestead. We were having a cold spell, which can happen even in the middle of the summer in this part of Canada. We worked twice as hard as we would have on a hot day. The trees fell one after another. The thick bush soon became sparse. Our supplies also grew sparse as our appetites increased with the speed of our work. To down a loaf of bread became a contest among us. Before we knew it, we had depleted our food supply. We had to do without for the last couple of days of that week. On the week-end we would have to replenish our eggs, butter and milk at a nearby established farm. It wasn't practical to travel great distances for supplies in the middle of the work week. A dog and a few geese proved to be very useful to us at this time. The story goes like this:

We would always approach the area we were working from the west. This area, except for the narrow road, was thick bush for hundreds of miles. Every now and then, we'd quite unexpectedly, come across a tiny farm house nestled on a small cleared lot. We'd be surprised to find them there,

and never really knew who the people were. The two non-Jewish farmers, whose property we passed regularly, barely had enough food for themselves, let alone enough to sell. So we decided to go south to find a farmer with enough foodstuff to sell.

We heard a dog barking to the south of us, and knew that a family must be somewhere in that direction. We didn't like to count on the barking of a dog to point our way, but hunger urged us on, and decided to follow it in search of food. Since I was now the cook, I was elected to go. I was then known as the 'Londoner Aristocrat.' I acquired this title because I arrived in Canada, after five or six years of work in London, without enough money to buy a pair of overalls. So I used to go to work in the suit I came over in. I wasn't the only one that showed up that way. At any gathering there were always some people wearing the clothes they came over in. Some men had already acquired authentic Edenbridge overalls, and some even had the badge of multicolored patches on them.

So off I went on a food finding expedition. I made sure I had all the necessary things on hand for such an expedition: a sack for potatoes, a bag to carry the bread back in, a small sack in the happy event that I could get some flour, a container for milk, butter and eggs. Everything was proceeding according to plan. I could hear the dog barking as I plodded on through the thick bush. I came across a swampy creek and couldn't decide which was the best way around it. There were no trails to be seen on either side of it. The barking seemed to be coming from one direction one minute, and just the opposite direction the next minute. Just then I heard the honking of geese behind me. I followed this sound until I came upon a shack in the middle of nowhere. A thin stream of smoke was curling up out of the chimney. The walls were made of logs so poorly fitted together, a cat could have crawled through the spaces between them. I knocked at the door. No one answered. I looked into the window and saw a big black dog, with sharp white teeth, and an angry snarl. How, I wondered, did this little piece of civilization come to be here in the middle of the wilderness? As I stood there,

a young pup ran up to me. He was soaking wet, and began shaking himself dry, wetting me from top to toe. He was very happy to see me, and wagged his tail gleefully, begging to be patted. We immediately became friends.

Just then I heard the sound of an approaching horse. A woman, at least seventy years of age, appeared, mounted on an old nag. The horse too was soaking wet. The old woman jumped down with the spring of a young girl, and greeted me with a hearty "how do you do." I told her briefly of my mission, who I was, and where I came from. It seemed that she had already heard of us.

"You are one of the 'merry men.' That's what we call you. We can hear your axes ringing through the woods every day, and the sounds of crashing trees. The trees can be heard falling one right after another. You must have very sharp axes. And in the evening we hear your singing and your laughter."

She continued, telling me how they came here from the States nine months ago:

"The land was so poor where we lived, we decided to pack up everything, sell our house and land, take our horses, cattle, chickens, machinery, cat and dog, and come by train to this more fertile land. My two sons, my daughter and son-in-law, are working the land on the same section as you are. So you see, we are neighbours. This makes me very happy. Before you came here, it was quiet and lonely. Since your arrival, the whole place seems alive. Your singing once saved me from getting lost. I was out on my horse one day, visiting my son. The horse kept pulling to the east, and it seemed to me that we should be heading west. It was getting dark and the mosquitoes were out by the millions. I was sure I'd have to spend the night in the bush unless some miracle happened. All of a sudden, I could hear you men singing. First one song, then another and another. I realized then that I was less than a quarter of a mile away from home. You put me back on the right track with your singing. Ever since then I have thought about how I could meet you and thank you. Please come in. First of all, I'd like you to meet my dog. He may come in handy some day. Also, it's nearly suppertime, and a farmer never lets a guest leave hungry."

"How Come Jews Want To Be Farmers?"

No sooner had we entered the house when the dog leapt on me like a caged wild beast. A few sharp words from its mistress, in her native Norwegian, and the dog put its tail between its legs and slinked away, ashamed of its behaviour. "Now," she said, "the dog will never bother you even if we aren't at home."

We sat down at the kitchen table and she introduced me to her younger son who lived at the farm with her. Suddenly she turned to me and asked: "What are you? Jewish?"

"Yes," I said. "I'm Jewish."

"And you want to be a farmer?"

"Yes, I want to be a farmer."

"A Jewish farmer?" she asked in disbelief. "A Jewish farmer just can't be."

"Why can't a Jew be a farmer?" I asked her.

"I'll bet you ten to one that Jews won't make good farmers," she assured me with great confidence.

"And homesteaders, at that! It's a far cry from being just a farmer to being a homesteader. Homesteading is such hard work. We've always worked the land, but you Jews have always refused to be farmers."

I asked her if she'd heard of Jews refusing to work the land in Norway.

"No," she said, "not in Norway, but in Russia they did. When we lived in the States," she continued, "a priest told us that in Russia, the Tsar, being concerned for the well-being of his people, inquired of all his citizens (and there were many races) who would like to farm and who would like to engage in trade and live in the city. All the Jews refused to live in the country and work the land. They all chose to have little businesses in the towns and cities. Whenever you come across a Jew, you will find he's a business man of one sort or another and lives in town. And, you know, business men aren't always honest."

I said that I had never heard of a ruler being that interested in the well-being of the common folk, especially the Russian

Tsar. I asked her if she thought all Jews were dishonest. "No, I'm not saying that," she said, "I'm just saying that all Jews are businessmen and business isn't always 'kosher.' You can see how long it takes for a farmer to eke out a living, and yet within a year, a businessman gets fat and is bedecked with gold. Harry, however, never made a success of it. And do you know why? Because Harry is an honest man."

"Who is Harry?" I wanted to know.

"Harry is a Jewish young man who was a pedlar. Whenever he came to visit us, we'd have a real celebration. We'd gather together a houseful of farmers and listen to his tales. He'd tell us which countries were at war, and who was benefitting from the war, and who was suffering. He would tell us why there were strikes at the factories, why the rich were rich, and why there were so many poor people. He told us how prices were fixed for products that farmers produced and that the farmers had no say in these prices. He told us what the children were taught in the schools and how the teachers were told what to teach. He'd tell us how a poor man could be sent to prison for stealing a loaf of bread for his hungry children, but that a large contractor could swindle hundreds of people out of their money and still be as free as a bird. He told us of the world-wide struggle between the rich and the poor."

The old woman began telling me of a rich shopkeeper who wanted to have Harry arrested as a 'red agent.' Her townspeople couldn't believe that a Jew would turn on one of his own people. But Harry was right; there were just two classes in the world, be they Jew or Turk. "Our townspeople," she went on, "stood up for Harry. We told our storekeeper if he pressed charges against Harry, not one of us would set foot in his shop. And this action helped."

I suddenly remembered my poor colleagues back at my farm and their empty stomachs. And here was I sitting in this pleasant kitchen enjoying myself with this old woman. I suggested to her that we postpone our conversation for now, and that I'd best collect some food supplies as was the original purpose of my visit. She went off to the storeroom

and soon returned with a good supply of bread, potatoes, honey and eggs. When I asked her how much I owed her, she came up with the grand total of sixty cents. When I asked her why she was asking so little, she said that she wouldn't have gotten any more for it (perhaps less) from the storekeeper, and she didn't want to make undue profits from a neighbour.

Our friendship with these neighbours continues to this day. The old lady is dead now, but we have been friends with her children these thirty-three years. And no one knows better than we farmers how important the friendship of good neighbours is here in the wilderness.

There should have been an artist there to capture the looks on the faces of my friends when they caught sight of me laden down with provisions. I can still hear the sounds of that night ringing in my ears. We all crowded into the shack, huddled ourselves under the blankets, and sang. Our songs rang out into the bush well into the night, and for miles around our music filled the air.

CHAPTER 11



Uprooting a tree

Woodchopper's Strategy

Much has been written about Jewish heroes who performed their heroic deeds in mines, in factories, on the seas and even in the skies, but I've never read a word about Jewish heroes who pioneered the wilderness, advancing civilization in its fullest sense. This was happening in Edenbridge. If one wanted to know such heroes, one would have to come and watch us, a group of Jewish men, sunburned, hands calloused from wielding six pound axes, all of us eager to turn a thousand year old wilderness into a civilization.

One spring morning, when the birds started to stir from their sweet sleep, a group of men set out through the swamps, armed with all the modern ammunition needed to wage a war against the bush: razor-sharp axes with long handles, blankets, matches, a good stock of food and, of course, reading material. In case it rained, and no work could be done, we'd be able to enjoy our relaxation.

We arrived at Pullman's $12 'palace,' which could barely be seen through the thick bush. It was surrounded by tall

trees which guaranteed not a ray of sunshine would come through to the shack. We sat ourselves down on his 'chesterfield' (which was a row of tree stumps). Some apple crates provided seating as well. The room also contained a bed: three boards, nailed to the wall and covered with a straw mattress, which he had made out of straw from a neighbour's field. We were all wet from the early morning dew, and sat down for a five minute rest. We began planning how we could facilitate the work so everyone in the collective could get the work done on his property. There were many suggestions. The first was from a man who had been in Edenbridge for two years and felt he was an authority on tree removal. He suggested that we invite Alex Springman to come over with his oxen. They could pull the trees out, roots and all. Since Alex's oxen had quite a reputation in our area for tackling large jobs and getting them done, that seemed like a good idea. After all, the strength of two oxen could not be compared to that of five men. Since Alex also needed help in turning over his soil, we could exchange labour.

Another man had a different idea. He had plenty of experience in this work, he said, and found that oxen would do for pulling up willow trees, which, though they grew very close together, didn't grow too tall or big around. Since oxen moved very slowly, a willow could fall onto one of the animals or the driver before they were out of the way. Because these weren't very heavy trees, they couldn't cause too serious injuries. On the other hand, the poplars were so tall and big around, if the oxen didn't move out of the way quickly, this could prove dangerous. He suggested that we invite Isaac Cohen and his horses instead. They were known to be strong and fast, and could uproot a big tree and then move quickly out of its path as it fell.

A third man spoke up against both of the previous suggestions. Since the forest was made up of many kinds of trees, each having their own rights as to size, shape and place in the forest (a sort of democratic republic of trees which had existed this way for thousands of years), we would encounter many smaller trees growing very thickly

together in amongst the tall ones. These, he said, had to be rooted out by hand first, so that the horses would have room to move around. It was dangerous, he continued, to use horses if it were not possible for them to easily get out of the way of the falling trees. And, as necessity is the mother of invention, a fourth man came up with still a better plan, His idea was to encircle about twenty trees with a chain and have Isaac Cohen's horses draw them close together. They could then be pulled over so as to expose the roots. We would sever the roots with our axes. The strategy was to leave one tall tree standing in the center, uncut, until the horses and driver were well out of the way. The chain could then be slacked and all the trees would fall together after everyone was out of the way. A round of applause went up simultaneously at this suggestion.

Just a short time ago, each of us was feeling as helpless as a fly trying to conquer this mighty forest. It was not possible to do this job alone, but together we had come up with a plan and collectively we would be able to accomplish what had just moments before, seemed an impossible task.

I Become the Cook

Now that 'the plan' was finalized, the assignment of individuals to the various jobs had to take place. Someone would have to help the driver fasten and unfasten the chains; someone would be needed to chop down the roots once the trees were hauled away; someone to clear the smaller trees out of the way to make room for the horses; and someone would have to gather up all the twigs and branches and pile them up high so they could burn more easily. Once the jobs were allocated, a heavy burden was lifted from our shoulders. We had each separately suffered the worries of not being able to conquer this huge forest with our bare hands. Now it all seemed possible.

The only one who didn't feel less burdened by the job assignments, was me. I had mixed feelings about it. I wasn't

sure if I should be happy to have been crowned king: 'King of the Kitchen.' Should I, for once in my life, accept the crown and behave like a king, or should I be unhappy because I had been denied the opportunity of working with the other men at what I felt was the *real* work? My fantasies of going out with my axe and undoing, with a few deft strokes, the thousands of years of growing this forest had done, was shattered. I wanted to be instrumental in providing a place for people to realise their dreams. But I wouldn't argue with a program set up by the whole group, and since I am by nature not afraid of hard work, I accepted my new position without protest.

No one need envy me my new post. My brow was frequently furrowed in thought: How can I keep these appetites (none of which needed stimulating with tonics) satisfied through the week until I could get away on our rest day and find some 'real food' at the neighbouring farms. (We didn't indulge this luxury during the week). As General of the pots and pans division, I had to somehow ensure that these hard working men didn't die of starvation. I resorted to mathematics. No matter how I juggled all the facts, the results were always the same: not enough food for such hard working men. Oh, sure, the first few days were nothing but compliments: 'a good cook'; 'a tasty and economical meal'; 'neatly prepared'; 'appetizingly served'; 'mealtimes are festive as well as nourishing' etc., I was beginning to think I had truly become quite expert in the tricks of the trade. But by the fifth day I had used up all my tricks; my mathematical juggling was useless. Hungry stomachs are not interested in calculations. I felt particularly sorry for Isaac. He was from London and was used to enjoying his 'cuppa tea,' brewed strong as beer. We weren't using tea at all. What was the point. It was silly to waste the tea. We wouldn't get the proper taste or colour out of it anyway because of the swamp water we used to brew it in. Isaac used to joke about it: "hey, guys, we must invent a machine that will enable us to pop over to London once in a while for a 'cuppa tea.'

"Buns" Become a Gourmet Delight

I was ready to resign my post because mathematics does not fill the stomachs of men who have been out tree clearing for ten hours. We needed a miracle. But miracles don't fill stomachs either. We needed potatoes, eggs, sugar and even a little butter. But we had none of these. The men just laughed at my concern. What's a little hunger? Are we going to give up our work over a small detail like that? We had to dig in and get our work done.

I was given an assistant. He was a young man from Lithuania, a hard worker and a good sport. He was even tempered and not easily upset by bad times... he could take it all in his stride. His pipe never left his mouth. He soon became my advisor: "put in a little salt, a little flour, add water and baking powder, and after fifteen minutes in the oven, you'll see the whole table covered in delicious 'buns'." Where he got the term 'buns' is still a mystery to me. We got quite a reputation for them all through the community, though one needed an iron stomach to digest them.

I was now free to slip out of the kitchen and join the men at work in the bush. When I saw those men, shining axes raised high in the air, dwindling the size of the bush and increasing the size of the fields, I was very moved. There was Joe Pullman, at play, stripped to the waist, his body tanned and muscular, teasing his buddies to work harder and faster or he'd overtake them. I asked myself: where does the spirit come from that makes the blood boil, and inspires men to such hard work without a worry about hunger or fatigue? It was this sight that made even the forest shake with fear. I was convinced that the spirit that moved these men could also move the forest. The forest seemed to know this too.

Light, Air and Mosquitoes

It would be good to have pictures today of our life there and the palaces we lived in and how they were furnished. Joe Pullman's table was so small, it made mealtimes a

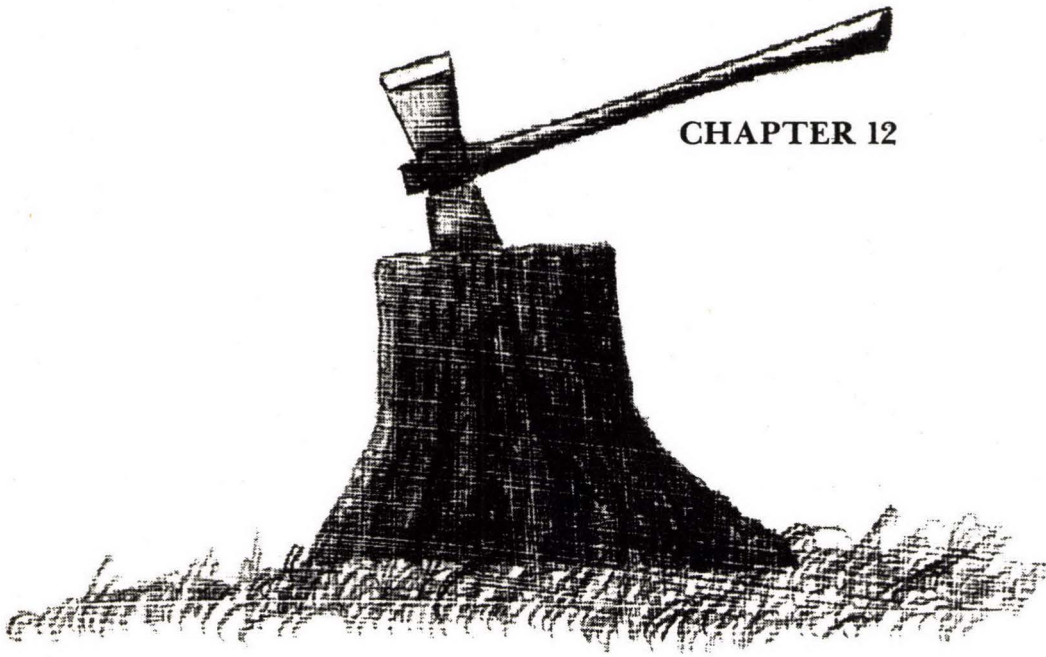
problem. We had to nail a couple of extra apple crates to the wall to extend the eating surface. Boards, nailed across logs, made benches to sit on. Since the house was too small to accommodate much furniture, we had to come up with a solution for the sleeping arrangements. His bed, a board nailed to the wall, was too small to sleep all of us, so we added a few more boards, making it possible for us all to sleep sideways on the new extension. This also helped the sparse blanket problem. During the day, we could use the bed for a table. Problem solved.

It would be strange today to think that lack of light could be a problem when there was so much open sky and sunshine above. Or to talk of lack of fresh air with so much open space around us. But 'homes' such as we lived in, to get enough air and light was indeed an issue. There was no light in this house because it was originally built as a granary. That meant there were no windows, just a couple of holes cut out and covered with bits of glass. We couldn't get any air into the place at night because the bush was thick with mosquitoes. We had to fill in all the holes that the mosquitoes could squeeze through, close the door tightly, so that no crack would be available to our waiting assailants. (We didn't have the luxury of mosquito netting). Because we were used to so much fresh air during the day, the absolute lack of it at night made sleeping very difficult. But Jews have to find solutions to problems, and we had a problem. What we needed was a plan. We needed fresh air. We'd make a smudge-pot fire right in front of the door and that should make the mosquitoes afraid to enter. Whoever woke up during the night would have to get out of bed and tend the smudge. We were, after all, new to this business, and failed to realise that young men, having worked ten hours clearing bush seldom woke up in the night. On the contrary, if we didn't have to get up in the morning to go to work, we'd probably sleep until hunger woke us. So this wonderful plan failed on its first night of operation. No one woke up. The green twigs soon burned out, the smoke drifted off, and the mosquitoes needed no

second invitation. They invaded, biting, stinging and sucking our blood mercilessly.

Things were very different when we finally finished working at Joe Pullman's and moved along to Raphael Abramsky's. There we had two 'houses' to live in. Also, Raphael was an excellent cook and homemaker. In the time it took me to collect my thoughts and utensils, he danced a delicious looking pudding out of the oven. There was very little challenging work here for me in the kitchen. The jobs I took care of could be done by anyone. So I joined the tree-felling crew, and became one of the men whom, until now, I had only admired from afar. I now became part of the important work. My axe and I now really belonged!

One of the greatest hardships we had to endure was the lack of cold, fresh drinking water. We were using the swamp water, which was not only thick with insects and tadpoles, but was also thoroughly warmed through from the heat of the summer sun. It tasted more like castor oil than water. When our thirst became unbearable, all work would stop and we'd dig a deep hole. This would soon fill up with cool fresh water and we would drink and drink until we felt somewhat refreshed. The problem was that the water holes could only stand up for a couple of days. What we needed, but didn't have, were boards to keep the walls of the hole upright. So we would stand helplessly by, watching the earth fill in our source of fresh water. This did not stop us from digging new holes. The swamp water became denser and shallower as the summer went on, and we simply had to have drinking water. So our digging continued as our thirst needed quenching. It actually worried us as we looked around at the property near the house. The holes everywhere made it look like a battlefield.



CHAPTER 12

Battle with an axe

My Troubles on the Job

By 1912 our group had become quite adept at farming. Though we were still unable to produce on our land, we had begun paying land tax. The hundred and sixty acres that each of us 'owned' was still mostly overgrown with wilderness. We could barely reap enough from our land to feed ourselves. There were no other means of earning a living, though there was no shortage of work. We had a vast forest to convert into farmland, houses to build, and swamps to drain in order to make the land more workable. But all this work left us with no means of filling our stomachs or of buying the supplies we needed to help speed the progress of our work. When our stomachs sent out distress signals threatening to strike if better treatment was not forthcoming, we felt something had to be done. Money-making work had to be found in order to avert the strike.

My brother volunteered to go to Winnipeg to see what fortunes he could make in the big city. Some of the others went to Saskatoon and Prince Albert. I stayed in Edenbridge. From the letters I received, my brother and the others made

it very clear that they were able to make enough money for bread and herring, and that was all. There was not enough left over to buy a train ticket back home.

Those of us who stayed back in Edenbridge had it every bit as hard as the city workers. When your stomach is empty, you don't sit back with your arms folded. We had to be very creative about making what we had available productive. We hauled the wood we cut into the towns once a week. We couldn't do it more often because our 'flyers' couldn't make the round trip more often than that. Nowadays, with a truck, it is a two hour round trip. We haggled, bargained, and sold to anyone and everyone. We simply did not rest.

I was one of those lucky (or unlucky) ones who had no means of my own for doing business. I didn't own any 'flyers', but did experience the trip of hauling wood into the towns over miles of brush and ruts. I had learned how to harness and unharness the oxen should they get stuck in a swamp. It broke my heart to see the animals suffer those incredible hardships. Though I didn't own my own oxen, I had borrowed someone else's and had learned to work with them. At this time I had the good fortune to be oxen-less. It was also at this time that I met a farmer who was a sort of politician and knew of jobs that were soon to become available.

The whispers from higher up were filtering down and it seemed that a choice few would get these jobs. The government planned to put a road through our little community, and he, the farmer cum politician, assured me of a job. It would pay $2.50 a day. No food or lodging would be provided. That didn't worry us. We weren't used to soft beds. We could get a pretty good night's sleep on a board using our fists for pillows. It had also been many a year that we'd even dreamed of eating marzipan, so the $2.50 for a mere nine hours work sounded just fine.

It was my job to root out the trees in preparation for the grading crews. It was their job to plow up the earth, haul it to the cleared areas, and pile it loosely in readiness for topping. There were five of us on my crew, myself and four burly Irishmen. They had the 'real thing' in axes—six pounds

each and sharpened at both ends of the blade. When they took a swing at a root, the earth would tremble. It was obvious they weren't greenhorns at this work. My axe, sharpened only at one end, looked like it was made for cutting sugar cane, surely not huge tree roots. This didn't upset the other crew members. Quite the contrary. Seeing I had a smaller axe, it was agreed all around that I take on the smaller trees and shrubs, and that they with their big axes would handle the big ones. Their trees popped like corks out of champagne bottles. My crew and I became very good friends. We worked side by side, sometimes harder, sometimes slacker, whatever seemed to be the mood of the day. The only thing we had to make sure of was that we kept well ahead of the grading crews. We couldn't hold up their work.

And so time flew by and the weeks slipped through our fingers like grains of sand. The worst days for me were Mondays. On Sundays my buddies would disappear into town where they would spend the day drinking. The next day, they'd arrive at work feeling sick and hungover. On those Mondays I was definitely an outsider. They seemed put out with me. They never really said so, but their eyes voiced their irritability. They hardly spoke at all on those Mondays, and when they did, it was a language I didn't understand. In all the London newspapers I had read, or even at night school, where they taught us newcomers the English language, I never encountered this vocabulary. From the tone of their voices, I knew they must be curses. Since I couldn't join in, I sat back quietly. This seemed to anger them even more. On those Mondays they seemed to smoke more than they worked. Every few minutes they would sit down on a tree stump and either light up a cigarette or have a chew of tobacco. Since I could neither speak nor remain silent without angering them, and since I neither smoked nor chewed tobacco, it seemed wisest at those times to take my axe and go to the trees. Their responses I could feel at ease with. They would always respond in the same way.

The Parable of a Transplanted Tree

Let me return for a moment to London, England. Before I left England, I met a very warm, intelligent young man. His name was I. L. Fine. (Years later he went to work in New York for a Jewish socialist daily called *The Forvertz* (*The Forward.*) In London, he worked as a ticket agent for a steamship company, and we all bought our tickets from him. After a day's work of cutting fur pelts, in the dirty musty shop, my greatest pleasure was to spend an evening with this young man. He had very little money, and I, being a shop worker, was no better off. Very often neither of us had even enough money to go to the theatre. So we'd spend time in his room. He had a great book collection. We'd read a lot, and spend long hours talking. One evening we were reading about the early American settlers, and how hard it was for them to get established there.

"You know, friend Usiskin," he said to me, "it won't be much different for you and your friends when you attempt to settle in the virgin parts of Canada. You are sure to suffer the same privations that these American settlers did. You will have plenty of history to record about the hardships of the homesteading you plan to do in Canada." I replied that I firmly believed the hardships of the olden days were due to the primitive facilities but now that modern civilization had come to America, it would be quite different.

"One day you will remember what I am saying to you," he continued. "What better example than this: Take a tree from one land and try to transplant it in another land with another climate. See what becomes of that tree. If it is a young tree, after much struggle, it is possible that it will adapt and continue to grow. If it is an older tree, it will have about one chance in ten of surviving."

It is this conversation that I am remembering as I stand all alone near a large tree, while my co-workers are off in the distance, engaged in some lofty discussion of their own. I was thinking of that talk my friend and I had so long ago about how difficult it is to transplant a tree.

A Battle in the Woods

Suddenly I heard loud shouting coming from the area where the other four workers were sitting. I looked around, and my God, what's this I see? Two of the four were facing one another, glowering, in preparation for a fight. The third man has grabbed the fourth man's axe, and is holding it up in a threatening pose, as if not to let him pass. I rushed towards them in order to prevent what looked like a potential blood-bath. Someone called out for me to stop. "Go home or your life won't be worth an onion!"

After this incident I was transferred to another job. I was given a shovel, as my work now was levelling out the lumps of earth along the road. My foreman was a short man with a perpetual smile on his face. He was a very fussy person and wanted everything to run like clockwork. The tempo of the work was not to be too rushed, nor too slow, but perfectly smooth and even. He never told me what I should be doing, or how I should be doing it. He felt that it was not enough for a worker to use his hands. He wanted us to use our heads as well. I couldn't understand why he seemed protective of me, and somehow overly kind. I didn't know what had put me in his favour. I also didn't know why I had been transferred from the other job. I hadn't taken the fight episode too seriously. I had seen enough spats to know that after it was all over, the men generally went back to being good friends.

On my new job there were problems too. Here amongst the teamsters was a miserable young man who got along with no one, including me. He had blond hair, weak eyes and was friendly only to his two strong mules. He would brag and boast about their strength, saying that they were stronger than any of the teams of horses and could do any job better than they could. This young man, seeing me bent over a pile of earth which I was spreading evenly across the road, would step on my foot. (That would enable me to see all the stars in the heavens in the middle of the day.)

I had made a couple of good friends though. One was an older teamster who was an avid student of Robert Ingersoll,

whom he passionately admired for his outspoken criticism of deceitful religious leaders. He read everything Ingersoll wrote. My other friend was the camp's cook. He was a quiet, warm and friendly person and a voracious reader. He showed me his book collection. He brought it to the camp with him, and it struck me that even in a patch of thorns one can sometimes find a rose. These two friends watched over me and protected me from that which I was to learn about some time later.

One Monday, the aforementioned nasty young teamster was in a particularly aggressive mood. He kept his mules coming closer and closer to me until he finally succeeded in driving them straight into me when my back was turned. An argument broke out immediately amongst the drivers. Fortunately, I escaped unharmed, but sides were taken, and a battle ensued. The foreman intervened and ordered the young blond back to camp to sleep off his nastiness (no doubt a hangover from the previous day's drinking). "If you persist in making trouble around here," the foreman warned the young man, "you will be fired."

The troubles did not end despite the apparent good handling of the situation. He kept up his harassment of me, though by now I had learned to protect myself from his attacks. It wasn't easy to work in the blazing sun, soaking wet with perspiration, covered in dust and grime, constantly on the alert for an attack from the mules.

One Monday there was a shortage of workers. A Jewish farmer was recruited to join our crew. His name was Israel Gordon. (He now lives in Chicago, and if he were to read this he would remember how we built the road between Wolfavitch and Shallitt Park.) Israel was a natural comedian. Whenever he told a story the whole work gang stopped to listen. Everyone loved him right from the start, except, of course, the young blond mule driver. The young anti-Semite was having trouble winning any friends. One day when Israel was 'holding court,' he suggested that the proper treatment for a person like the blond was a hit on the head with a spade. Everyone thought that was a fine idea. I, however,

stated that I was a pacifist, and had not come here to fight, but to work. I couldn't understand why people always wanted to fight when it was so much easier to live together peacefully. The other men just didn't understand my way of thinking. They claimed that sometimes it was necessary to right a wrong, and that I'd better learn to do this, if only to keep my self respect. They repeated that the 'shovel on the head' treatment in this situation was definitely in order. This form of reprisal did not amuse the blond. From that Monday on he never returned to the work site. Once he was no longer with us, everyone breathed easier.

People who are isolated from civilization, and are engaged in a never-ending battle with mosquitoes and swamps, should not expend unnecessary energy in conflicts with their fellow man. On the contrary. The bonds of friendship and cooperation should be strengthened in these circumstances. Common struggles enhance the need for friendship. Being so far removed from civilization, it felt even more important that we create a civilized environment of our own.

I Am Capable of Doing the Job

Once again on a Monday there was a shortage of workmen. The 'scraper man' didn't show up. It was his job to scoop up the mounds of earth with his scraper. Men were also needed to empty the earth from the scrapers onto the road. The foreman asked me to fill the scrapers. I was 'green' at this kind of work, but I managed somehow. Though I was dead tired at the end of each stint, I didn't give in to my fatigue. This made me very popular amongst the workers. The regular 'scraper man' was short and stocky, and I soon learned the advantages of that build for this job. First of all, the shorter one is, the less one has to bend over. And broad shoulders are vital because very often a man's entire strength is needed to prevent the scraper from tipping over. I was tall and of rather slight build. But once I got the hang of it, it wasn't that hard. The foreman was aware of how hard I

was trying, and that it was a difficult job even for an experienced man. So for the following three days he gave me various lighter jobs until I felt stronger again.

My popularity with the workers kept up because, no matter what job I was assigned to, I accepted it readily and did it well.

And so time passed unnoticed, one day melting into the next. Every day the same scorching sun. Every night the same battle with the millions of mosquitoes. Every day the same conversations. Meals and mealtimes a repeat of the day before. Only the birds seemed to have a new song to sing each day. We had no radios. World news seldom penetrated our isolation. We could get a newspaper once a week if the roads were good. If they weren't, sometimes two or three weeks would go by without word from the outside world. So we worked and lived as was God's will.

But the meetings of the Edenbridge Jews were quite another story. They were full of laughter, life and wit. At those meetings our minds became revitalized. So what if we have no contact with civilization out here? So what if civilization has no contact with us? Is that an insurmountable problem? Of course not. We left big cities to make our own civilization. It was these thoughts, coupled with our goals and ideals, that made our meetings so lively.

I Meet Robert Ingersoll

It was 2 A.M. and I was on my way home from a meeting. We had been discussing setting up a cooperative store in Edenbridge. We came to complete agreement on all points except one. Who was to be the store manager? One end of the colony wanted one of their farmers to be the manager and the other end insisted my brother get the job.

I found myself deep in thought as I wended my way home through the thick bush. As I walked, I had to jump across the swampy areas, climb over fallen trees, and avoid deep puddles that lay hidden in the tall grass. I kept hoping the water wouldn't come up any higher than my waist, where it

was at the moment. As I was walking, I suddenly came across someone else hopping through the bush in much the same way I had been. In the dark we didn't recognize one another. As soon as I heard his "hello," I recognized it to be R.I. himself. We named him R. I—the initials for his full name: Robert Ingersoll.

"Where are you going so late at night?" I asked him.

"I have been visiting an old friend."

It was wonderful to be talking to someone in a language other than that used on the road gangs...especially Mondays.

"How come you are heading north instead of south?" I asked him. "Are you going back to the camp? I am. You would have 'gotten to God knows where' if you'd continued in the direction you were heading."

Robert Ingersoll began telling me how he came to be lost in the woods. "It isn't entirely my fault. It is a fairly dark night, and nature seems to be playing tricks in the heavens. The clouds are crowded in close to one another. The northern lights have painted the sky a multitude of colours, and the feeling was that the entire woods and I were at one with the heavens. I became mesmerized with the beauty of it all. I soon realized that it was bright enough to wend my way through the woods. I thought the light from the sky would help me find my way around the swamps to the Shallitt farm. I could see the swamp and knew that the farm was not too far off. I turned right and proceeded towards the farm, I thought. I awoke a herd of cattle with bells around their necks. They started running through the woods and I followed them. I knew they would lead me around the swamps. And so the cow bells brought me to this spot."

We headed off together towards the camp, soaked to the skin from the dew. Suddenly he stopped walking and invited me to sit down beside him on a sawed off tree stump. He had something he wanted to tell me. I could tell he was finding it difficult to begin. Finally he stood up, took hold of my sweater, and began telling me about the incident that occurred some time ago at the camp. He was referring to

the fight that broke out when one of the loggers had snatched an axe from the hands of another and threatened me with it. I had wanted to step in and stop them at that time, but was stopped. "Your life hung by a hair that day," he said. "That man was out to get you." I told him I wasn't aware that someone had something against me. I couldn't imagine why there could be any animosity towards me from a fellow worker. I was lucky, it seems that the others intervened. He said they saved my life.

I learned something from this encounter: one has to consider every event in one's life very seriously. Luck won't always take care of us.

Still the whole incident seemed exaggerated. I couldn't believe people living under the same conditions and suffering the same privations could hate one another. Still, it was true the man did try to attack me with his axe. Surely he didn't see me as his enemy. Maybe he did it because he had suffered so much at the hands of our common enemy...the struggle for a livelihood. Maybe I became the outlet for his acute misery.

CHAPTER 13



A four-footed visitor

A Storm in the Bush

I had a free Sunday. No meetings or socials were planned for that day. That was a rarity in Edenbridge. We called it a dry day. I decided to use the time to clean a week's grime from my body. There were no bathrooms, of course. (Many homes still don't have them.) My bath took place in a small tin wash basin filled with water from a nearby swamp. The water was murky from the multitude of tiny worms that inhabited the swamp. Though I strained the water through a pillowcase, the occasional worm found its way into my wash water. I indulged in the luxury of changing into clean clothes which had also been laundered in that same swamp water.

It was a very hot day. It felt as though a storm was brewing. Since I had accumulated a stack of magazines and newspapers which I hadn't had a chance to read, I stretched out on the floor (a farmer-style chesterfield) and began taking advantage of the pleasures the free day had to offer. I became so absorbed in my reading, I didn't notice the day slip by. I jumped up from the floor and was befallen by a million

visitors. The mosquitoes were pouring in through the door of my shack. That was a sure sign a storm was imminent. I barely had enough time to make a smudge out of paper and green twigs to smoke out my uninvited guests, when the world outside my little palace began to rumble. The leaves were screaming in terror as they were about to be torn away from their branches. The mean devil wind had mercy for no one or no thing, breaking and bending the trees at will. Suddenly, lightning lit up the sky, and I cowered at the terrible crack of thunder that followed. Then came the downpour. It came down so hard, I couldn't go to fetch some firewood, so that I might at least cook some food for myself. I was grateful the room could withstand the deluge. At least it was dry in the house. From time to time some light from the lightning bolts came in through the holes in the walls we called our windows. I was afraid to light my lamp because the heated glass could crack from the spurts of water that came in through the windows and the door. It would take weeks to replace if it broke.

A Four-Footed Visitor

So I sat and waited for the storm to subside. The house was dark; I was hungry. I couldn't go to sleep because I had learned that if you go to sleep hungry you wake up tired and hungry. There were no neighbours nearby. Isaac, my nearest neighbour, was at least a mile away, and in this storm that trip was unthinkable.

All of a sudden I heard a scratching at my door. A person? Couldn't be. Who would stand scratching at the door in this weather? A wild animal? They don't know about doors. I opened the door and in came a four-footed creature, soaked to the skin. My match didn't burn long enough for me to see what I had admitted into my home. But from the pounding of the tail on the floor, I guessed this to be a tame animal. A second match enabled me to see that it was Isaac's dog, 'Kalla,' that had probably been sent out to bring home the cattle. In my guest's honour, I had to light my lamp and

give it something to abate its hunger. I decided I might as well have something to eat too. The dog wouldn't sit still as I prepared the food. Kalla kept going round and round the room, jumping up and down as if trying to tell me something. I was having difficulty understanding him. Many things crossed my mind. Maybe the neighbour had sent the dog for help. Maybe someone was sick. In such a vast wilderness, where doctors are nearly impossible to find, even a neighbour can be a blessing. Then I thought perhaps the dog simply wanted to thank me for taking him in on such a miserable night. I patted his head and called him by name, and he settled right down. He crawled under my bed, the only place in the house where he wouldn't be underfoot.

By then the storm had exhausted itself. I had to get up very early for work the next day. The work site was a good three miles from home, and because of the storm, it would take longer than usual to get there. I would have to get up at 4: A.M. In the midst of all my reckoning, I fell asleep. About three o'clock in the morning, I turned over to lie on my other side, so as to enjoy the last hour of sleep to the fullest. Just then the dog under the bed began growling. I could hear people talking, and told the dog to be quiet. I tried to listen. I heard someone say: "You go in and wake him up. I'll wait here."

A man entered, as tall as the ceiling. The dog would have eaten him for breakfast, had I not stopped him. It was a neighbour who lived four miles away. He was on his way to work. He used the same route I did, and decided to wake me. I had no choice but to get up.

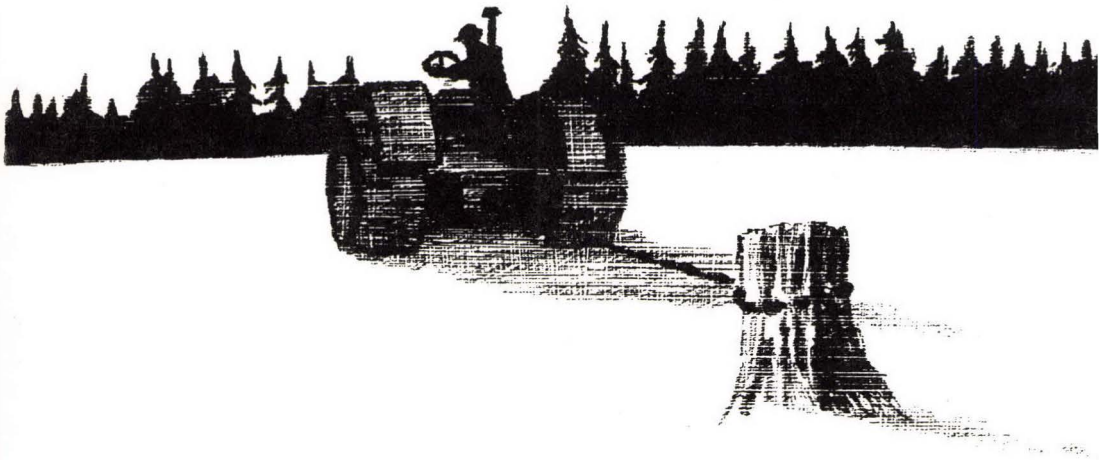
"Hurry up. We want to get to the camp for breakfast. Get dressed quickly, and take your tall boots. The weeds are soaking wet from last night's rain." (He talks to me of tall boots. What I own can hardly be called short boots!)

"Don't worry. My shoes aren't afraid of the wet. They have plenty of holes. When the water goes in one hole, it drains out of three others."

Only the cook was at the camp when we arrived. The workers were still sleeping. So we partook of a leisurely breakfast. The cook was very pleased to serve us. It was

easier serving a few people at a time. When everyone was there, all wanting their food at the same time, it was very hard on him. We decided, from that morning on, one of the workers would help the cook serve. That would cut an hour off his day's work. We would do this in rotation. This would make things easier for everyone, especially the cook.

CHAPTER 14



From oxen to tractors

A Farmer Tells an Incredible Tale

The air became cool and fresh after the rainstorm, and the work proceeded very quickly. The trees sprang from the earth like young rabbits. Our crew was quite a distance ahead of those using the horses. I was standing near a large tree, axe in hand, ready to begin my assault, when I felt someone tug at my shirtsleeve. Well, well, if it wasn't my old co-worker. It was nearly impossible to recognize this face as that of the sourpuss I remembered. He was dressed to the teeth and appeared very animated. He waved me over to him and, without a word, pointed to a spot where we could go and sit. There was plenty of time before the crew with the horses would catch up, so I went over to him.

And there we sat, in silence. He was having trouble starting to say whatever it was he wanted to talk to me about. I could tell there was a volcano brewing in the heart of this man. If he didn't say something soon, I felt he would burst into tears. And that's exactly what happened. He grabbed my hand in his and held it very tightly. I felt very drawn to him. I don't think I had ever seen a big strong man cry

before. I couldn't bear it, and asked him to stop or I would leave. He heard me, and began: "Okay, I'll stop crying, though I do feel a little better for having done so. I would like to explain some things to you, and then perhaps you won't think of me as some miserable beast. I know I behaved like one that terrible Monday when I let my cup of bitterness overflow. I should begin my tale when I was three years old, but neither of us has that much time. You are a worker and your time is valuable. I am about to leave for the United States, but I want to tell you a little about my life so you will understand why I am going there." After a couple of minutes spent in thought, he began:

> "My brother and I came here from Ireland. We were a couple of young, strong bulls. We left our rather old and frail parents behind. We decided to come here, get ourselves settled, and as soon as we could, we'd bring them over to live their remaining years with us. A group of twelve families left Ireland together. Once we got here, we became so spread out over this vast wilderness, that we lost track of one another. Each one settled on his own piece of no-man's-land. My brother and I had our half section. Across from us lived a couple in their fifties and an adopted daughter about 16 years of age. She was a very beautiful young lady.
>
> My brother and I worked very hard the first few years and finally got ourselves to the point where we owned seven field-working oxen, and a few cows. We sold our cream, and kept the skim milk for ourselves. If there was any left over, we fed it to the calves. Generally, we ate poorly though we knew good food was necessary to give us strength to carry out the work. We had many wonderful plans: we wanted to build a proper house instead of living in a corner of the barn with the oxen; we wanted to bring our parents over; we hoped one of us would marry and begin a new generation of life here. That's why we lived so frugally and ate so sparingly. We saved every penny, never indulging in either alcohol or tobacco. One day I decided to take the neighbour's young daughter to a dance. My brother talked me into it. He was a very clever and practical man. He insisted there was a limit to everything, even frugality. A young man, he said, was entitled to some of the joys of life which he worked so hard to earn. But I was always afraid to spend a cent.

The day after the dance, when I came home from the field, I met my neighbour. I gave him my usual hearty 'hello.' He didn't reply. My heart skipped a beat! I began to worry. Maybe he didn't want me to take his daugther out and maybe he'd gotten angry with her for going with me. He was a big man, and I imagined that he could have beaten her, like the stories said about step-fathers.

I went into the kitchen and began making dinner for my brother and I. Our arrangement was that I would leave the field first with three oxen, and my brother would come later with the four others. I would have the food ready for us when he got home.

This day, when I came home, my brother was already there. He was lying down and moaning. He had a pain in his heart. I was very frightened. I loved my brother very dearly. There were only us two children in our family. He was the youngest and the most precious. All through the meal I watched my brother as he clutched at his heart. It was as if a ghost were standing next to him, stabbing him with a knife. But I wasn't a doctor. I wasn't even a mother, who probably would have noticed things a lot sooner. He couldn't have become sick suddenly. It was clear that he had been suffering for quite a while, and I hadn't noticed.

And then he told me that a piece of steel from his plough had broken off and it would be a good idea for me to take two oxen and go into town and get it fixed at the blacksmith's. While I was there, I could also drop into the doctor's and ask him for some medicine to ease the pains. I went immediately.

Driving along, I began thinking about our luck, and how the riches of the world were distributed so unevenly.

Back home in Ireland, not far from our home, there lived a prince, who also had two sons, the same age as we were. What a life they had! They knew nothing of work. They and their parents were always together. They had many friends. They had servants to wait on them. They had teachers to teach them. They had lots of nice clothes. They had no worries, For them there was always everything in abundance. They had a lot of land, horses, machinery and people to work it all for them. Their crops were always successful. Their palace was bustling with life everyday. Visitors came and went; food was served up at every meal, fit for a king; horse and buggy rides were available for all; dogs for hunting were at their disposal;

even little sailboats for riding on the glassy lake. And look at us in contrast with the prince's children...our home, shared with the oxen in their stall; our food, the thinnest of skim milk and potatoes; our clothes, either torn or patched. We were always exhausted, like prisoners, lonely as stones. Everything around us was hard, dry, grim, stubborn, without a trace of heart or feeling; without pity or compassion. Man, horse, cow, machine...everything's worth measured in dollars.

I drove along and thought, "what will become of my brother?" I was sure he was seriously ill. A doctor. What good will a doctor do? We don't have any money so none of the local doctors will even come out to see him. Even if one did, he'd never let my brother stay in the stall. A doctor would tell him to change his diet, and we have nothing to change to. A doctor would tell him to stop working, and this he couldn't do either. A doctor would say that we should get someone in to take care of him. Who could we get? Our parents were thousands of miles away. I felt desperate. I was also going mad with worry because no mail had come from home. At first letters would come regularly once a month. And now it had been five months since we had heard. My heart told me there was bad news on the way. And then there was the girl. Just as we were getting to know one another, everything else was falling apart.

When I finally got into the town, it was dark. Everyone was asleep. It took me eight hours to drive those fourteen miles. I was very hungry and sad. I felt as helpless as a child. Here I was in a town, in what was called civilization, and I had to go hungry and sleep out of doors. No one thought to ask a stranger if he were hungry or if he had a place to rest his weary bones. Oh, if only I were the prince's son, things would be different. The sad thing was that I was not the only such visitor in this town. I saw many others just like me. Dark faces, torn clothes, standing around, rolling their cigarettes out of cheap tobacco. We all drove about a half mile out of town and let our oxen wander freely through the fields of green grass. We built ourselves a fire, and lay down, looking up to the faraway heavens as if expecting to find the help we sought there. The town changed completely in the morning. The shopkeepers opened their doors, awaiting our arrival. Suddenly we became very important people. We were spoken to as if we were long lost friends. Everyone was eager to make a sale.

I couldn't relax. The doctor didn't get up this early. I had been to his place five times and each time got the same answer: he's still sleeping. What's his rush? He has time. But my heart was bursting with anxiety. I had left a sick brother behind. And there was so much work to be done: the cows had to be milked, the milk had to be put through the separator, and God knows what else. Every few minutes, my heart skipped a beat. Crazy thoughts rushed through my mind about my sick brother, about the unfortunate young girl, about my parents and why I hadn't heard from them. I was going mad and there wasn't even anyone here to talk to.

Suddenly I got the idea that it would help if I went into the church. Holy men would feel my sorrow and help heal my wounds. It is, after all, the place of love and peace, both of which I so badly needed at this time. As soon as I crossed the threshold of the church, my mad thoughts left me. I felt removed from my body and alone with my soul. How surprised I was when I heard ordinary words spoken by ordinary people! They talked just like the shopkeepers and the dealers. "What do you want young man? Who are you looking for here?" I felt bewildered. The holiness, the compassion that I had hoped to find was not here. I turned and was about to run off wherever my legs would carry me, when I was stopped by a round little man, with glasses on his nose.

"Young man, I see you are troubled. Perhaps you aren't well?"

Hearing his fatherly voice, I broke down and poured out all my worries, my problems and my fears. He sat quietly throughout my tale of woe, and never once said a word. When I was finished, he suggested that I try reading.

"Have you ever read the Bible?"

I told him that I had when I was a child.

"Well," he said, "buy a Holy Book from me now and that will help you with all your problems. You will throw yourself into reading and you won't have time to think about anything else. You will emerge healed."

I told him I was a very poor man and only had two dollars with me. I still had to pay the doctor for his advice and for any medicine he would suggest for my sick brother. "The Bible will also help your sick brother," he replied. And so we traded half my wealth for his cure-all Bible.

I just couldn't dismiss the possible value of seeing the doctor, and went back there. The doctor relieved me of my last dollar for the following advice: "I can't prescribe anything for the patient unless I see him."

I set off for home, dejected, disappointed and penniless. I had no medicine for my brother, but I had a Bible that should cure us of all our problems and diseases. I couldn't recognize our stall as I drew near. Everything was cleared away and sparkling clean. My brother wasn't there. He must be in the field. Cured, without the help of a doctor! I felt better. I took my oxen and set out for the field.

On the way I took out my pent up frustrations on the oxen, screaming at them to hurry up. Just then I heard a bird singing sweetly in the open air, and I thought to myself: How lucky a bird is to be able to fly about freely, without any cares or worries. It has its little nest and can do what it pleases. When it is hungry, it finds food; when it is tired, it rests. And we humans, who are supposed to be the clever ones, must suffer in our attempt to build a meaningful life.

Suddenly I heard a mighty roar! I couldn't believe my own ears. Did I hear the majestic sound of a motor? What is a motor doing in my field? There must be some mistake. I looked around and saw it was no mistake. A tractor approached me, driven by a stranger. Behind the tractor was a plough, which left behind itself great mounds of rich black earth which begged to be seeded. I didn't know what to make of it all. It turned out that the man was an agent from a machine company. One of our neighbours had told him that we were sick to death of ploughing with our lazy oxen, and that we were interested in buying a tractor. So he had come over to give us a demonstration of how well his equipment worked.

What can I tell you? I was frightened to undertake such a financial burden. When would we be able to pay off such a debt? But I was very tempted. Inner voices prodded me: Look how strong it is. It never gets tired, and when its work is done, you just park it. You don't have to brush it down, feed it, water it, or clean its dirt out of the stall. I also wanted to get even with my neighbour. He played a prank on me, sending me this tractor salesman, knowing full well how poor I was. I wanted to show him I was not one to be toyed with, but could, if I wanted

to, buy a tractor. It was harder to convince my brother. He was clever and practical. If we don't meet our payments, he warned, not only would we lose the tractor, but also our farm. We can't make deals with machine salesmen any more than we can make deals with Nature. He warned me against the salesman, who was now as soft as butter, but when it came time to meet the payments would be hard as rock.

But I wasn't as pessimistic as my brother. We agreed to make yearly payments for three years at the rate of 9% interest. As collateral, I offered the farm and the seven oxen.

Soon my brother bounced back to normal health. Working with the tractor, compared to working with the oxen was like comparing day to night. Because we were not skilled mechanics we had plenty of troubles with the machinery, but we managed to get through them. We had a very good crop, and easily paid off our first year's installment plus the interest. We were very happy. It was too bad that we no longer had a means of delivering our cream to the towns. We talked about getting a couple of horses. They would be very useful.

One day, as we were mulling this thought over, a car pulled up to our door. It was the same tractor salesman. My heart skipped a beat! Maybe we hadn't understood the agreement, and had made a wrong payment. He quickly allayed our fears. He had heard, he said, that we were thinking of buying horses. He thought maybe we would like to buy the second hand truck he had brought instead. It was very cheap. Again the same thoughts: No more taking food and drink to the animals; no cleaning stalls. As for getting to the towns, it's a simple thing for a truck. It takes horses all day. He didn't even want money from us for it. We could pay him with the next tractor payment. But as collateral, he wanted us to sign a little paper that said we would put up the farm until the truck was paid off in two years. He talked us into it. After that we began to see the troubles we had gotten ourselves into. We were uninformed and didn't know that the difference between what is written on paper and what actually happens, is as vast as the difference between east and west.

The roads weren't suitable for cars yet. Especially for an old truck and inexperienced drivers. We also had to pay for gas, oil, licence, a garage and some of the repairs.

Not only did we not make any money on the cream, but every delivery ended up costing us money.

Late one evening, when the air was still and the clouds poured rain hard against the windows, I began thinking about what my brother had said about the salesman being soft when he wanted to make a deal, and so unyielding when it came time to collect. My brother's health was failing again. He was getting weaker day by day. Even my own strength was beginning to wane. Every day we ate the same food. Every day the same work: milking, cleaning stalls. Every day the same pots; every day the same thoughts. I thought I would go mad. Still no mail from home. And then I remembered the Bible. It was intended to take away my sad thoughts and bring me joy. I remembered in my childhood, when I felt sad or out of sorts, my father would give me a treat, and my mood changed immediately. With the same hopes, I took to the Bible.

The first words that shook me were those telling of the earth's creation. Frightening storms, floods, seas full of fish, so many animals, birds, insects, earth, sky, clouds, sun and stars...all created in six days. These days it takes longer to build a house. I could see that I was not really understanding this book. Instead of bringing me joy, it was making me morose. To make it worse, I read the story of Cain and Abel. One brother murders another, and because of this murder, a quarter of the population is killed. It left a horrible impression on me to think that so many innocent people had been killed. Instead of making me happy, or making my brother well, one story after another in the Bible added to my misery. Slaves, driven to work by their masters, until they fell. Infants torn from their mother's arms and thrown like pebbles into the sea. It made me want to tear my hair from my head. I felt that I was going mad again. Is all of mankind dedicated to hostility? Can it ever change?

My brother was getting worse, and I couldn't help him. So much knowledge in the world. So many doctors, professors who should certainly be able to save a young man like my brother. But everything I read convinced me of the ugliness and insanity in the world. It seems there are two kinds of people: those with everything, and those with nothing.

As he was telling his story, the farmer was still holding my hand. I could feel a cloud deep within his soul smothering

him. He couldn't seem to shake it loose. I felt that if he could vent all that was choked down deep inside him, there would be an explosion that would shake the world.

Suddenly, he dropped my hand, and began pacing about the bush with such speed, that I actually became frightened. I thought his worries finally drove him out of his mind. He soon composed himself and came back. He took my hand again, and began anew to tell me some story about a letter he had received. It was crammed full of paper, and covered with markings and stamps from all over the world. It seems it was a letter from his mother. She had made a mistake in the address, and the letter had travelled halfway around the world. It was in this letter that he learned that his father had died, and that his mother was staying with a friend. She was helping take care of the friend's children. It drove him wild to think that his mother, who had two sons of her own, should have to live with strangers at this late stage of her life, and work for them as a nanny. She should be here with her own sons, being taken care of, not working at all. In her letter, his mother told him a story that chilled the body and withered the soil. Here is that story:

At the rich prince's palace, not far from where they had lived as children, there had once worked a young, beautiful peasant girl. One of the prince's sons took a shine to the pretty maid, and a few months later, the women in the palace saw that the young girl was pregnant. A hue and cry arose over this, and the young girl was sent a hundred miles away to see some old woman who was to take care of the birth. A few months later the young girl died from complications incurred by the delivery. Neighbours took pity on the old woman, and took the baby to a younger woman who had children of her own. As it happened, one of these children died, and she blamed the little orphan child for her own child's death. She gave the baby away. The new 'mother' was very old and poor. She was also very religious, and hoped by her good deed, to ensure herself a place in the hereafter. As it happened, her one and only cow died, and again

the orphan child was blamed. So the child was given to a couple who had no children of their own.

She was treated very badly by the neighbouring children. Notwithstanding that, this child grew up with such little love and with so many different mothers, she developed into a pretty and talented young woman. She did very well at school and always got top grades. This made her lose favour with the other children.

Once, at a neighbourhood gathering, several of the families came to drown their sorrows in the bottle. While the children were playing something in the house fell and broke. And who was blamed? The orphan girl. A fight broke out. Some defended the girl, others blamed her. The girl came out of the brawl with a damaged ear that she's had to live with ever since.

His mother's letter went on to say, that this girl, who was now about sixteen, set out with her parents, to settle in Canada as homesteaders. His mother thought they were one of the twelve families with whom he had arrived in Canada. She asked that he try and locate the girl. She would be easily recognized because of her damaged ear.

As you have guessed, the storyteller had already found this girl. She was the adopted daughter of the neighbour, whom he had once taken to a dance. Such an extraordinary coincidence. Before hearing this tale, he had been attracted to her. Now he felt very much in love with her. However, a life and death struggle was waging between him and the girl's father.

When our storyteller had returned from town that day with the Bible, and had found the house shining and clean, it had not been the work of his brother, but that of the young girl. When she heard he had gone into town, leaving his sick brother at home alone, she couldn't bear it, and went over to see if there wasn't something she could do. She found his brother on the ground, bleeding from the mouth. She revived him, and cleaned up all signs of the illness. They both decided to spare him the knowledge of his brother's poor condition, and made it look instead, that the sick man had rallied, and even cleaned up the place for his return.

His brother's health continued to deteriorate, and he had to devote much time to him. The work was being neglected. In the first two years he had been able to pay his debts for the tractor and the truck. There was just a small amount owing and he had already talked to the girl of his plans. He wanted to build a house as soon as the last payment was made and they could start a new life together. They would have a room for his sick brother, and they'd also bring his old mother over to join them.

But the girl's father made plans to have him driven off his homestead. The man had an 'in' with the local politicians, and they in turn had 'ins' with the higher ups. And together they set about to 'fix him'.

When spring came, and he began working the land, he was prevented from doing most of his chores. He was immobilized. In the past, when spring came, he borrowed gas for his tractor and all the other items he needed. He would pay it back in the fall after threshing. That was the way it was, not only for him, but for all farmers. This year, however, he found that no one would give him credit. Wherever he went, he was asked to pay cash. No matter how hard he pleaded, nothing changed. Where could he possibly get cash at the beginning of the season?

Because of this, he started his spring work late, and as luck would have it, there was a frost early in the fall, and he lost nearly all his grain. There was hardly any left for threshing. This meant there was no money to make the payments. The collectors came for their money for the tractor and the truck. He had already paid off the tractor, and only owed a small amount on the truck. He begged them to take the truck back if they had to, but to leave the tractor. He had bought them separately, and had already paid for it. The company didn't see it that way. They said it was a combined debt. He owed for both together. The fine print of the contract was on their side. Besides, they said he owed charges for having to bring out the sheriff two times. He also owed interest on the interest. The few cows he had went for lawyers' fees, which won him nothing; no respect, no property, not even sympathy.

Finally a man arrived with a paper in his hand saying that he and his brother had to sign. Like new born lambs, they did as they were told. They signed, and he and his brother were then given two weeks to get off the property. "Now, my friend," said the farmer. "To whom was I to direct my hatred, my anger? To our lawmakers, who make the laws for us? Or to those who carry out the laws? Those who make the laws are very far removed from us, and we from them. We never see them. And so we vent our anger on those who are sent to inform us of our misfortunes, like the man who brought me the paper to sign. It seemed to me at the time, because of this man, we were going to lose everything we had worked so hard and so long to achieve; that it was he who had turned me and my sick brother out of our home; that it was he who tore my beloved away from me. He had ruined my whole life. And so he became my enemy."

And then the homesteader told me something that totally astounded me, and also made clear his earlier hatred of me. It seems I resembled very closely, in fact was exactly like the man who had delivered the notorious paper which lost him his farm. He was sure I was the same man. Not only because of my appearance, but also because of the way I conducted myself. I didn't smoke, drink or carry on with the others in their socializing. I kept myself apart. So, not only did he hate me for the horrible thing I did, but felt I was a menace and a threat on the work site. On that Monday morning when he threw his axe at me, and the others had to use force to keep him away, this is what had happened:

On the previous day, a Sunday, he and a bunch of friends went off on a drinking binge, and he spent all his money. He felt so terrible, he didn't even bother going home. He spent the night at the home of one of the men. When he woke up in the morning, he found himself outside with just a bundle of hay under his head. The heavy dew had soaked him through and through. He felt so cold and wet that he could barely unfold his limbs. He asked the man at whose home he had spent his last cent, if he could at least have a cup of coffee to try and warm up his thoroughly chilled

body. The man refused him the coffee because he knew he had no money left.

You can imagine the spirit of this man as he set out hungry and tired on the terrible trek to the work camp. By the time he got there, breakfast was over, and so he had to go to work, hungry and cold. And there was I, quiet, distant, stand-offish, not joining the others to have a smoke at break time. He was, of course, tenser than usual, and there I stood, that awful man who drove him from his farm. I was not to be trusted. No, I shouldn't even be allowed to live! Someone must have said one thing about me, he didn't even remember what was said, and he let his axe fly. The others saved my life that day by holding him back, and taking me away from there.

When he found out I wasn't the man from the sherriff's office, he was very upset. He couldn't rest until he explained the reason for his terrible behaviour.

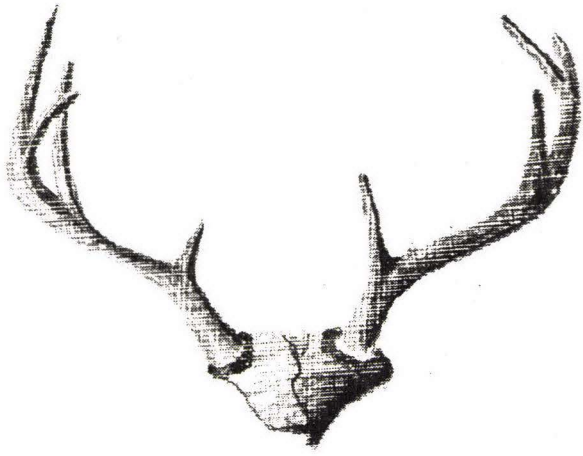
The end of this tale is happier than its beginning. First of all, he got a letter from his girl whom he had not heard from in two years, since she had left her step-parents and gone to the United States. The letter was a very good one. She wrote that she had completed high school with very good marks and had won a medal in music. She was now living in Boston and working as a nurse in a hospital. She had saved some money, and her dearest wish was that he would come to see her. He was ready to go, and he swore to me that he would take care of her and spend his life making sure that she had everything she wanted, so she could forget her unfortunate childhood. He also decided to bring his old mother over. She had outlived her youngest son. He wanted her to enjoy her old age. He also swore that he would stop drinking and change the company he had been keeping for the last couple of years. He wanted to become a respectable man again. He then said good bye to me and told me he considered me one of his finest acquaintances, and that he hoped I would forget that unfortunate event at the work camp.

At first this tale seemed to me one of only poverty and sorrow. I began again to think how hard it really is for a person to settle in a new land; just like the tree which is transplanted into another climate. How many are the hardships one encounters in the struggle to make a home by one's own labour.

The love of the land and the work of the soil brought my thinking back into proper perspective. It's true, there are endless hardships here, but we are clever, and we learn from our mistakes. And that tale held a lesson for me. One should live and think in accordance with one's ability and means and not undertake to do things which are unreasonable and that could in the end lead to one's ruination.

I decided to throw myself into the work with renewed energy, enthusiasm and resolve.

CHAPTER 15



We find a treasure

A Cucumber Made of Stone

Once, when we were ploughing at the construction site, we found a stone axe, which had been used long ago by the native people. I knew it was from a very early period because it didn't have a handle. I really wanted to own this treasure, and was quite prepared to spend three dollars to have it. But it belonged to the man who unearthed it. He sent it to the museum in Ottawa. The incident set me thinking about the primitive people and the early times in this land of ours.

Some time later, while digging a well in our yard, I found a stone which had been carved into the shape of a cucumber.

It is twenty-five years since I became the owner of this stone, and I don't know to this day what the early inhabitants could have used it for. The stone is now the colour of a cucumber as well. More than one farmer in these parts has experienced moments of great excitement at having found a fully grown cucumber in his garden in early spring. There is a saying that goes around here about this cucumber,

and that is, when God decided to introduce the cucumber to man, he first made a sample out of stone, and we had the original prototype.

I found another treasure one day while in the process of building my palace. I had to carry the logs that I needed for the walls, on my back. The bush was so dense, the horses couldn't get through. On one of these wood-cutting trips I found a pair of deer antlers. They were the most beautiful ones I had ever seen. I still have them today.

Another time, when we were breaking new land, we came across the bones of very large animals, which are now extinct. The bones were so enormous that they would jar the plough out of the soil, hampering our work.

It seems that Edenbridge was not born yesterday.

CHAPTER 16



A burning barn

Helping a Brother in Need

It was the spring of 1912. There was a Jewish farmer in Edenbridge, who, with the help of his wife's dowry, became the proud owner of three horses and a buggy. So as not to have to work for someone else, he rented land from a nearby farmer.

One day I decided to set out through the bush to find out where these people whom we only saw periodically, lived. It made no difference to me where I ended up or who I met, as long as I saw some people. After a four-hour ride, that took me around a small lake, I heard a voice singing in a cantor-like style, an old version of a prayer. I felt very excited. First of all I had found what I was looking for: a Jewish farmer. Second of all, I was so hungry, I thought I would faint. Thank God I was saved.

"Hello, hello, where did you come from? Did God steer you here? And look, you are wet to the waist! Come into the house and dry yourself. Surely you are hungry?"

I immediately recognized the 'farmer-talk' of the Edenbridge bush, and within five minutes we were talking like long lost friends.

"Why are you sweating that way?" I asked.

"My wife is away this week and I am baking bread today," he answered. "I hate that job more than death itself. You wouldn't have found me at home today if my neighbour, who lives half a mile away, had had flour to bake her bread. I would have been over there for supper."

"Why are you heating your stove with such long pieces of wood? Look at all the ashes on the floor and all the smoke in the house."

"God bless you. I heard that you are a clever man, so why don't you understand? Long logs make the oven hotter, and that makes the bread bake better. The ashes around the stove don't bother me. There is no real floor in the house, and no ceiling either. So what will get smokey, the roof?"

No one need envy me the supper we ate together. The Edenbridge bachelors' delicacies were very familiar to me ... bread with syrup, and tea. But this freshly baked bread, which had to be put back into the oven to dry out a bit because it was only half baked, was something even I hadn't counted on. Sleeping conditions were no better. When I left that man the next morning, I hesitatingly told him that, in my opinion, he would never make a farmer.

"God spare me!" he replied.

(Today he is somewhere in the United States in the wholesale business. If, by some chance he reads this little anecdote, and remembers back to his early years in Canada, near the Carrot River in Saskatchewan, he may be able to laugh at those experiences.)

This same man, owner of three horses, (we'll call him "R") set out one day with a small collection of machinery and his three horses to help a neighbour who lived 4½ miles away. At midday, he gave his horses a chance to rest, and he visited with some friends nearby. It's not possible to describe the heartwarming experience of a get-together with a kindred spirit in one's own mother tongue, when getting together is such a hardship.

But the merriment did not last long. He looked out and above the tree tops could see black clouds of smoke rising

from the spot where he had left his horses. Everyone in the house leapt up and ran the full half mile in less time than it takes to draw a breath. A pile of straw was burning, and the stall too had already caught fire.

"R" flew into the burning barn to cut the rope which held the horses tied. He tried to save them from the blaze. No sooner had he entered the stall when the roof fell in, and he had to run through the flames to save his own life. The scars that he was left with from that fire can be seen on his body to this day. He saw his horses burned alive and with their death, his hopes also died.

In the days immediately following this incident, "R" and his family were in a state of despair. They could not decide whether to leave Edenbridge, or try to start all over again. They had no means of achieving either. We farmers got together to see what could be done for a brother in need. We decided we'd all take jobs helping a nearby farmer clear his land and then give the money we earned to this family.

We set out May 26, 1912, at 1:30 A.M. There were nineteen men, four horses and six oxen. We were off to uproot the trees that inhabited this thousand year old forest. We would uproot them and turn the soil into productive farm land. It would enable us to make our contribution. We were to earn $52 for the job, and this would be given to our needy brother.

It was a cloudy night, and the men, like the horses, were still half asleep. Because we were so sleepy, we all stood quietly in the wagons. No one spoke. Every once in a while a silent curse would be heard as a wheel got caught in a rut, making the wagon slide off the trail. We had to travel seven miles this way. It was bitterly cold. We couldn't stand in the wagon for long. We kept getting out and walking to keep warm. We proceeded slowly in this miserable fashion waiting for the day to break and for the dark clouds to give way to blue skies and sunshine. At last it became light enough for us to see the warm breath of the horses fill the cold air around us. We comforted one another by assuring ourselves that the cold night would soon give way to a

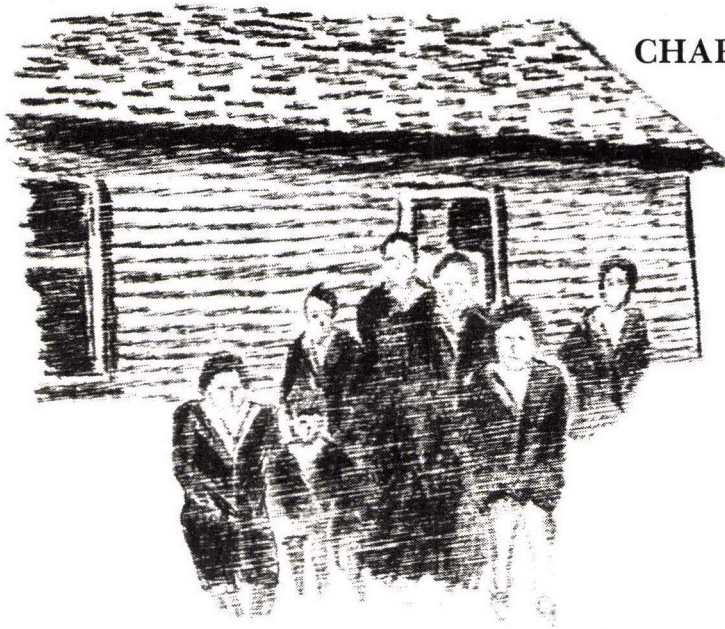
warm day. Someone recited a revolutionary poem remembered from 1905.

At 6: A.M. we could make out smoke curling from the chimney of a house in the distance. We knew they were waiting for us with a cooked breakfast. Right after breakfast we would have to set out with our sharp axes and accomplish the task we had come this far to achieve.

I wish I were a poet so I could describe the looks on the faces of the elderly couple when they caught sight of the nineteen of us. When would they be able to see so many strapping eager young men again? What good fortune! Nineteen able bodied men! The old woman shot a pleading glance at her husband to let the youngsters rest after breakfast, but he was the practical one of the two. He wasn't about to waste one minute of this manpower (and ten fourfooted creatures to boot).

That day was more joyous than a regular holiday. It's hard to explain because a holiday is a day of rest, and this was a day of hard work. Bringing down a forest, roots and all, is no easy task without the help of machinery. And yet this was a day of joy. First of all we would be helping a friend in need. Secondly, we learned the power there was in banding together. One man alone is weak, but together we were strong. We experienced the joys of co-operation. If we could live our lives in the spirit of togetherness, we could overcome the parasites that drained us dry. If we could live co-operatively, and collectively pool our energy, we could withstand exploitation.

The third reason for the joyous quality of the day was that we had lost our fears. When we came here from the big cities, some of us bakers, some shoemakers, all of us making money for someone else, we strove to free ourselves from the bondage of others. We wanted to become farmers and builders. We wanted to become free men. When we were confronted with this thousand year old forest and the endless swamps, we became frightened. We didn't think we'd be able to make a deal with Nature. But when we saw what we could achieve in a day of combined effort, our fears vanished. We were filled with pride at the capabilities of man.



CHAPTER 17

Our "Hall"

We Treat Ourselves to Sholem Aleichem

It was the year 1916 when we founded our Youth Club. Its aim was enlightenment. We called it 'The Educational and Dramatic Club.' Before the club was founded, several of us would get together at each other's home and read to one another. At the meeting where we officially became a club, there were eight people present. Since the majority of the members were young people and English was an easier language for them, we decided on an English name. The eight members soon grew to twelve. We twelve got more pleasure from our Educational Club than some have with triple that membership.

We began holding our meetings once a week in a hall which was 1¼ miles from its closest member, and 4½ miles from the farthest. Since we had no roads, but had to plod through the bush, every mile became a mile and a half. Of course, we didn't have cars at that time either, so the most comfortable way of getting back and forth was by oxen. The quickest way, however, was on foot. The once-a-week trip to the hall became somewhat of a pilgrimage,

but no one had to force himself to go. Quite the contrary, everyone ran there with the speed of a deer. We decided that 2:30 P.M. should be the starting time. Anyone who came late couldn't enter into the discussion. No one ever came late. (Not at all like other Jewish meetings.)

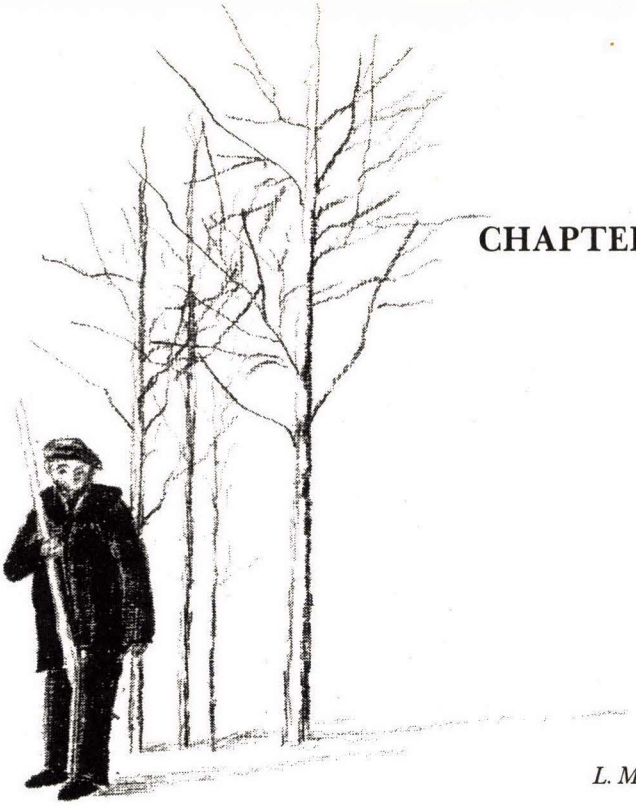
We hadn't become Americanized yet. We hadn't learned the eleventh American commandment: Hurry up! Or the twelfth: Time is Money! or even the thirteenth: Business Before Pleasure! We were still European in our outlook, and could still enjoy the pleasures of a social get together. It was that summer that our beloved Sholem Aleichem's death was still fresh in our minds. We decided to deal with it the way he would have wanted us to: not to grieve over him, but to read his writings and laugh.

On this particular day, it was decided that we would not have a discussion, but would instead read one of his stories. I was asked to be the first reader. I asked my audience what they wanted to hear, and they left the decision up to me. What to choose? All his works were good. I decided to just open the book and begin reading. It opened at "My First Romance", a lengthy selection, and everyone was delighted. A love story. The title itself got the young hearts beating.

It was a chance for my young audience to get even with me. Whenever I read from one of our favourite authors, Sholem Aleichem, Winchevsky, A. Raisen, D. Edelstadt, I. Bovshover, Rosenfeld, Peretz, Frug, Dinezan, Tolstoy, Krapotkin, etc., I would always choose a short piece. My theory was that young people must not have their appetites satisfied in one sitting. I wanted them to hunger for more. To read long passages would kill the appetite.

When I began reading, a hush fell over the room. One could feel the respect for the deceased author in the air. Everyone refrained from laughing even at the funny parts. After a while, my audience became restless because they all had something they wanted to say. So I pretended I had to rest my throat. This gave the group a chance to express itself, and release some of their pent-up excitement. They didn't need a second invitation. A controversial discussion ensued.

Soon I saw that the discussion was veering far off course. Our plan for that day was to read and enjoy ourselves, to laugh and have fun. So I called out that I still had more to read, and that they could carry on their discussion to their hearts' content later on. The room settled down. They were all anxious to hear the ending. When the secret of the story was revealed, everyone broke out laughing. They all but rolled on the floor with laughter. And so we accomplished our goal for that day.



CHAPTER 18

L. Mallach

Grandfather Winchevsky in Edenbridge

It was the war years (1914-18), and nearly all of the earth's crust was aflame. People were driven mad by the insanity of the war. Everyone was part of the insanity: those who fought in the war; those who watched others being vandalized; those who watched people kill one another, not knowing why; and those who were silent. There we sat in Edenbridge, completely cut off from the rest of the world. We would frequently gather in our hall to talk about the worries we carried about in our hearts. The talks alleviated the heaviness we felt about the war. But soon the fears and worries would mount, and we would be drawn together again to the hall, as if by a magnet. It was here we would attempt to lighten our burden before going back to our huts in the wilderness.

One day I was detained on my way to the hall, and arrived as the proceedings were already underway. I could hear someone letting off steam:

"How come? How is it possible? What kind of a story is this?" Someone had received a letter from a cousin in

Montreal accusing us of being leeches, interested only in sucking others dry. And, as if that were not bad enough, we were also accused of being swindlers: "You went to be farmers. You consider yourselves honest folk. You couldn't bear the injustices being perpetrated against the poor people, and yet you are no better! A dab of butter, the price of gold! It is impossible to buy an egg; more costly even than gold. The price of meat is insane. What are you doing there? Our children can't even be treated to a glass of whole milk, let alone an egg."

In another corner a heated discussion was also underway. Someone had received a message from London via New York that a bomb had struck the neighbourhood where his two sisters lived. Many women and children were killed there, and many were driven crazy with fear. One of those who had lost her mind in that attack was the speaker's sister.

How was all this possible? What was happening? Everyone became enraged. If we are living in a civilized world, why are women and innocent children being wounded and killed? How could a man in his right mind kill a child? Certainly children couldn't be held responsible for the ills of mankind.

From a third corner, I could hear a lovely melody and words that echoed the melody: "Eight shillings a week. Too little to live on, too much to let us die!"

Another group huddled together and sang the same song. Sad, long faces echoing the words and music of the others.

Still another group was bemoaning the lot of the farmers. "The marrow is being squeezed from our bones. The prices for our produce is being lowered to the barest minimum. There is nothing left for us. We get twenty-five cents for two dozen eggs, and the same twenty-five cents for two pounds of butter. No cash! That would be asking too much. Neither do we get paid in flour, sugar or shoes. We get chicory, pepper, cabbage or licorice in exchange. As for prices, whatever the storekeeper decides to give us, that's what we have to take. If we complain, he says 'Take your butter to Paris!' And they call us leeches and scoundrels!"

Over there, near the door, there is more fuming and fussing. Hands are gesticulating wildly. They are engrossed as if they were studying the Talmud. "Civilization has gone mad. Even the religious leaders who claim to have connections with the heavens, aren't doing anything to stop the war. If anything, they are making matters worse. They say special prayers that our armies should kill our enemies. Do they care that human blood will flow like water?"

One middle-aged woman, her face quite wrinkled, though one could see she was younger than she looked, was seething. "They, the leaders, could just as easily have arranged for there not to be a war."

"You'll never make a good statesman," a young man, new to the country, interrupted the woman as she spoke. From yet another corner shouts of anger could be heard. The noise was deafening. Everyone had complaints. The tragedies from across the sea were weighing heavily on everyone's heart. Everyone was feeling the effects of the war—a war no better or worse than any other war—death, hunger, poverty, pestilence, revolution, civil disobedience, needs. The dues of war fell mostly on the heads of ordinary men. I felt as if I'd dropped in on a battlefield. I tried to find someone with a happy face. I have to admit sour faces are not to my liking. I looked around to see if I could find one cheerful soul. And, as the saying goes, "Seek and ye shall find." I came across a man who felt the same way I did. We wanted to find a way to change the mood of the gathering. We wanted to drive the sourness from everyone's face. He suggested we look for something in a book. Maybe that would change the mood in the room. I told him what we had in our sparse library. He rejected everything I mentioned. When I suggested some poems by Grandfather Winchevsky, he fairly wept with joy. "Oh, good. Give me '*A Bezem Un A Ker*' (A Clean Sweep)."

Before I could get the book from the shelf, word spread throughout the hall. Murmuring could be heard from every corner "A Bezem Un A Ker." From one corner could be heard the beginnings of the poem:

"Children, can you hear the rumblings
People stirring everywhere,
Workingmen, becoming militant..."

Over there the strains of:

"No more clouds, no more bitterness
No more...
Nothing now but light and freedom,
All dark shadows, gone from view
As though freedom had been ours since the beginning
of time..."

Before long the sour faces turned to faces of joy and hope. The rafters resounded with:

"We have no use for idlers..." etc.

From another corner came:

"Then man won't bow down to unfair laws
Nor kneel before false idols
No longer shall he let himself be
Incited to take up arms."

When it came time to go home, I was beseiged with requests to borrow the book. "I'll return it tomorrow." "No, give it to me, I'll memorize the whole thing." Everyone wanted the book for himself. Since I couldn't give it to everyone, I suggested that we all stay another half an hour and read the poem together and commit it to memory. In those days we were fresh, alive, full of hope, not preoccupied with material things. There was enough time and energy for affairs of the soul. To memorize a poem was a simple task. Before the half hour was up, voices could be heard throughout the hall reciting the beloved poem. Most important of all was that the poem lifted our spirits and infused us with love and hope. We left with renewed energy and happiness. All along the three mile hike home, we could hear voices resounding through the wilderness:

"We have no use for 'titled' men
'Titled' men, no more!"

Jewish Writers Seek Us Out

One particular summer, we were paid a visit by a man from New York. His name was Noah Steinberg. He was a critic and a writer.

"How did you manage, dear friend, to find this secluded corner of the world, Edenbridge?" we asked him.

"It's like this," he replied. "For us New Yorkers, Montreal and Toronto are also small secluded little corners. Once one sets out, one continues. From the east, I proceeded to Winnipeg, and in Winnipeg I discovered there were more stops ahead. So the tour continues."

Steinberg stayed with us for two weeks. The farmers, and even more so, the farmers' wives, were very hospitable. When a person came to visit, he was made to feel very much at home. For those who travelled great distances and arrived weary, Edenbridge was a wonderful place to rest. It was very quiet and rich in the gifts of nature.

He delivered six lectures. He introduced us to Jewish celebrities and classicists. He spoke of the hardships of the workingman in the large cities. His visit marked the first time the stone wall of distance, which kept Edenbridge out of touch with the rest of the world, was broken through.

Some time later, a telephone call came from Saskatoon from the dramatist and journalist, L. Mallach, asking if we would like him to come to Edenbridge.

"It would be our greatest pleasure," we replied. "But how do you think you will find Edenbridge?"

"I don't know, but there must be a way to get to you."

"Oh, yes. We can be found. But how did you hear about us? And what makes you want to come here?"

It seems that friend Steinberg had left a thread of yarn from Edenbridge in Montreal. Some interested people from the cultural and intellectual circles of Montreal, whom Mallach was visiting, gave him a piece of that yarn, and he was drawn by it, to see us.

Mallach spent three evenings with us. He didn't seem at all like a guest from a faraway place. He was a homey,

gentle man who seemed as if he'd been with us from the start. The first evening he brought regards from the thirty thousand Jewish colonists in Brazil and Argentina. Until his talk, these people seemed very remote from us. They now felt very close. As he told us of all the trials and tribulations they had to endure as early pioneers, he could have been talking about us. However, when he spoke of their enemies, the locusts and bandits, both of which invaded those colonists mercilessly, we knew he was talking about them. We had our own kind of enemy. One thing was clear to us after his talk and that was, pioneers, wherever they settled, even if they chose to settle on the moon, would have to overcome their own special kind of difficulties.

The second evening the hall was packed with eager listeners. He introduced us to the Jewish literature of Argentina and to their newspapers. The paper called *The Press*, was wonderful. He showed us a section of the paper where a theatre was advertising its latest production. It welcomed everyone except those lowly creatures, the slave traders. He read some of his own work to us. But here I must stop. My pen can't possibly convey the feelings evoked by his poems, particularly "The White Veil" which dealt with the Spanish inquisition, and one entitled "Two Friends." These moved the audience tremendously.

There was an elderly man sitting next to me with whom I had had an earlier conversation about the kinds of things he liked to read. I asked him how he liked what he had just heard. "It's sentimental garbage... suitable for women," he insisted, ignoring the tears which dropped steadily from his cheeks. On my other side sat a young mother. She didn't move a muscle. She sat there, a rose pinned to her dress. Tears fell like raindrops onto the rose. It seemed to me the rose was growing.

The third evening was dedicated to our children. For the first time in the history of Edenbridge, the children were being honoured and entertained. They were ecstatic! He read his own stories to them and told them tales of children

he had visited in other countries. He told them how these other children lived and the hardships they had to endure. The children sat with their mouths open as if to drink in every word he uttered. He had them mesmerized with his tales. The children responded in Yiddish, with all the enthusiasm only children can exude. (May they grow like trees in the forest... tall, strong and free!)

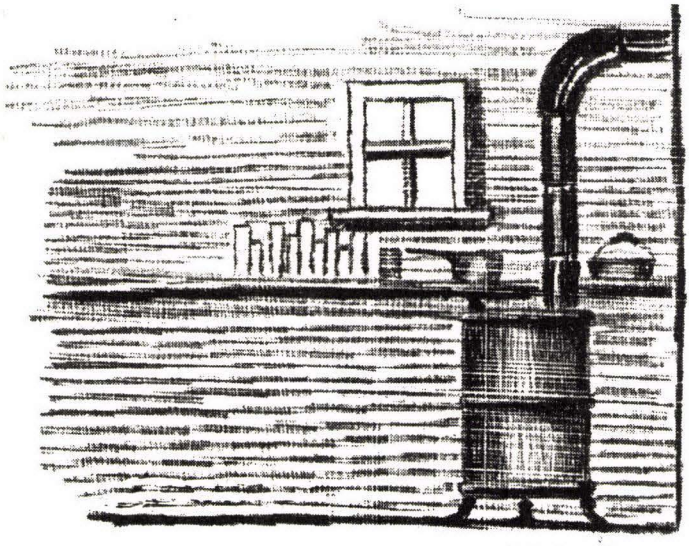
I'm not sure, but I think I saw his eyes fill with tears of joy. He discovered that evening that there were many others just like himself. He was not alone in his state of upheaval. He simply couldn't tear himself away from the children. A mother of one of the children blamed our terrible suffering here in Edenbridge on its miserable location. She was saying goodbye to him: "We're far away from everyone, isolated as in a jail cell, not knowing what goes on in the rest of the world, and the rest of the world oblivious to our existence. We must, with our own tired and weak spirits," she added wearily, "break through the 'China Wall'."

He offered to return and share with us whatever of his life we wanted to share with him.

Dear friend, gentle soul. Through you, we experienced such closeness, such compassion.

And Mallach did return on one other occasion and spent three more days with us. Again we prospered from his visit. We prospered in warmth, humanity and knowledge. His untimely death affected us all very deeply.

CHAPTER 19



Interior of a room

Baron de Hirsch's Birthday

Sunday evening, December 31, 1931.

Notwithstanding the bitter frost, the farmers' hall was filled to capacity. All the chairs were taken, and most of the children had to stand. The hall was decorated with paintings. When the curtain rose, a huge portrait of Baron de Hirsch was unveiled. Sheaves of grain, adorned by stalks of corn, surrounded the picture. Above the stage was a huge poster upon which was printed:

IN CELEBRATION OF THE 100TH BIRTHDAY OF BARON DE HIRSCH, AND THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE JEWISH COLONIZATION ASSN. (J.C.A.)

All eyes were on the portrait. One could tell by the looks on their faces that everyone felt admiration for this man. He had achieved what he had striven for, and this was his reward.

The chairman, who was one of our first pioneers (he had come to Edenbridge as a young child) opened the program. A biography of Baron de Hirsch, written by L. Rosenberg, was then read by another farmer. This was followed by the singing of a folk song called "The Plough," by a group of

young men and women. Their singing reflected everything the composer intended to convey, because they had experienced the words of the song first-hand.

One of the singers told us how he, after being here for a year, could no longer stand the boredom. He thought he should have some horses, and decided to go to Winnipeg to buy them. They were cheaper there, but still cost more than the cash he had available. In Winnipeg, he had to sell his gold watch and his wife's bracelet which they had brought with them from Africa. For all his wheeling and dealing, he was able to accumulate the grand sum of thirty-five dollars. He had the good fortune to meet a man called Finklestein who told him about Baron de Hirsch. De Hirsch had left his millions to Jewish settlers. He had formed an organization called the J.C.A. which had an office in Winnipeg. That was the first Edenbridge heard about the J.C.A.

When the reading of the biography of Baron de Hirsch and his wife Clara was finished, everyone was asked to stand and honour the man who had made it possible for Jews to continue being farmers. Not even one child remained seated.

Next on the program was a children's performance of recitations and songs.

A woman who had been farming here for thirty years rose to speak when the children were finished. She told how, in the early days, the women of the neighbouring towns used to prod her with questions like: "What are you doing in that wilderness? Why do you stay there? You'll never get rich or prosper there. All you may manage to achieve is to live out your days alone in that wilderness. Oh yes, the occasional Indian may stumble into your life but, like the Indian, you will become totally uncivilized. If and when you decide to go back to the city, you will no longer be acceptable there." But the love of the land kept her here. And she could see now how wrong they had been. She never came to be like the average city woman, but then they couldn't be like her either.

Another woman spoke on behalf of the women's organization. She too had experienced the same lack of compassion from the ladies of the surrounding towns. But she had never been afraid of becoming uncivilized. People who had come from the universities and factories of New York, London and Johannesberg, wouldn't lose their civility so easily. What did concern her though was the children. She was worried that they would grow up uncultured, wild, unsophisticated. She could see now that she needn't have worried. Our children were not uncivilized, quite the contrary. They could measure up to children anywhere in the world. In the children of Edenbridge, she declared proudly, you could find every type of individual: those who went off to high school and university, and then came home to be instantly converted into farmers. They knew that profession perfectly. Some, despite their high learning, never left the farm. They were used to the land and loved it. There were those children who had graduated from our own university, the university of life. They had mastered all the hardships of pioneering. Those of our children who had never learned the alphabet, could be taken into any high school and asked most anything. They could tell you how to build things, be blacksmiths, glaziers, fix ploughs, be shoemakers, tailors, even farmers. They could also be engineers, dismantling entire machines and repairing them as if they were trained mechanics.

When one of the children stood up to recite a poem by H. Bialik called "Our Garden," in which he says, "you can find anything you want or need in our garden," I thought, how appropriate. When one looks at the children of Edenbridge, one can honestly say you can find everything in our garden!

One of the young men addressed the group on behalf of the Young Judeans. He said: "If Baron de Hirsch's dream was to have the young people carry on the work of their parents as farmers and pioneers, then we, the youth of Edenbridge undaunted by the hardships, have helped make his dream come true."

One farmer, who had worked the land for forty years, and had once been an official for the J.C.A., told us what they had to put up with from 'green farmers.' They would dismiss all help, suggestions, and ideas that were offered in their new venture as farmers. Each one insisted he knew more than his advisors. That's why he thought the J.C.A. should give its assistance to the native born youth. They didn't need advice, they needed money to establish communities.

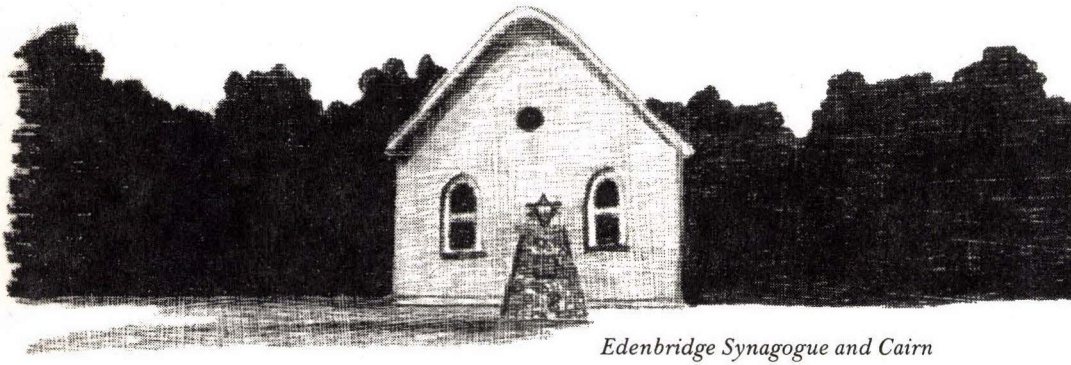
L. Rosenberg, from the J.C.A., brought the evening's proceedings to a close. I can't quote his speech, because he created an image. I will try to describe that image to you. He talked about a kind of collection, made up of bits and pieces of a machine, each doing its own specific job. As each piece did its work, the machine automatically assembled itself into one smoothly running unit.

One thought kept going through my head all evening. It seems he was thinking about the same thing. And that was the incredible patience of the farmer. He said he had no words to express his feelings about this. He was amazed that they, young and old alike, could sit glued to their seats from nine in the evening until well past midnight, totally involved in the program, as if a great opera was being performed on their stage.

A suggestion that a telegram be sent to the head office of the J.C.A. in Montreal in appreciation of the evening, was unanimously approved.

The evening ended with a glass of tea, an Edenbridge custom. A little bite to eat went with it. Someone began singing a song; someone else joined in. Before long, everyone was singing, and the party came back to life full force. At half past two in the morning, the festivities finally came to an end. Everyone toasted the occasion enthusiastically: "Let us, here in Edenbridge, have a 200th anniversary celebration honouring Baron de Hirsch's 200th birthday, one hundred years from now!"

CHAPTER 20



Edenbridge Synagogue and Cairn

In the Beginning

When this tale takes place, sixty farmers had already settled in Edenbridge. We had developed our own little civilization. We had a synagogue, a hall for meetings (though it didn't have a roof yet) a *shoichet* (kosher butcher) a *moyl* (one who performs religious circumcisions), a teacher, and all the necessary farming paraphernalia. Though we had nearly everything we needed, one important thing was missing: unity.

This lack of unity made it impossible for us to get ahead. If one person said 'day,' it was certain another would say 'night.' If one said it was winter and very cold, another would point out very clearly, with good examples to fortify his proof, that it really was summer and very hot. This situation was not the fault of the common people, but rather our leaders. Our leaders were brilliant, but arrogant and loud-mouthed, who could, and would, shout down any opposition. Battles, hostilities, arguments, disagreements.

God only knows why we had to disagree. Everyone had more work to do than he could handle. There were shacks

and barns to build, an ancient forest to clear, a few yards at a time. No amount of work seemed to make a dent in it. There was no reason to envy one's neighbour. No one had anything more than the other. But somehow the squabbling became part of our life.

Perhaps the fault lay with the circumstances that brought us together. Edenbridgers came from the four corners of the earth. The Europeans were mostly Lithuanians, but the others came from everywhere else. The first group came from Africa in 1906 and called themselves the 'Africaners'. The second group, labelled the 'New Yorkers' came from the United States a couple of years later. The third group came from England and were given the name the 'Londoners'.

Maybe the dissatisfaction of the Africaner had to do with his difficulty adapting from the heat of his homeland to the freezing conditions of the new land. Maybe the New Yorker had trouble coming down from the lofty civilization of that cosmopolitan centre to earth, real earth, mud, in fact. Maybe the Londoner, being used to the hustle and bustle of Whitechapel, the heavily polluted fogs, the noise of horse and carts being drawn through the paved streets, now had to breathe the fresh air of the country and hear only the sounds of the birds singing, or the breeze rustling the leaves on the trees.

Maybe they all missed their old homes and their old problems. Or maybe the drop in standard of living (our living conditions were very primitive) was affecting us. Our huts were built out of logs which we cut ourselves and then plastered the cracks with lime. They were so tiny one could barely move around in them. The houses made of "lumber" were no better. They were built in a hurry so shelter could be provided as soon as possible. Once one moved in, they never seemed to get properly finished.

There was never enough food. If one managed to produce his own butter or eggs, he had to sell them in order to buy the other necessities which could not be produced on the farm. There were no real stores. Where a small shop did exist, there were no necessities there for the farmer. The

tracks of the animals became our highways. We followed the trails made by the deer. Every mile became two miles as swamps had to be circumvented. Our 'limousines' with their monstrous horns, travelled at the great speed of one mile an hour. On our homemade roads, they couldn't even go that fast.

As for our livelihood, the way we made our millions, and the way we had to budget it, as you can probably tell from the previous chapters, was quite a task. It was as difficult for us 'green farmers' to make a dollar as it was to part the Red Sea. Exploitation was rampant. There could be no talk of organizing ourselves. We lived miles apart from one another, separated by thick bush. Months went by without contact. You can imagine what kind of luxuries life offered us.

Still, we were not intimidated by all this. We were so enthusiastic about the possibilities, these difficulties didn't seriously affect us. We dreamt of the time when we would at last be free from our troubles. No more dense forest, no more impossible swamps. We'd have well-built roads, good houses, with all the conveniences. All this would be the result of our own hard work. We'd no longer be dependent on the vultures from the big cities, who waited for every opportunity to exploit us. We'd be free of bosses and foremen for whom we provided the necessities of life, though we couldn't spare as much as a taste for ourselves. We hoped that in later years we would be our own bosses in our own homes. No one then would have the power to drive us off our land.

We had made plans for our colony while we were still in London. We didn't want it to be just like every other settlement, each person stuck off somewhere by himself in a corner of the wilderness, struggling all alone with the hardships this kind of life can afford. Our dream was to make Edenbridge a showplace of co-operative life. We wanted to live and work together in friendship. Work becomes so much easier and more pleasant when shared with friends. Our dream was to make the song: *Arbet Macht Dos Leban Zees* (Work Makes Life Sweet) come alive at Eden-

bridge. Our dreams were shattered. When we got here we discovered that we couldn't fashion our settlement after those in Palestine. The conditions here were totally different. Every homesteader who wanted to make the land his own, had to live six months of the first three years on his own land and cultivate a specific area. The best way we could do that in those early days was to work each property collectively. We would all get together on one acreage, do the necessary work there, and then move on to the next. It would have been impossible to do it alone. Our equipment was very primitive, and only the very finest quality of manpower, one of zest and great energy, could compensate for that.

"Man Cannot Live by Bread Alone"

There is a popular saying that man cannot live by bread alone. And that is true. Man must also have intellectual and spiritual food, no matter how difficult it may seem to come by. That was why we made sure we had our meetings every Monday and Thursday, sometimes even on Wednesday.

As soon as we arrived, we discovered some very important problems that had to be dealt with. For example: If one had to spend six months on his land, some sort of shack would be needed to provide shelter. He'd be stuck there alone, with no roads, not even paths or trails, no telephones, no neighbours, no wife or children. A man could get sick and not be found until he'd frozen to death. It was worse for the women we brought here. Out of nowhere, it seemed, they'd begin to moan and before long, they'd be in labour. What could we do? The doctor was miles away. The hospital still farther. The proceedings, however, couldn't be postponed. Our 'flyers' would take four days to get to the doctor. And even so, who could afford the luxury of a doctor? Their fees were more than we could afford. Because of this, we had to invent a system of communication. We came upon the concept of a 'live' telephone. Each person had to make sure he was in contact with his nearest neighbour; that neighbour with his, and so on, so that the

communication lines were open to all corners of the community. Within a day, everyone was aware of what was happening in the whole settlement, and any help that was needed or any good news that needed to be shared, could be passed along via our 'live' telephone.

Another problem that needed attention was the education of the children. It was our fear that we'd raise our children with no more awareness of Jewish history than the Indians who lived near us in the wilderness. We weren't worried that they wouldn't learn the language of the country. The government saw to that. It was a Yiddish education that we had to provide. Without this we would create a gap, a barrier between the children and their parents. The children would grow apart from their parents, by not knowing their history or their language. And if our children met up with other Yiddish-speaking children who understood what the Yiddish language meant to its people, they would be angry with their parents for depriving them of their heritage. Those parents who felt it wasn't necessary to provide this, but felt instead that one could be a good neighbour, and a good ball player without knowing Yiddish, were making a serious mistake.

They would pay dearly for that mistake in the future. Those of us who felt strongly about a Yiddish education for our children, were confronted with another problem; a teacher had to be found.

True, when we first arrived there was an intelligent young man who lived in the settlement with his wife and children, who was the religious leader of the community. He was the *moyl*, the *shoichet* and the *melamud* (teacher) to several of the children. That wouldn't have been so difficult if he had had the time to take care of all his posts. It was hardly worth his time for the few dollars the settlers could afford to pay him for his services. He had acres of wilderness to clear. Besides all this, he was an agent for a washing machine company, and an agent for a matzoh company at Passover time. (This enabled the Jews to have at least their matzohs here in the wilderness.) Despite all these jobs, he barely

had *vasser oif kasha* (water in which to cook his cereal). He'd certainly not make his millions taking care of the correspondence for the *Greeneh* (newcomers) that needed attending to. As a matter of fact, most of the time he'd have to use his own stamps to mail the letters because the new farmer couldn't afford them.

This man simply didn't have the time to teach the children of the colony, except perhaps those few who lived very close to his farm. For those who lived far away, it was impossible. It was simply not feasible for them to walk that distance after their regular school hours, then to return home late at night through the thick bush.

We also had our own personal needs to take care of. Our soul food. We decided to set up an amateur theatre group and a library of books and newspapers. We wanted to provide an environment that would serve our intellectual and spiritual needs. Should there be a happy event in the colony we'd need a place to hold the celebration. And since we weren't very old, we'd occasionally like to have a dance. Every undertaking was very difficult because our pockets were never full. (And aren't to this day!) We would try to accommodate people with families of small children. It was even harder for them to get away, so we'd use their homes most often. Besides, their homes were generally larger. We usually walked to the meetings as it was faster than using the oxen on our primitive trails. The meetings were held in the evenings because our days were too busy. Our meetings were always well attended.

A Colony Marches to a Meeting

This story would be incomplete without a description of a farmer's 'palace' where the meetings were held. I'm remembering one meeting in particular. It was a cold, still winter night. The temperature hovered at 45 degrees below zero. The stars were bright in the sky. Three of us, my brother, my neighbour, Raphael Abramsky, and myself were ready for some relaxation after a hard day's work in snow up to our knees, chopping down trees in the bush.

Our minds needed some activity though our bodies needed to rest. We stocked up on plenty of firewood, took off our frozen work clothes, and stretched out to rest on our hard benches. It was heaven! The kerosene lamp barely threw enough light for the three of us, but we each buried ourselves in something of interest, not noticing the discomfort. One read a newspaper, to see what was happening in the world; the others were engrossed in their books.

There we were, luxuriating in our own little heaven when we heard music coming from the bush. Could it be the birds singing? No, it was the wrong time of the year. The sounds grew louder and louder and soon it was loud enough to wake the dead. We knew then it was a group of men on their way to a meeting. Joe Pullman who lived farthest east, walked three miles and picked up the two Springman brothers. They continued on for a mile and a half and added Zalman Flax to their entourage. We, the settlers farthest west joined the group and together set out for the mile and a half trek to Isaac Cohen's house.

"All the waters run into the sea, yet the sea is never full." That was the way it was at Isaac's house. We named his place 'The Inn,' (because we met there very often). What Edenbridge would have been like without Isaac, is hard to imagine.

However, this meeting was not at Isaac's. He joined us on our trek. It was still 2½ miles to the meeting place from here. On the way, we picked up two more men. The path was only wide enough for two people, so we formed a line and walked two abreast. Pullman led the group. He was a robust young man with long legs. He loved to sing. Though he could hardly carry a tune, he fancied himself Caruso the second. He was also a prankster and would periodically lengthen his stride, making the rest of us run to keep up. His companion was Raphael Abramsky. He was so light on his feet, no sooner did his right foot hit the ground than his left foot was up in the air. He had no difficulty keeping up with his partner's tomfoolery.

Zalman Flax was part of the next pair. A fine man, not too tall, and heavily set. He always had a pipe in his mouth. It gave him much pleasure. For him, it took the place of a good book. He had the habit of sitting on the floor of his house (can you imagine!), hold open the door of his stove, and let the smoke of his pipe drift into it. I once happened to drop in on him unannounced, and found him entranced with the smoke rings to such an extent that he didn't even notice my arrival. When I asked him what kind of pleasure he got from that sort of thing, he looked at me in strange disbelief. How could I even ask such a question? Imagine my not knowing how fascinating it was to watch the blue smoke of a pipe being sucked up by the stove. His eyes were always moist, as if full of tears. The half of his mouth that wasn't occupied with the pipe, was smiling. This pose made it difficult to really know if the look on his face was that of happiness or sadness. His feet were turned out 'à la Charlie Chaplin'. Because of this, he took up more than his share of the path. His companion, R. Springman, was much taller than him. Together they looked like Mutt and Jeff. Springman didn't mind losing some of the foot room to his partner. He needed more room for his hands than for his feet. Like a good Jew, when he spoke, his hands were as active as his mouth.

The next pair was made up of my brother and B. Springman. Springman was a man who very rarely read anything. The rabbi in the small town in Lithuania where he came from, told him that a *Goy* read, but a Jew learns from a *Seyfer* (religious book). And what Jewish boy wanted to be labelled a *Goy*; so he didn't read. I was in the pair walking behind them, and from what I could hear of their conversation, this man was asking my brother endless questions. Why are there crises in the world? Why does money become scarce and then disappear? Why is there vast unemployment? Why can't people afford to buy things? Why are there robberies? Why do people wander the streets looking for a piece of bread? Who hides the money, he asked my brother. He couldn't understand why one year the price of wheat was $1.00 a bushel and 18½ cents the next. Did people stop

eating? I could hear my brother trying to clarify the whole thing for him. But how can one deliver a lecture in political economics to a man who wants to know everything there is to know on the subject, and have all the answers by the time he completes his walk to a meeting? This man eventually became a passionate reader. Though he may even have fancied himself a sort of professor in political economics, I wouldn't go quite that far.

Isaac and I were the next pair. Also not too well matched. I was tall and thin, and he was short and broad shouldered. We had difficulty keeping in step. He stomped down heavily with each step. This way of walking made him periodically expel a gust of warm air which froze as soon as it left his mouth, forming a miniature iceberg. This blocked off the air to his nose, making breathing very difficult for him. He looked as though he'd have to sit down and catch his breath. But the man who was walking behind us, and who fancied himself a cantor, would start singing, and Isaac, instead of sitting, would leap forward, and take off as quickly and gracefully as a deer. It was just the opposite for me. I was very light on my feet, and found walking very easy. I was dressed very lightly (we didn't have any heavy winter clothes).

The rhythm of our footsteps on the cold snow made the sound of music. It was as if we were being accompanied on our walk by one of the grandest orchestras of London. The sounds made me almost dance my way down the path. My eyes were glued to the sky. It seemed to me I could see angels poking their heads out between the sea of stars that bedecked the heavens. It was as though the angels wanted to see if there really were two-legged creatures in this wilderness. They seemed curious to know if such a forest was suitable for people and why we had come such a great distance to disturb the homes of the creatures who had lived here in peace for thousands of years.

Suddenly I heard the sound of music ringing through the woods. People were singing. The discussion that had been taking place on political economics had reached the point where the speaker could best express himself by

singing, "No, no one shall set us free; neither God, nor hero. We will achieve our freedom with our own weapons, with our own strengths..." The singing spread like wildfire. The volume rocked the forest and made the angels pull their heads back into the heavens.

This group of people, with their boundless energy, though deterred by insult and disrespect, would not be defeated by hunger or cold. This group would make their mark in this world. Their hopes and dreams would come to pass!

M. Shallit's 'Palace'

Before we get to the meeting, I must introduce you to the farmer at whose home the meeting will take place, and to his palace. This farmer, who is our colony's religious authority, is M. Shallit. He is a tall, handsome, broad-shouldered man. There is always a mild mannered expression on his face. None of us has ever seen anything upset him. His wife is an intelligent, good woman, and his children, one boy and two girls, are very well brought up. This farmer, who is also the *shoichet* (butcher), *moyl* (performs religious circumcisions), the teacher, sales agent and writer (his writings play an important part in the history of Edenbridge), has made just enough money from all these occupations to build himself a 'palace' out of boards. His furniture consisted of a table, a couple of chairs, a stove for cooking, a heater, a box of wood, and a book case full of books and religious works. At night the table and chairs would be put outside to make room for a bed, which was brought in for the family to sleep on. This man struggled and struggled, and one day came up with an invention as ingenious as Marconi and his radio. He saved all the boxes that the matzohs for Passover came in, and all the papers that things came wrapped in, and somehow miraculously put them together, adding a new wing to his 'palace'. With ingenious planning, this could accommodate a bed. So what if it was a tight squeeze? The boards and papers could give a little, and the bed would somehow fit. And so this farmer became our first bourgeois. He had a two-room

house. (Thanks to this 'new wing,' Shallit could accommodate another farmer and his family for several months, until their home could be completed.)

It was in this house that the meeting was to take place. The closest neighbours were already there. They were waiting for us, those farthest east. They weren't sure if we, the 'townshippers,' as we called ourselves, would show up. As soon as they heard the singing, they knew we were quite close by, and they began assembling the 'chesterfield'. It was a long board that stretched the entire length of the house, and was wedged in so close to the door, it could only be partially opened. We all had to squeeze in sideways. We knew this 'palace' by heart and decided it would be best if we entered one at a time, like Joseph's brothers in Egypt. But for quite a different reason. We didn't want to let the frost in right along with us, and chill the feet of those already seated in the house. It would be best if we slipped in quickly, one at a time, closing the door at once. Once the first six people were inside, the place was already packed as tightly as a can of sardines. The door couldn't open any farther. There stood Isaac, his broad shoulders halfway in and halfway out. One of his buttons was caught on the door knob, and he stood there hopelessly stuck. We couldn't move any farther away from the door than we already were. All the while heat was being lost from the house.

I could hear Zalman Flax making a suggestion: If our host and his wife got into bed, that would free up some space. His idea, or at least part of it, was acted upon. The mother and her three children went into the bedroom. And sure enough the place became quite spacious.

This meeting was called to choose an arbitration committee which would negotiate with the government whenever necessary. Like all our meetings, this was a heated one. There were some who were against the whole idea. What kind of falling out could possibly take place between people who have nothing to argue about? No one even had an inheritance he could be asked to share. Other than that, there could be no way of coming by any money. The men

and their wives seemed to be getting along just fine. So why waste our time?

On the other hand, there were those who felt quite strongly that we were obliged to set up some sort of judiciary system to settle any disputes should they arise between neighbours. One man, an avid socialist, told us that he had learned through his study of socialism, most often quarrels occur between people because there is something they need and can't have. There is only one way to avert these quarrels, he said, and that was to put an end to poverty.

There was one more item on the agenda, and that was to set up an emergency brigade, just in case someone got sick and unable to tend to his chores. This item met with no opposition at all, and was settled very quickly. The meeting ended at the unusually early hour of 1:30 A.M.

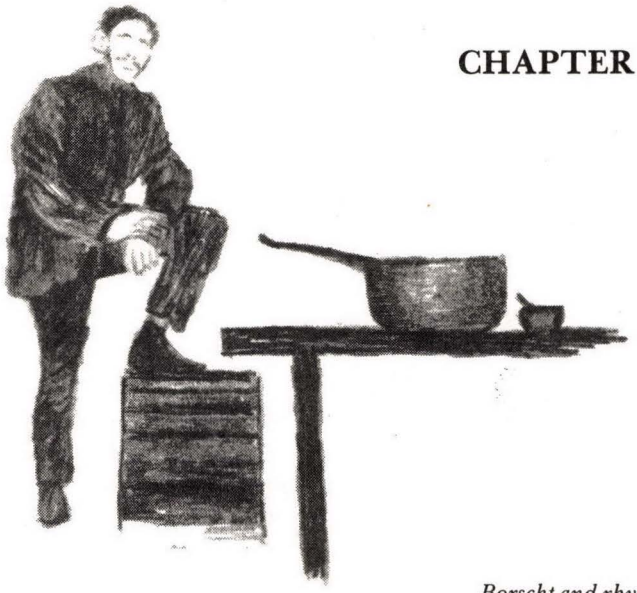
In our colony people didn't like to go home so early. Mrs. Shallit was a very clever woman, and with the accuracy of a mathematical genius, she figured out that young people who walk the distance this group had, in the bitter cold of winter, could not be lacking in appetite. She had prepared food for her guests. The problem was she couldn't serve them because there was no room to set the table. Two people had to go into the bedroom so that she and her two daughters could get to the refreshments. Then the musical chairs began. As soon as someone had finished with his or her snack, they went into the bedroom to let someone else come into the main room to get theirs. We really needed some champion chess player (like Abe Yanofsky from Winnipeg) to keep the moves straight, and to make sure that both Isaac and Shallit, both being broad shouldered, didn't try to pass one another in the narrow doorway and cause a traffic jam.

A most striking development was not revealed until quite some time after the meeting. There were always arguments taking place throughout the colony. They could be violent as thunder and lightning storms, or volcanic eruptions, landslides and infernos. Over here you could hear one person shrieking his complaints to another. Someone else

would outshriek the first complainer. A moment later, however, the storm would pass and peace would return, just as if there had been no storm at all. Back would come the good humour, the laughter and the kibbutzing. As long as our leaders didn't get involved, the people could settle their disputes quite well on their own. And in this way our quarreling always managed to stay within our four walls, hidden from the outside world. However, this remarkable incident that occurred within our ranks, had the potential of exposing us to the public eye. "*Oi Vey*," would we Edenbridgers have received publicity! But that was not our fate.

Seeing as I've led you this far, aroused your curiosity about the incident and its outcome, I'll tell the whole story in detail.

CHAPTER 21



Borscht and rhymes

A Man of Prestigious Ancestry, from Poland

It was Tuesday evening, the 2nd of July, 1912. I went over to see if my neighbour was planning to go to the post office the next day. Wednesdays were happy days for us because the mail arrived that day. Since we didn't have radios yet, our only contact with the outside world in those early days was through letters and newspapers. We'd have to absorb in that one day what had been happening all over the world in that past week.

As I made my way down the road, I met my neighbour, R. Springman. We were very happy to see one another. From the look on his face, I could tell he had something very important to tell me. We farmers learned to read the expression on each other's faces. He didn't keep his secret for very long.

"Yesterday, when I was in Star City, I met an unusual person." He stopped and looked at me to see what kind of response I would have to his statement. I knew what he was waiting for and asked: "Did the man have horns?" He realized then he'd have to get serious with me and told me

straight out that this man had come from Warsaw, Poland, and was making enquiries about the Jews of Edenbridge. "He wanted to know everything. He asked if there were anarchists in our midst. I told him I didn't know what kind of 'ists' he'd find here, but I guaranteed him that he'd find plenty of people with whom he could discuss almost anything. He took out a printed card from his pocket and handed it to me. Printed on the card was: "*People's Press*, Warsaw." I realized then that he was a reporter and was looking for material for his newspaper. While he was in the city, he probably heard about a Jewish farming colony and figured he'd get a scoop. But something didn't seem right to me. I was sure the *People's Press* came out of Vilna, not Warsaw. Besides, I remembered it to be a weekly publication, not a daily."

I became very curious about the story I had just heard. On my way home from my neighbour's, I decided I'd better get to the post office myself. It was our communications centre, and I could find out all the news there. All of Edenbridge came to the post office, and I was sure I'd learn something about this strange man from Warsaw. Maybe I'd even meet him there.

That night I could hardly sleep. I was very anxious to meet a man from the outside world, especially not just an ordinary man. Perhaps he'd even be able to help us with our problems concerning the education of our children. Maybe he was sent by people who were truly interested in us. I spent the rest of the night fantasizing about how our meeting would be. As soon as the sun rose, I leapt to my feet and equipped myself with all the necessities such a walk required. I'd need a long stick to help make the leaps across the swamps; I'd need boots, with openings at both ends. (Just in case the leap proved unsuccessful, and the water rose above my boots, it wouldn't be able to stay in there too long. It would run out of the holes in the bottom.) I'd also take a sack, tied at one end with a string, in which all the correspondence was stashed. This sack would be supported by a stick slung across my shoulders, making sure it stayed above water.

I began plodding my way through the tall grass which was wet with the morning dew. I must have been out too early, because I awakened a bird. I watched it leave its nest, catch a fly and carry it home for her young ones' breakfast. I also saw a mother rabbit suckling its newborn babies. My approach frightened her, and she jumped to the side of the road waiting for me to pass; a new fear for these little creatures, called civilization. I then heard a dog bark. Because a dog is, after all, a part of civilization, I felt less of an intruder. I was probably not far from Isaac's house. Sure enough, I heard the strains of "Rooftops of New York," a popular song then in the Whitechapel district of London. Isaac had begun his day.

"Why so early, Isaac?" I asked. He told me he was going off to buy a cow from a farmer, and had to get there before the man went off to work in his field. He also had to get the day going earlier than usual because his neighbour, Segal, was away and he wanted to cut wood for both their homes, milk all the cows, feed the calves and, of course, grab a bite to eat. "No one should ever leave home hungry," he said.

I made one more stop en route to the post office. This was at the home of a farmer who came from the same town in Russia as I had. He was a very hard-working man, and was very seldom home. In London, he had been a presser. Here he worked with the road-building crew, a very demanding job. He was very popular with his co-workers. If Charlie Kramer says it's so, then it's so.

He worked very far away from home so that the care of his cows, calves and chickens was left to his wife and their four young children. The eldest boy who was twelve, though he looked more like eight, did most of the chores. He would go off with his mother to find the cows which wandered about freely in the 1,800 acres of bush. The three little children were left at home alone. Before she went out, the woman would empty the water, put out the fire in the stove, chase the cat out of the house, hide the matches and lock the door on the outside. She would then tramp her way through the woods leaving her heart and soul back at the house. It was the twelve year old's job to see that there was plenty of fire-

wood for the house. It's true one didn't have to go far to find the wood, but it was too difficult for him to lift the large logs. He would gather the smaller twigs and branches. They were also easier for him to chop. I took it upon myself to chop some proper wood for them everytime I passed by their place.

It was 2 o'clock in the afternoon by the time I got to the post office. The mail hadn't arrived yet, and the postage stamp-sized waiting room was filled to capacity. Everyone, without exception, was covered in mud up to their waists. Some people were seated on tree stumps, others, on the floor. All mouths were open as they listened attentively to an unknown young man who sat at a little table near the wall, talking. As I entered, I saw one of the men turn to the visitor and whisper in his ear, "That's him." I suppose they had been talking about me. In a few minutes we knew the young man's entire history. He had been sent by a Jewish newspaper called *The People's Press*, a non-partisan paper, with a circulation of 1½ million copies a day, (imagine that!) and is published in Warsaw.

He told us that he was the son of a Polish father who, though he had become an assimilated Jew, still within himself believed in Moses. His mother was a very religious woman. His name was Arkady Farnbach. He told us he had two very famous brothers-in-law, Noah Sokolov and Sholom Ash. His impressive ancestry bewildered us. Some of the facts seemed rather far-fetched. Still, it was possible for him to have such important brothers-in-law. It was also possible that an assimilationist could raise a son to be a fine man. What was most difficult to believe was that a Jewish newspaper could print 1½ million copies a day. That was unheard of. We decided that this man was simply a braggart, and chose not to believe everything he said. It cost us nothing to listen to him. So why not? Who knows, maybe the situation in Poland had changed so much that such a newspaper really existed. If not 1½ million, let there be at least ½ million readers. Why should we worry ourselves over these questions? At this moment he was our guest, and we had to treat

him the way we treated all our guests. The arguing then began as to who should entertain him first. At which end of the colony should we start our rounds of hosting?

I Am Chosen to be His Guide

The arguing started as to where our guest should begin his visits. The people from the south, the Afrikaners, felt they were the most prestigious residents. After all, they had been the first settlers in Edenbridge. They were the first to buy forty acres of land from the government on which they built the synagogue and the cemetery. They also had plans for a communal bath and a *Mikvah* (a ritual bath). The post office was located in their area, and they even had a correspondent from the Winnipeg newspaper, *The Canadian Jew*, living in their midst. They had purchased land, divided it into lots, and named the settlement. Before their arrival, the place was overrun with goats. Now the value of a lot was worth more than a goat. When it came to adding up prestige, they were overflowing with it.

And we, from the northern section of the settlement, had only three established families to our credit. We were the Londoners, and that was all we could claim for ourselves in the realm of prestige. We had to accept the fact. It was true, though, that we had hopes of building a hall which would be used as a theatre; we had plans for a library, and we were eager to find a modern teacher for our children; we had plans for a co-operative store and other such 'sinful' aspirations. But so far all these were still plans. Not too much prestige in that.

As for the New Yorkers, poor things, they were caught in the middle between north and south. They were, unfortunately, cut of the same cloth as the Londoners, and had collected just as few credits in the prestige department.

Because of these comparisons as to who had, in fact, amassed the most prestige in our community, a full-blown war could have erupted. Thanks to our guest, who proved to be a person of great merit, it was averted. He quietened

the disturbers and established himself as the dictator. He laid the map of Edenbridge out before him, and made his own decisions. He didn't ask anyone where he should go first or where he should go next. It was clear from the map the route he should take.

We ran into another problem which held things up again. The women who lived closest to the post office (those who lived far away hadn't come because of the bad road conditions) didn't want to entertain our visitor until they had more time to prepare. A man from a big city, they argued, no doubt had a delicate stomach, and a meal more suited to his needs took time to prepare. Also, they pleaded, furniture that is a table by day and a bed by night, is no furniture for such a guest. And our one-room palaces. What kind of hospitality can a one-room house afford? All these things needed taking care of before he came, they insisted.

Our visitor spoke up sharply against this kind of thinking. He wanted to eat the same borscht we ate. He could sleep on a hard bench the same as the rest of us. He didn't need a ballroom to satisfy his comforts. He would be very happy to partake in every facet of our lives exactly as we did. He would even make his visits to the various farms on foot, the way we did, and he guaranteed he'd do the job as well as any of us. All that he needed from us was a guide so he'd not lose his way. He was worried that his map wouldn't be of much use to him. The thick bush was much more powerful than his paper map and he could get hopelessly lost. Besides, he was frightened of dogs and every farmer had at least one dog on his premises.

To be his guide would be a job that took several days. It was the time of year when everyone was busy land-clearing. So there were no volunteers. No one felt they could spare the time at this particular season.

Just then I heard someone call out my name. Who was bestowing this honour on me? It was Zalman Flax, a close neighbour of mine who had worked co-operatively with our group and knew that my land was in pretty good shape. He knew that I had more time than some of the others.

At some other time, I will explain why our group had gotten together and insisted I was not to take part in the heavy work. For now, all I will say is my friends never really let me be a vital participant in the process of civilizing the wilderness. No sooner would I approach a tree, stand poised with my sharp axe ready to strike my first blow, when Zalman would appear at my side and, without a word, begin chopping my tree. When I tried to sneak in a few swipes while Zalman filled his pipe, Raphael would appear and with a wink of his eye would tell me to move over. And Pullman...he'd not even ask if I needed help. He'd just move in with his six-pound axe and with one blow would cause the earth to shudder and the trees to tremble. When the trees were lying outstretched on the ground, they had to be gathered and piled. That, they said, was my job. My brother had another tactic. He would send me to get fresh water for the men. By the time I got back with the water, most of the large trees were felled, and I was left with the saplings to clear. And so time after time I was made to feel like I was shirking my responsibility. I felt I wasn't pulling my weight. However, I would get my chance at tackling the bush at harvest time when the others went off to the neighbouring towns to earn some money by harvesting, or working in the lumber mills. I would remain at home because they didn't want me doing that kind of work either. They had their reasons. It was in this context that Zalman suggested I be the guide. Soon we were making plans for the expedition.

The first problem was how to shod the feet of a big-city man with boots that are open at both ends. Secondly, how do you teach a Warsaw gentleman to leap across swamps? And still worse, how will we protect him from the mosquitoes that exist in the trillions and that bite to kill?

On the first day we stopped at four farms. We slept over at Rosenberg's. They ran the department store, where all the merchandise could fit into one corner of the kitchen. On Thursday, our guest went to Star City to send a telegram to his newspaper in Warsaw reporting on his visit to Edenbridge. We resumed our tour on Friday and managed to

visit quite a few of the farms. He wanted to spend that night with us Londoners. He'd gotten to know us over the past little while and felt he could gain something from our group of carefree men. Before he left, he wanted to arrange a gathering of all the farmers, their wives and children. He wanted everyone to gather at the schoolhouse on Sunday, and he would provide the program himself. What he hoped to do was to unite the northern and southern factions of our community so we could live together more harmoniously.

I was very worried on our trip home about the very large swamps we had to somehow get around or cross over. Our guest had become quite an expert in the past few days at leaping across mud puddles, still I was quite apprehensive. What had become of his delicate Warsaw shoes should only happen to our worst enemies. He had refused to wear the heavy boots we offered him (the ones with openings at both top and bottom). By the time we got to Isaac's, he was wet enough to be wrung out. Poor man had slipped and fallen headlong into one of the deep swamps.

Our Guest Is Sure We Are Lost

Once at Isaac's, I felt we should send a message home saying we had arrived safely and that we'd be setting out for home that evening. There was still one big swamp we'd have to navigate between Isaac's and home. By this time I was so familiar with this swamp that I could leap across it with my eyes closed. I wasn't so sure it would be that easy for my guest. I borrowed an axe from Isaac and decided to cut down a few trees to make a small bridge over the swamp thus making the passage easier for him. Before long we were accosted by a swarm of giant mosquitoes. I sat my guest down on a fallen tree so he could rest more comfortably. I lit a fire hoping the smoke would drive the mosquitoes away. Having made him as comfortable as I could, I set off to build the bridge. Since our guest would have to use the same route on his way back, the bridge would save him from any disasters on his return trip as well. There is a saying

that a wedding without a quarrel has no zest, likewise an expedition without a mishap is also without flavour.

My architectual plans for the building of the bridge were such that I had to chop down two large trees and direct their fall so that they traversed the swamp from north to south. I then planned to cut down a few smaller trees and chop them into shorter lengths. These could be put between the trees that were already in the swamp from previous crossings. They were there so that if someone did slip into the water, they could hold onto them and prevent themselves from going under. The shorter logs enabled one to walk across the swamp, once one had pulled oneself out of the water. The sun had set and it was beginning to grow dark. I didn't quite hit my mark with the felling of the trees, and one of them got stuck at its highest point on another tree. Though I wrestled with it for a long time, I couldn't free one tree from another. So I had to chop down a third tree, hoping that in its fall, it would free the stuck tree. If that failed, it would no doubt come crashing down on my hat, ruining both my hat and my head.

After I finished building my 'Brooklyn Bridge' I built a blazing fire for my guest. He was soaking wet and cold, and was trying to keep warm. It was a pretty sight, the blazing fire in the darkness, bright sparks reaching up to the sky and illuminating the heavens. I added more wood, and from the light could see the sad and lonely face of my guest. I thought it was because he was cold and exhausted. I called for him to get up; we were going to set out for home. We are just a quarter of a mile away now, I assured him, and he could dry out and rest once we were there. My guest didn't move a muscle. He sat as if he'd settled down for the night. I called him again, but he wouldn't move. He had come to the conclusion that the whole bridge building escapade was devised to kill time and that I had built the fire so we could spend the night there. He was 100 percent sure that we were lost in the woods and that I didn't know the way out. So he didn't want to budge. He was convinced that all that could happen was we'd get soaking wet again in some

other swamp and have to build another fire to dry out. He didn't see the point to that. He was quite comfortable just where he was and wasn't going to move.

Out of sheer frustration I began to sing. I sang a Russian song called "Dubinushka." I chose this particular song because Joe Pullman, who lived nearby, just loved it and I figured if he heard me singing, he would somehow respond. And that's exactly what happened. In the distance we could hear his voice ringing out a full octave higher than mine. He began singing the "Volga Boatman" with such gusto that the entire bush reverberated with the sound of his voice. When my guest heard another human voice, he leapt to his feet with the glee of a child. He saw then that my bridge building was not a ruse, and he admitted to the dubious thoughts he was having. He could see now that it was sheer genius on my part to find the way back in such darkness. He was sure that even a creature of the forest couldn't have done better.

When we arrived at the house, I invited him to go in ahead of me. He just stood there and didn't seem to know what to do. He could see a couple of holes in the wall (we called them windows) with a light shining through them. But he couldn't see a door anywhere. He could see some hinges nailed to the wall, and a sort of knob (nothing like what he had seen in Warsaw). What was one to do? Pull at the wall? He didn't realize that it was quite possible to cut a hole in a wall, nail the cut out boards together, put hinges on them, place the whole thing back on the wall and presto! one had a door. Finally, he opened it, and by gosh, it was a door! He entered and saw three young men all decked out in Adam's attire, in jubilant spirits. A round of *Sholem Aleichem* (Peace be with you) greeted him and the feeling in the room was of a group of long lost friends who were all finally together. I realized, once I was in the house, that preparations had been made for our guest. The floor was swept, the chairs were around the table in preparation for a celebration. The glass on the lamp had been polished and the borscht on the stove filled the room with the wonderful

aroma of sweet and sour. I wondered what had become of all the books, newspapers, paper and ink that usually bedecked the table, chairs, and virtually the whole room (somewhat like the old illegal libraries of Tsarist Russia).

Our guest took one step and didn't know where he could go from there. He was looking around for the washroom, not knowing that it was quite possible to have a washroom, kitchen, living room, dining room and bedroom all in the same space. And that it was quite adequate for everyone's needs. A small corner of the room had been set aside for his privacy. He wanted to wash up. We warned him that he could turn slightly red in colour after his wash. The secret of the redness was this: Our water came from the swamps which were teeming with worms. The larger worms were retrieved by pouring the water through a sieve, but the tiny ones were left in the water which we then boiled. When the little creatures were cooked, they turned red. (Because of this colored water, our tea looked even stronger than English tea.)

When our chef announced that dinner was being served, our guest arose and asked that we grant him a wish. We wondered what sort of person would ask for something without having earned it. His request was that we give him the whole night, right through until morning. Instead of being our guest, his wish was that we be his guests for the night. This idea appealed to us. We had no reason to be suspicious, so we agreed.

The All-Night Dinner

We had two special dishes for dinner: a herring, which our chef very deftly cut on the bias, and laid out on a platter in a very appetizing way; and red borscht. This took the place of wine. We ate all through the night. Because we had, of our own free will, bestowed upon our guest the powers of dictator, we then had to succumb to his every wish.

Before we were allowed to begin our dinner, we had to discuss and analyze all the problems of mankind through the ages. Since we were the focal point, the subject of the

discussion centred on our lives, Jewish farmers in Edenbridge. We talked about all the concerns of the world and also about the subject of food. This subject we couldn't avoid because of the very real presence of our hunger.

It was then that the reason for my friends' constant protection of me from hard work, revealed itself. I was a vegetarian and so ate no meat whatsoever. Our guest didn't know this. And though I'd argue fervently that I was every bit as strong as everyone else, they insisted that it was impossible for me to be up to the kind of strength required for such work when eating only greens and grains.

When that subject, for the time being was laid to rest, our guest began to talk about his impressions of our colony. He was very pleasantly surprised, he said, at everything he'd seen so far. He had certainly not expected to find such intelligent, well-educated, intellectual people in a colony of farmers. He had been talking to a young mother in the colony who expressed her great concern regarding the Jewish education of her children, the oldest of whom was five. An older woman, who he was sure was going to talk to him about arranging a match between him and her daughter, had quite another concern. She wanted to send her children to college to study agriculture, but she wasn't sure how poor people managed such things. She wanted his advice.

Then he told us of a conversation he had with a young girl, with eyes as black as cherries. When she asked to speak to him, he was sure she wanted to talk to him about her fiancé, or the case she was sewing for his philacteries. What else could concern a young girl, especially a farm girl? It turned out that she wanted to talk to him about drama, and to ask him what he knew of Jewish playwrites, and which plays he thought were most suitable for young people.

He also had an exchange with an old woman who complained about the absence of a *Mikvah* (orthodox ritual bath). An older man told him his worries about his grandchildren. They were very talented children, the old man said, with exceptionally fine singing voices. He felt they didn't have the same opportunity for furthering their talents as a city child might.

More than anyone, though, our guest was enthralled by a youngster he met, who was 12 years old, though he seemed more like 15. This young fellow had drawn our guest into a wild and wonderful discussion on the cosmos. He was very impressed with this child's intelligence. (This youngster became a professor at a university in New York when he was still very young.)

Joe Pullman, who was hungrier than the rest of us, when there seemed to be a moment's lull in the conversation, took the opportunity to state that a bird doesn't satisfy its hunger by singing. Our guest considered this statement for a moment and then dug into a piece of herring. When it came time to start on the borscht, he had a new idea.

Borscht and Rhymes

This was his new idea: The borscht was to be poured into a large bowl. Each diner was to become a toastmaster, toasting some important world figure. The toasts were to be in rhymes, and for each line, one was entitled to a spoonful of borscht. There was to be no cheating. If one made his toast too long, and so took an unfair portion of the borscht, he'd lose all he'd managed to accumulate in his own bowl. He gave us fifteen minutes to think, and then called out: "Who wants to go last?" I jumped in first and secured last place for myself. My reasoning was this: I had grown to love this man since our 'expedition.' I found him to have many remarkable qualities. He was an intelligent man in the fullest sense of the word. There didn't seem to be anything he didn't know. He was interested in the most incidental things. He was willing to trudge along with us through our untamed wilderness, giving of his time and knowledge, and expecting nothing in return. And so I wanted to help him with his borscht game by giving him more time. I almost outsmarted myself. I began more lines than I could make rhymes with. It was just not clicking for me. Then I remembered an old Russian poem about a priest and his dog. That saved my reputation. I could

have made that poem go on all night. The game began. My brother went first. This was his toast:

May the red flag of the working class
Wave over the throne of Tsar Nicholas

Short, but good. He was easily assured of two spoonfuls of borscht. Pullman was next:

Here's to Stolypin and Witte (Russian Statesmen)
And, also their wives,
May they die and be buried,
Along with all other anti-semites.

Also good. Our cook was next:

The power that the workers hold,
Makes the bosses hot and cold.

Our guest then stood up and began his toast:

When dealing with capitalism, there are always two classes;
Those who sleep in the street, and those who live in palaces.
There are those who eat meat, chicken and red,
There are those who subsist on greens and bread.
I wish for the poor that they'd come to their senses,
so we could speak of the capitalist in past tenses.
May they overthrow the oppressive rich,
and make for themselves a comfortable niche.

It was then my turn:

The people in the town of Brod
Devised a most ingenious plot.
Their object was to get the Tsar
Into a steam bath, good and hot!
To hold him captive was their aim,
They needed help—someone of fame.
So, "Pabadanetzev" of holy synod officialdom
Was briskly told that he must come.
"Informer" is what his name means,
So he was vital to the scene.

He'd play the part of the masseur
And lash the Tsar with his birch-leafed switch,
But more important still than that
He'd use his powers, great and rich.

He summoned his sextons to form a brigade
To make sure that the news they'd made
Was spread with haste thoughout the land
And told to every living man.

They had the Tsar in their control
And so the secret must be told
That the people in the town of Brod
Succeeded with their clever plot!

This tale would have gone on and on
Had not the spoon struck bottom
The bowl was dry, the borscht was gone
And so the story ended...

That night our sides ached from all the laughing. After the meal our guest read to us from the writings of Edelstadt, Winchevsky, Sholem Aleichem, Frug, Bovshover, and others. We listened, we laughed, we cried until the night came to an end and morning made its entrance through the tiny windows.

Our Guest Writes with Strokes and Swirls

Saturday morning we dropped in at Isaac's. He was ready and waiting for us. Isaac's mother, an elderly, clever woman, was also waiting. She wanted to meet the visitor from Warsaw because her brother lived there. She hoped to send him regards through the articles our visitor would write in his newspaper. Our guest not only promised her this, but also that he'd take pictures of her and put them in the paper. Isaac wanted the pictures of his mother taken with his horse-drawn wagon. His horses, after all, had the reputation of being the most beautiful in the district. He was able to buy them with the money he had brought with him from London.

The old lady refused to get into the wagon on the Sabbath, so our visitor came up with a suggestion. He'd take a picture of her, and then take a separate one of the horses. He'd fix it later, he assured her, so that the picture would look like it had been taken together.

One could never leave Isaac's without having something to eat, so we stayed and had a meal with them. How tired we were! After all, we'd not slept all night. So we also stayed and had a nap. When we got up, we had some tea and a chat. Isaac was a gifted storyteller, and told us tales of his life in London. Our guest, Arkady Farnbach, made strokes and swirls on his page, taking notes in the script of a stenographer's shorthand. He assured us that this was wonderful material for his newspaper.

We moved along to another farm, and spent the evening there. When our host discovered that our guest was collecting material for his newspaper, he favoured us with a five-hour account of his struggle as a newcomer in Africa, then London, and, last but not least, of his struggles right here in Edenbridge. Our guest covered his entire writing tablet with his funny strokes. The man's tale came to an end when he heard a symphony of sounds coming to us from the forest. Singing, laughter, commands shouted at oxen, women shreiking in fear, and the clomp-clomp of footsteps in the muddy marshland. This was the beginning of a procession to a meeting at the synagogue. Outside we heard great commotion. Alex Springman's huge oxen, with their strangely shaped immense horns, stood blocking the way of Freedman's oxen. Neither would let the other pass. It looked as if one of the wagons, filled with men, women and children, would be dumped into the swamp. We rushed out and held the wagon in place, saving all the passengers from an undesired bath. Our guest quickly took out his camera and recorded this incident for all time. He said it would be a wonderful introduction of Edenbridge to Warsaw.

When we arrived at the synagogue, our guest saw a sight he'd never seen before. Oxen stood harnessed to their huge wagons, wheels so high, ladders were needed to climb up into them. Other wagons, with no crates to sit on, just boards stretched across the length of them, so a ride, though not a comfortable one, was possible. He saw a pair of oxen, the colour of which has not been named yet. On one wagon there was a structure with large openings in it, called a rack.

It was used for carrying hay. One prankster showed up with only one ox pulling a buggy. There were also the dogs, each barking louder than the next, giving everyone a headache.

Our guest again wielded his camera, joyfully uttering that these scenes could only be captured once in a lifetime.

Legal Committees and Presidents

Once inside, we found the wardens of the synagogue all decked out in freshly laundered white shirts. They had been preparing a program for the special meeting with the newspaperman from Warsaw, who had been sent from abroad directly to Edenbridge to entertain us.

There then ensued the haggling over the election of committees and presidents. A committee for the main meeting, and a president to head it. A writer's committee to send reports to the newspaper, with a president. A committee to get subscribers, and, of course, a president. God knows how long we would have gone on with our committees if our guest, Arkady Farnbach, hadn't intervened. He took over. He threw out all the presidents, slashed the committees and once again made himself dictator.

He asked the ladies to take care of refreshments. He didn't want any subscribers for his newspaper, nor did he need any money from us in advance. He would simply take the names of those who wanted to subscribe, and they would be sent copies. Each person would then pay for his own paper. There was no need of the other committees either. What he really wanted was that the chairs be set up, and that everyone be seated, so he could take more pictures.

The meeting began with a recitation by our guest of "The Blessed Shopkeeper" by Morris Rosenfeld. The crowd listened in complete silence and wonderment. Never before had they heard such a wonderful recitation. He recited works by Edelstadt and Bovshover. The crowd cried tears the size of beans. Once he had his audience in the palm of his hand, he attempted to get to the real purpose of the meeting, to unite north and south.

The conflict between them was this: The Jews who lived on the north side of the colony wanted to finish building their hall for gatherings. They wanted a community centre, but couldn't afford it. They wanted to borrow money from the recently formed Credit Union. It had been established to help farmers who needed loans with a $15 maximum. They wanted to borrow $50, and pay it back in six months. The committee at the Credit Union was made up of Orthodox Jews from the south end of the colony, who felt that having a synagogue as a meeting place was enough. They didn't feel a hall was necessary. Though there were rules and regulations at the synagogue, as long as they were respected, it could be used instead of building a new hall. One of the regulations was that non-Jewish boys and girls couldn't dance at the synagogue. Another was that men had to wear hats at all times. Also, no undesirable literature (that meant anything other than religious texts) was to enter the building, and other such rules. Those of us from the north found it criminal that our closest neighbours couldn't be invited to our celebrations just because they weren't Jewish. And, as can be imagined, we had a totally different idea as to what was desirable and undesirable literature. We also had differing opinions about many of the other regulations. We didn't want to be disrespectful to the religious Jews, so we needed our own place.

Our guest undertook being the mediator between the two sides. After a lengthy talk about every subject in the world he got to the real issues: an investigation of the services ordinarily provided by the synagogue; the hall, which was in the process of being built; and whether a loan was possible to facilitate its completion. Every pertinent question was raised; all ideas were expressed; every detail was discussed; nothing was left unsaid or unconsidered. Our guest showed an amazing talent for making everything that seemed unclear, clear. But, and it was a very large but, our guest, who could speak in five languages, was such a fine actor, wonderful reader of poetry, marvellous speaker, writer of shorthand and seemingly endless other talents, did not

have the talent to unite this handful of dissenting Jews. And that was how it was left.

Our Guest Vanishes Without a Trace

Before he left, our guest gave us a few things to remember him by. A pen, a book upon which was written in his own handwriting, his full name, Arkady Farnbach, and a gift certificate for a Winnipeg book store valued at $8 as a gift for our library. We said our fond farewells. A group of us saw him off and promised to write. He said he could be reached at the Hirsch colony where he would be meeting with more Jewish farmers.

Things happened which we certainly weren't expecting. Two of our letters were returned from Hirsch. No sign of him there. The book store in Winnipeg wrote saying they'd be happy to forward the books we had requested if we first sent along the eight dollars. We never saw or heard from our guest again.

We realized that some things weren't quite the way he had described them, but we weren't angry with him. After all, we hadn't lost anything. We had truly enjoyed his visit. He hadn't taken any money from us for his newspaper. And if he did help himself to a few newspapers from our collection, then he must have needed them more than we did. So we extended to him our heartfelt blessings wherever he may be. Little by little, as time went by, the whole incident of his visit left our thoughts. Until nineteen years later...

Who Was Arkady Farnbach?

In the month of June 1931, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the day when we, Jewish farmers, set foot on Edenbridge soil. I hope to write about that celebration in my second book. For now, I would like to talk about one very special guest. He came to help us celebrate this joyous event along with a very large family of friends. This very talented young man was the poet Moishe Volhyniar Diamond. He was sent from Winnipeg as a representative from the Israel-

ite Press (*Yiddishe Vort*). He is now in the Soviet Union. He became very popular with our young people and earned the title 'Moishe the Kindhearted.' Moishe was very impressed with the young people of Edenbridge.

Moishele wanted to take in some of the wonderful fresh air of the country, and chose to stay at the most quiet, most primitive spot in the colony. My place. My small hut was in the middle of the bush. Neither the cold winter wind nor the hot summer sun could find space enough to enter. Flocks of birds made their home with me. In the bush we are all equal neighbours. Even the little rabbits felt free in this area.

That day, as chance would have it, the sun, before it set, coloured the entire bush with a red hue that no artist has yet been able to copy. My young charge's mouth fell open and his eyes grew large in wonderment as he absorbed this awesome panorama. It was a sight that could never be seen in the city. I warned him that a rainstorm usually follows this kind of sunset. All farmers learned to predict weather by such simple and natural means. They were usually as accurate as the more sophisticated weather forecasting equipment.

I was right. In the middle of the night, the heavens opened their floodgates, and poured out a driving storm that flooded the entire area. My visitor didn't want to miss a minute of such an event. We decided to forego sleep that night and stayed up to watch a powerful electrical rainstorm instead. We spent the night talking, watching and listening. He was particularly interested in hearing about our early homesteading days. I tried my best to satisfy his curiosity and brought out my whole collection of books, papers and articles. My archives. The night flew by unnoticed and it was eight o'clock in the morning when we came across a story entitled 'Arkady Farnbach'. He became very excited. He was sure that Farnbach was none other than Dr. K. Farnberg. From my description of the man, my account of his talents, his being a representative from a newspaper that never existed, his honesty and concern, Moishe felt

certain he was right about the real identity of the man. At that time, Farnberg was a political suspect and could not allow himself to be seen in the cities. He would have surely been arrested. What better place to hide than in the remotest corner of the world under the protection of the 'red Jews'. In their innocence they looked for no hidden truths about their cherished guest.

Before Moishe Diamond left Winnipeg, he suggested we publish the story about Farnbach so if Dr. Farnberg or his friends should read it, they would be pleased to know that we in Edenbridge had reaped so much pleasure from his visit.

Epilogue

It was Mike Usiskin's intention to tell the story of Edenbridge from its earliest days of the oxen to the later years when the tractor became part of its life. Though he called his book *'Oksen un Motoren'* (*From Oxen to Tractors*) he never got to write about those later years. The work was published in its unfinished state with the hope that Mike would continue his account and that that story would appear in a second book. Unfortunately, he died five years after *'Oksen un Motoren'* was published and so the rest of the story remains untold.

There is some original writing still unpublished in the Archives of Ontario. I am hoping to find material there which will take us into the transition from oxen to tractors and perhaps realize for him his original intention.

M.U.B.

Marcia Usiskin Basman was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1935. From the age of six until she was fourteen, her uncle, Mike Usiskin, lived with the family. He affected her formative years so deeply that she felt the need to share the wisdom she had gained through her relationship with him. For those who could not know the man, there were his writings. And so she decided to translate his work, *Oksen un Motoren.*

Marcia now lives in Toronto. She has two children, Davida and Ken Basman. It is for them and their generation of Usiskins that she wanted Uncle Mike's writings available in English so that they could become more aware of their rich heritage.

Mrs. Basman works in the field of radiography; she also spends many hours doing play therapy with children. It is through this latter work that she feels she can pass on the love and wisdom gained as a child from her Uncle Mike.