Chapter 9 A Simple Wedding

Somewhere between Woking and Edmonton, the swaying railroad car made its way past miles and miles of bush and muskeg. The tall broad-shouldered young man found himself restlessly pacing up and down its aisles. He should have been very tired, nearly exhausted. For the last week of long days had been spent putting many finishing touches on his log cabin. This first home in Canada had to be made as inviting as possible for the coming of its first feminine occupant. It is understandable that this impending event was constantly on his mind, and though physically spent, Günther was much too keyed up to sleep.

He tried to put himself in her place. What a lot of impressions my little bride will have to absorb, he thought. First the trip from her home in Cranz to the seaport at Bremen; days and nights aboard ship on the long ocean voyage; the tedious train ride across Canada. Then the wedding, under such unusual circumstances, and the new challenges and duties of a housewife on a Canadian homestead. What must she be thinking, as she, too, sat on a train, hers coming from Halifax to Edmonton?

It was a proud feeling, Günther wrote to Tante Anna, that he as a man, would have the privilege of guiding, helping and protecting this young woman who had been willing to put her life and future into his hands. He knew that, in this foreign country, he would have to take the place of parents, siblings and friends, and her home. That was a tall order, but Günther felt confident. Had he not faced and overcome many difficulties and challenges since he arrived in Canada two years ago? He had grown, not only in manly physical stature, but also in experience, competency, patience and confidence. In this positive frame of mind, he watched the lights of Edmonton come into view.

The next day, on the evening of April 24,1930, Günther stood expectantly at trackside, his heart pounding. As the train slid into the station, he spied his beloved! The long months of longing and waiting came to an end in one long loving embrace. The so often dreamed-of reunion had become a reality!

By previous arrangement, a German acquaintance, Erwin Deimling had come to the station with his car. This man had an insurance business in Edmonton, and had been a helpful facilitator to many German immigrants upon their arrival in the city. Now he took the two happy young people to his spacious home and introduced them to his wife. Else was tucked into a cozy bedroom for some much-needed rest, and Günther tried, without too much success, to get a little sleep on a make-shift sofa in an adjoining room. Only later, over a late breakfast, could they fully believe that they truly were here in Canada together!

Ich aber und mein Haus wollen dem Herrn dienen. Jos. 24:15.

Trau-Schein.

Hierdurch wird bescheinigt,
dass durch den Unterzeichneten
am Neunundzwanzigsten April
im Jahre des Herrn
Eintausendneunhundert Dreissig
Günther Pankow
aus Spirit River, Alberta, Canada
und Else Gesien
aus Crang, Ostpreussen, Deutschland.

Ehelich verbunden
worden sind.

Zeugen:
Erwin Deimling
Margarethe Deimling

K.W. Freitag
Evang.-Lutherischer
Pastor

186

Certificate of Marriage

That afternoon the Deimlings took them to the Department of Vital Statistics to get a marriage license. Later that same day, April 25, 1930, they stood before Pastor K.W. Freitag in a German Lutheran Church in Strathcona. He solemnly declared: "I pronounce you, Günther John Pankow, and you, Else Gertrud Gesien, man and wife." His words echoed in the large empty church, for the only others present were Erwin and Margarethe Deimling, who served as witnesses. It was a strange wedding, in this respect, but these circumstances were unavoidable. They were strangers in Edmonton and thousands of miles separated them from their

families. But they had each other, and at this point that was all that mattered. For a few days they were guests of the Deimlings, who took them shopping at Eatons and showed them the city.

Soon they were aboard the northbound train which carried them in the direction of the Peace River Country and home. To Else, it must have seemed like an interminable distance, with nothing but miles and miles of bush. She would have had good reason to ask herself: “Where is Günther taking me?”

Finally, the train pulled to a stop in Spirit River. This address she had so often written on her letters. For the first time in many days, Else saw a familiar face, for there, greeting them warmly at the station, was Horst Anders. He had come with a team and wagon to pick them up. Soon, settled among boxes, trunks, crates and suitcases, the threesome began the wagon trip — the last leg of Else’s long journey. The first several miles went quite smoothly (though that may be an exaggeration) but as they neared the notorious mud-hole near McArthur’s, they could see that more horses had come to meet them. Fred Egge and Herman Wulf hitched on their animals for extra horse-power to drag the heavily loaded wagons through the quagmire. Again, Else must have wondered! But with the many new impressions, the excitement and wonder, her own fatigue was forgotten.

Finally, in late afternoon, as the last rays of sunshine peeked through the trees, Günther pointed to the south: “There it is — our home, our land!” And Else gazed in wonder at the log cabin nestled in the trees. It is hard to imagine the gamut of feelings that must have overwhelmed her as the tired steaming horses stopped at the cabin door. The entrance had been decked with a frame of evergreen boughs, topped with a large hand-printed placard which read “Herzlich Villkommen” (Hearty Welcome). Some twenty neighbours had gathered, including the three women resident in the area at the time, and each one of them gave the young bride a warm welcome. She experienced the true hospitality of a German pioneer settlement, as they visited, made music and sang folk songs, and enjoyed cake and coffee. The young couple could not have imagined a warmer or more delightful reception deep in the Canadian wilderness.

Many hours later they waved good-bye to their neighbours as the wagons rumbled away on the bush trails. The lovely scent of wood smoke filled the air. The fire crackled as a dim soft glow emanated from the coal-oil lamp. At length there was just the dark, and the warmth and the quiet, with the music of the wind in the treetops.

The Welcoming Party
Standing l. to r: Horst Anders, Elise Delfs, Freda Wulf, Eilert Pleis, Margarethe Oltmanns, ____?____, Otto Toerper, Johann Oltmanns, Fred Egge, Alfred Sellin, Hans Becker, Herman Wulf, Carl Heinz Muehrer, Hans Delfs. Front : Four Wulf Children, and seated: Else and Günther Pankow.

This Marriage Announcement Appeared in a Königsberger Paper

Chapter 10 Homestead Honeymoon

Newlywed Else and Günther Pankow 1930

Ten years from this momentous spring of Else's arrival, Günther was to write in his journal: "What a wonderful once-in-a-lifetime period it is when two young people who are in love begin their journey through life together. They are filled with ideals and dreams, and are not yet aware of the many difficulties, hardships and disappointments that life has in store for them. How different the whole world looks when you're newlywed, and how your whole outlook on life changes! It is no longer "I" but "we", and it affects everything we do."

Indeed, that spring of 1930 was a wonderful idyllic time. The beginning of a new life together coincided with nature's spring awakening. The stream near the house babbled in its ice-freed bed. The swollen buds on the trees soon burst into fresh green leaves. Birdsong could be heard from every direction and new green grass poked through the brown earth. The sun's rays got warmer each day. Beautiful unspoiled nature was awakening all around the rustic log house.

Inside, too, a transformation had taken place, one that only a woman's touch could accomplish. The many boxes and trunks which had accompanied the young bride from Germany, were now unpacked. Curtains had appeared at the windows, bedspreads covered the bed, cloth draped the tables, and pictures hung on the walls. A simple log house had become a cozy, comfortable home, and for the young Pankows, it was a home blossoming with love.

But the reality also had to be faced, that spring was the season of hard work. The gardener's daughter, full of optimism, struggled to make a small piece of raw bush land into a friable garden. Günther was getting his own piece of land ready for its very first seeding. He worked together with his neighbour, Fred Egge, so that horses and machinery could be shared. The German neighbours in the settlement helped each other a lot in those early days, with field work, erecting buildings, as well as road and bridge construction. When the seeding of field and garden was completed, there was fencing, clearing and breaking new land, and the many tasks inherent

in making a homestead into a farm. Especially during that first year, the work did not seem burdensome, but was tackled with so much enthusiasm, such optimism and pride in working on their very own land. There was truly a "Joie de vivre." It seems that only after years of setbacks, misfortunes and disappointments, did this joy and optimism begin to falter.

1930, this "honeymoon" year can best be understood by taking excerpts from a letter which Else wrote to Germany in August:

> *The time just races by. When you receive this letter, I'll have already been married for four months, and away from home for five. We don't even realize it, with all our working and striving. Can you imagine, Anni, that I am really happy!*
>
> *What fun it is to milk Lilly, and to make golden yellow butter out of the rich cream. We bought a little four-liter butter churn for five dollars, and every two or three days I churn two or more pounds. Once in a while the bachelors come and get some. The Swede, (Ernie Gabrielson) is a steady customer.*
>
> *The baby chicks are doing well, but the hawk got seven of them. That's something we have to put up with when we're surrounded by bush.*
>
> *Even though our first year isn't turning out as we had hoped, we are by no means disheartened or depressed. One simply hopes for next year.* (Ed. How long have farmers been doing this?) *It's the same for everyone, not just for us. We have to take into consideration that the soil is still raw and virgin, and its tilth will improve. The weather was bad, with too much rain in June, then drought later on. The garden*

suffered in the same way as the fields. Every beginning is hard, and the first years are learning years. However, we're always in good spirits and enjoy good times, by ourselves or together with neighbours.

Milking Lilly

Fred Egge lives about a half mile from us, and right now he has five bachelors living there, just like Günther had last winter. They're a jolly bunch, and often one or the other comes to visit us. Then we make an exception and take a coffee break, or they join us for supper. Each week I bake six loaves of bread for these men.

Yesterday we took another nice horseback ride. We'd like to do this more often, but don't always get away, because on Sundays we usually have company. We're glad though, that people visit us and feel at home here. The first Sunday of every month a picnic is held in the river flats. People from near and far, not just Germans, get together. We had planned to drop in there later, but wanted to do a little exploring first.

On the way, we stopped in at Egge's bachelor haven. They promptly brewed us a cup of coffee, which we enjoyed with the cake I had brought along, all seated on wobbly benches of plank and wood blocks. Tafelmusik was provided by the jolly Saxon, Brünning, on his violin. I was rather out-numbered --- one woman among eight men!

We were soon back in the saddle and rode in the direction of the (Burnt) river, through thick bush and wind-fall, down steep inclines. We so enjoyed exploring in this scenic valley, that we decided to forget about going to the picnic. This was completely new territory to both of us. We had a close call when Günther's horse, Ella, in the lead, suddenly sank up to her belly into a quicksand-like bog. I, riding behind on Toni, carefully turned back, just in time. After a desperate struggle, the frightened animal was able to get her feet back on solid ground. (Ed. This is most likely the same spot where our black horse got stuck many years later.)

After this rather unnerving experience, we turned back, on an old worn path which led to a long-abandoned trapper shack. Then we crossed the river on a trail that had, at one time, been used by ranchers in the

Burnt River valley as they drove their cattle to Grande Prairie before the railroad was built. We continued our ride, uphill and down along this beautiful wooded valley, and finally ended up at Witte's where we were refreshed with cake and coffee.

On the way home, we met the young Wittes, Lieselotte and Georg who were returning from the picnic. They told us that in two weeks there will be a dance at Bulhofner's house (German Canadians) with everyone welcome. Maybe we'll ride over, although there will probably be many English people, and I can't converse with them.

Again, it was a nice Sunday, and we're glad that our "adventure" was not more serious. Today Günther is helping Sellin with hay-making, in return for hay. That's nice for us because we have no river flats, and Lilly could use the feed.

Recently Horst Solty shot a young moose. It's wonderful meat. Since it doesn't keep long, it was shared all around, so everyone would have some. We got a shoulder, which I divided up and made into aspic, a nice roast, and twelve pints canned.

In our barn we have a pair of chipmunks. The little critters are comical to watch, as with their characteristic squeak, they dart away at lightning speed. Prinz goes wild, barking for hours, chasing after them, in vain, of course.

Else and Günther Pankow 1930

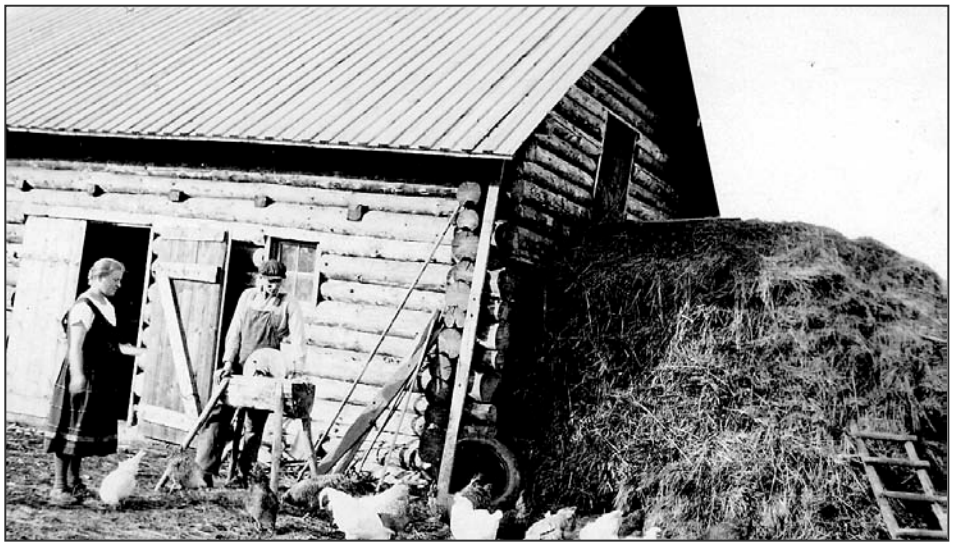
In the evening we often see nighthawks and swallows. During rainy weather we've seen gulls. Woodpeckers find nourishment in dead trees, and their hammering sometimes gets quite loud. There are lots of prairie chickens, and soon we'll be able to shoot some young ones for dinner. We often meet them when we go riding. They suddenly fly up out of the grass and spook the horses.

The mosquitoes are not quite as bad now. In June and July they were unbearable. We do have a screen door and I nailed screens on two windows, so on hot days we can open them to get a through-draft

without suffering afterwards.

You would love the wildflowers here, growing everywhere among the grass. There are hedge roses, goats beard, larkspur, fireweed, wild sunflowers, lilies, asters and goldenrod. It looks very pretty. Vetch grows everywhere and are excellent cattle feed. I have picked wild strawberries for a delicious dessert with cream, but they're very slow picking. Then there's a very tasty red berry that looks something like a blackberry, and creeps along the ground. Unfortunately, they are very scarce. (Ed. This is probably the dewberry.) *I've seen blueberry, gooseberry, raspberry, and currant bushes too, but they've yielded no berries, at least not this year. For the first few years we'll have very little fresh fruit, but hopefully that will change.*

And Günther's letter to Tante Anna that same year, though looking more at economic viability and financial realities, indicates that happiness, harmony and optimism reigned in the little log house.



Time to Sharpen the Axe

Our life is simply splendid! Else has adjusted so nicely and naturally that it is a real pleasure. Our home is remarkably cozy and comfortable. What changes can be wrought by a woman's touch! As much as we are enjoying our house, outside things have not looked so promising. For four weeks this month, we have, with few exceptions, had rain every day. The result is that, in the garden, the vegetable seeds and potatoes rotted, and in many parts of the field, the oats did likewise. I could not even seed some parts. Where the grain did come up, it is not progressing because of the cold and too much moisture. Unless the weather changes, we cannot count on it ripening in time. Well, there is nothing we can do about it. Taking chances goes with farming. We'll get by.

Just to be safe, I wrote to Hellmut (brother-in-law and executor of Mother Else Pankow's estate) and asked for an advance of $350 from my part of the inheritance (minus interest for Hansi.) Furthermore, I

hope, in July, to find several weeks of work in road construction, and then with some log-hauling in winter, to earn some cash. I'm not going to get grey hair over it yet. The bad thing is, as in agriculture everywhere, the turn-over is so slow. For example, money invested now in clearing and breaking cannot yield any returns until next fall.

The agricultural scene does not look rosy, and there is a lot of uncertainty in the world grain market. In spite of all that, we two farm people here in Northmark are happy and feel fortunate to be free, and working on our own piece of land. Our farmstead now consists of house, barn, outhouse, yard and garden, all situated in a lovely natural setting. On two sides of us there are greening fields, on one side there's bush, and on the fourth side the murmuring stream flows in its deep wooded ravine. To the north we have a nice view of a range of hills that reminds me so much of the Tautobergen, even though it's not as high. There is such lovely peace and silence here. The only sounds to be heard are the creek, the twittering of the birds, the peeping of our thirty chicks, and an occasional nicker from the peacefully grazing horses nearby. Hopefully we'll also soon hear the lowing of a milk cow.

The summer days are very long. It is still light at eleven o'clock, and it's easy to work too late, then suffer from lack of sleep. We really enjoy this ***freedom.*** *We can divide our time and our life as we wish.*

In the midst of all this optimism and hopefulness, some hints of hard reality began to appear. Their first crop proved to be a disappointment, much smaller than hoped for, because of adverse weather. As much as possible was salvaged for feed. But Günther was forced, with his team and hayrack, to join a threshing crew near Spirit River, in order to earn some money. For the first time, Else was left alone on the homestead for several weeks. It was not an easy time for either one. During rainy periods, when threshing was not possible, Günther, along with four German neighbours, would sometimes ride home. This was not a pleasure for horse or rider, travelling some twenty-five miles in the rain. Other times, when it didn't seem worthwhile to ride home, the seven-man crew languished in a damp, drafty tent, waiting for the weather to clear. But at the end of the threshing season, Günther was glad to return to wife and home with eighty dollars in his pocket. (Five dollars a day with team and rack.)

As winter set in, the young couple enjoyed their warm, cozy little home, as this snippet from Günther's letter to Tante Anna shows:

We have been sitting all day, writing Christmas letters, in our cozy living room, and we have the real Christmas spirit already. There's a beautiful snowy winter landscape outside, and in here there's an advent wreath hanging from the ceiling, and we're nibbling on gingerbread.

Tomorrow morning I have to get up at 3:30 to feed the horses, because I'm leaving for Spirit River at 5:30. Travelling is so much better with the sleigh than with the big rumbling wagon. And I continue to enjoy my two greys — faithful and quiet animals, but still with plenty of

spirit. They're very fast and mighty strong. They've never left me stuck.

Yesterday conditions were perfect for sleighing, so I hitched up my team and went to pick up our neighbours, Johann Oltmanns, his wife Margaret, her brother Eilert Pleis, and two young children. (Ed. Probably Hans and Helga Delfs whose mother was in Spirit River for the birth of her third child, Klaus.) *We like these friends, and celebrated first advent together. In the evening we drove them back home because they have no horses yet. Else was delighted with the speedy moonlight ride.*

On Christmas Eve there was a get-together at Wulf's house. The pastor, in his car, had already arrived at our place in the morning and had dinner with us. Then he spent a little time going over his sermon, until we went over to Wulf's together. It was a pleasant afternoon, with some twenty-five Germans in attendance, and we sang all the beautiful old Christmas carols. A collection had been taken before hand, so the children each received small bags of treats.

We went home at 6:30 and enjoyed a quiet intimate Christmas Eve. None of the parcels had arrived in time, but we had a lot of letters, which we read by the light of our candle-lit tree. We sang, too, nibbled on goodies, and drank home-made raspberry juice. Our thoughts were with all of you in Germany. If there was a touch of home-sickness, no one knew. The next two days we had visitors who came in the afternoon and stayed until late into the night. With singing and visiting, a little schnapps, we had such an enjoyable time that you might have thought we were back in Germany. Several days after Christmas, the parcels came and amid excited unwrapping, we had a little celebration all over again. We were overwhelmed by all your generosity and love. The joy is always tinged with a bit of sadness, because we always wonder: How can we ever reciprocate?

The rest of that winter, there was enough to live on, and enough feed for two horses and a cow, so Günther stayed home. Probably never again would this relatively care-free time of two-someness, of communion with unspoiled nature, of true neighbourly and community spirit, be as prevalent as during that "homestead honeymoon" year.

Chapter 11 A Decade of Babies

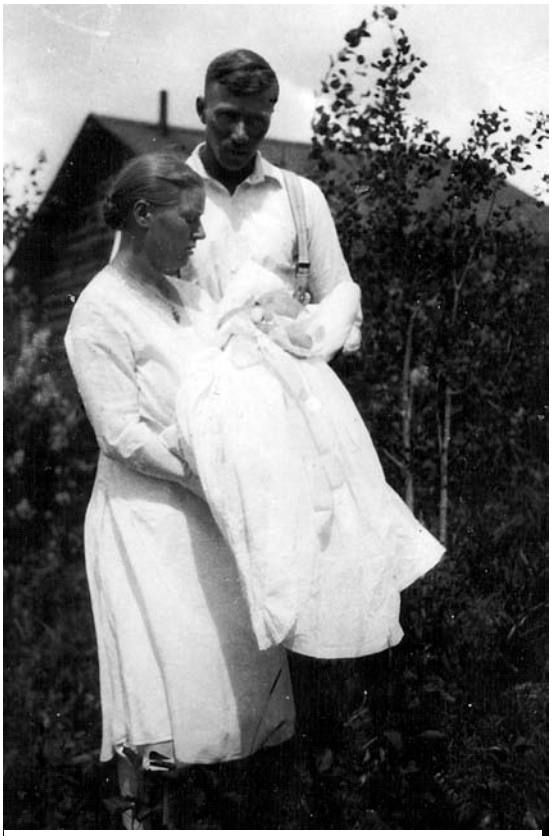
"A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on." …..... Carl Sandburg.

The homestead honeymoon for two was soon to be shared, for within the next ten years, Günther and Else became the parents of five children. The little log house would nearly burst at the seams and the already heavy workload would increase. Making ends meet, never mind developing and expanding the farm, was very very difficult during that depression era.

In November 1930, Omama Gesien wrote a letter to her daughter, which was similar to several others she would write in the future:

> *My dear child, did we understand this right? Your wish list includes material for diapers. Could it be, or is it for the young neighbour lady? We presume it's for you. What a surprise! We had hoped that this nice carefree and happy time of two-someness would be granted to you a little longer. But that's the way it is. It was the same with me. A true German mother is glad and waits in happy anticipation. Why didn't you tell us right away and we could have included some things in our parcel. Be sensible and careful when lifting and carrying. Don't stretch or bend over quickly. Always remember, you are carrying a God-given life, so put yourself completely in His care.*

The first child was on the way. The pregnancy went without problems. In case the doctor ever had to be fetched, a used buggy had been purchased at an auction sale and was over-hauled during the winter. It stood in readiness. But since this was the first baby, it was deemed wiser to go to Spirit River ahead of time, and have the baby delivered there. In mid May, Günther drove his expecting wife to town, where she was able to stay with the George Pring family. They spoke not a word of German, but were friendly, empathetic people. Günther headed back home to pressing spring work. Else found the next five days of waiting very long in a home where she could not communicate. She did a lot of



Else and Günther Pankow with Baby Dieter

walking, until she became quite familiar with every street in the small village. Then on Pentecost Sunday, things began to happen. In retrospect, on June 3rd, Else described the details in a letter to Tante Anna:

> *Since this will likely be my last day at Pring's in Spirit River, and I won't have this much time again, I want to write you a short note. I just can't wait to get home to our cozy little house. Never before have I been this homesick. It's so nice that our little Dietrich Fritz arrived on Sunday when his father was here with us. After a restless Saturday night, I was able to say with certainty that the time had come. Dr. Reavely and the mid-wife were summoned, and within eight hours, which is not bad for a first birth, our son had arrived. I think he'll look like his father--he's so long. Oh, Tante, you can't imagine* ***how*** *happy and deeply moved Günther is over this little mortal, and even more so because it is a* ***son*** *and heir.*

To share the joy, a telegram was immediately sent to Germany. At times like this the family was sorely missed. Under the care of Mrs. Pring, Else convalesced, while Günther went home to work. Ten days later he walked the twenty-one miles to Spirit River, as he had decided to hire a car to bring mother and baby home. Though still a strenuous trip, it was easier and faster than a buggy ride would have been. That homecoming to her humble log home, surrounded by burgeoning green trees and soft, warm spring air, a new baby in her arms, was one of the happiest days of the young mother's life. And the young father glowed with pride and gratitude.

Dietrich Fritz Pankow 1931

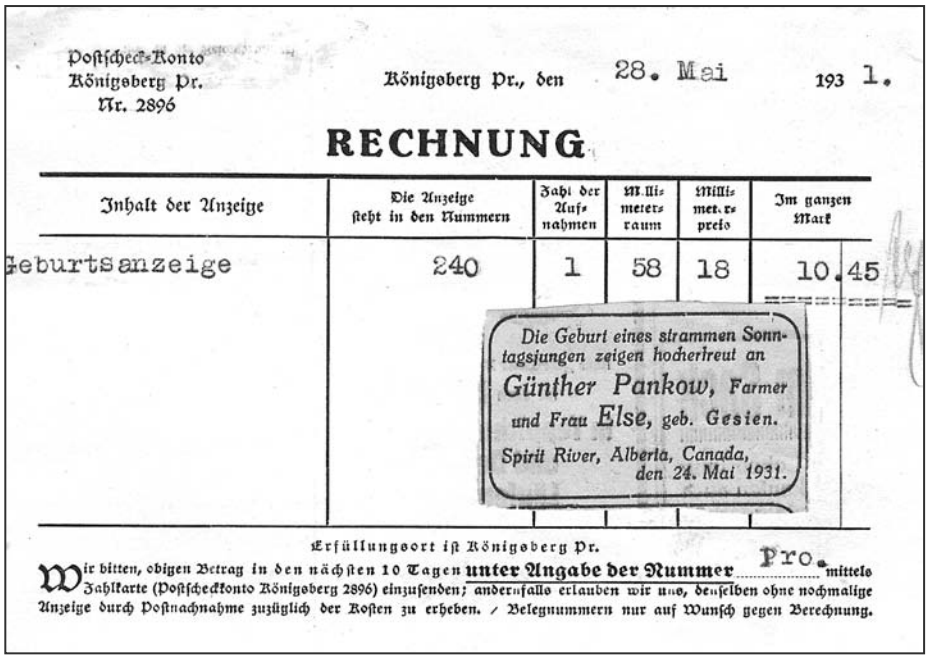
With the separation of thousands of miles, joyous occasions, as well as sad, had to be shared by letter — a rather poor substitute for a hug and a kiss or a heart-felt handshake. The time-lapse of the postal delivery didn't help. But, when Omama Gesien received the telegram on May 24th, she sat down the very next day and wrote:

> *To the happy parents: We send you our hearty congratulations and blessings on the birth of your son and heir! Praise and thanks be to God! May He keep your child healthy, bless him in body and spirit so that he may thrive for your and all our pleasure.*

You, dear new mother, look after yourself. Don't lift anything heavy, and lie down when you feel tired. Now there's more work for a mother, but how gladly one does it all! I hope it will be a quiet, contented child. Do raise him by the newest method — nothing to eat during the night, even if, at the beginning, you have to let him cry. He will get used to it right from the start. Will you be able to breast-feed? Always wash your breast before and after feeding, and strengthen the nipples with rum-soaked cloths. Lotte can write you about her method.

Last Friday I worried about you all day, and we were so thankful and overjoyed to find the telegram in the mailbox. Doctor (Werner Pankow) is going to put a birth announcement in the paper.

Uncle Werner Pankow did indeed, put the good news in the paper. He was so happy for his brother, and so proud that an heir to the Pankow name had arrived. Mixed with this elation was sadness and heavy-heartedness, at the many failures to achieve this in his own marriage. Indeed, Lena, a few months later, was pregnant again, and house-bound with orders for complete bed rest. Hope had crept into their hearts once more, only to be shattered. Lena Pankow died in childbirth June 24,1932.



Postscheck-Konto
Königsberg Pr.
Nr. 2896

Königsberg Pr., den 28. Mai 193 1.

RECHNUNG

Inhalt der Anzeige	Die Anzeige steht in den Nummern	Zahl der Aufnahmen	Millimeterraum	Millimeterpreis	Im ganzen Mark
Geburtsanzeige	240	1	58	18	10.45

Die Geburt eines strammen Sonntagsjungen zeigen hocherfreut an
Günther Pankow, Farmer
und Frau Else, geb. Gesien.
Spirit River, Alberta, Canada,
den 24. Mai 1931.

Erfüllungsort ist Königsberg Pr.

Wir bitten, obigen Betrag in den nächsten 10 Tagen **unter Angabe der Nummer** Pro. mittels Zahlkarte (Postscheckkonto Königsberg 2896) einzusenden; andernfalls erlauben wir uns, denselben ohne nochmalige Anzeige durch Postnachnahme zuzüglich der Kosten zu erheben. / Belegnummern nur auf Wunsch gegen Berechnung.

Meanwhile, on the Canadian homestead, a second child was on the way. On September 26, a dry autumn day in 1932, Ursula Anna was born, at home in the log cabin. Preparatory plans had been made, so that when the time came, a relay system of riders on fast horses made it possible to get to Spirit River in three hours. In this way Doctor Reavely was notified and was able, due to the dryness of the season, to drive his car all the way to the homestead. Labor pains had started at five in the morning and the doctor was there by nine. But this baby gave her mother a hard time and was not born until five o'clock in the afternoon.

Four days later, Else wrote to Tante Anna:

> *On the 26th of September we became the parents of little Urselchen. I think she wanted to play a trick on her mother who still had a lot of work planned when she arrived ten days early. But she is healthy and alert, weighs six pounds and sleeps all the time. We're so happy that the boy has a little sister; he loves babies. I'm so glad that I stayed home for the birth this time. Now we only have the doctor bill of fifteen dollars , and that will have to wait too. These are such difficult times. There is so much to do that Günther can't stay inside with us. Tante Lisi (Mrs. Egge), our neighbour, has been a big help. Dieter, at one and a half, still has to be watched constantly, and is not toilet trained yet.*

Omama Gesien responded to the second Canadian grandchild:

> *My sincere congratulations! Dear parents, I'm sure you are enjoying your little daughter, but at the same time, there will be more worries and expenses. It's not so good that she came so soon after Dieterchen, but that happens. I hope it won't be the same with you as with us — so many children cause a host of small worries, and later big worries. Now you'll have so much work and stress. May God grant both of you good health and strength. Maybe you'll just have the two. It's nice that it was a little sister. May she thrive and become her mother's helper.*

Ursula Anna Pankow 1932

It was while Günther delighted in the birth of his second child, that he wrote a letter to his older brother, Werner. That man was suffering in sadness after his wife Lena's death in childbirth in June. That Günther was a very compassionate, caring human being is shown clearly again in these excerpts:

> *For you poor lonely man, the joy of having a new little niece will have been tempered with sadness as you think of your dear Lena, and how your high hopes of having your own little "sunshine" were repeatedly shattered. But I know that in spite of that, you will share our happiness at the arrival of our little girl.*

I wrote to the Gesiens, in more detail, about how it all went, so I won't repeat it all here, as you'll get to read that letter. You know, it again became very clear to me, how much Lena must have suffered each time, physically but even more, emotionally. What a woman and mother must endure! First the burden of the long pregnancy, and then the great pain of giving birth. I witnessed it for the second time now, and this time not as onlooker only. I had various tasks to do for the doctor, even had to administer chloroform.

When it was all over and Else awoke from a long, healthy, refreshing sleep, all the discomforts of the last nine months, and the pain of the birth itself, were forgotten. Little Urselchen lay peacefully sleeping in her carriage. But when this reward for all the hard hours is not there, when it is all for naught, when the mother has no little one to hold in her arms, as was so often the case with Lena, then the mind and the spirit must be grievously wounded.

On May 10, 1936, Gerta Helene, the third child was born at the Egge house, neighbouring the Pankow homestead. Else had moved to her friend's home for her maternity stay because her own house was in disarray during the process of a major renovation, that of interior plastering. Günther was renting the Menckens land right across from Egge's so was working close at hand. He was later to record the details of Gerta's birth in his journal:

I was working at Mencken's during the week before May 10 and had made arrangements with Mother that she hoist a white flag at our house if she needed me. I would be able to see this with field glasses from Egge's barn. I climbed up that barn roof several times a day! However, when the time came it was at night and I was home. Quickly I hitched one horse to the buggy, tied two harnessed horses behind, and headed for Egge's. Again, arrangements had been made, to use the

Gerta Helene Pankow (1936)
With her Mother, Ursula and Dieter

relay system on the way to Spirit River, but this time, because of the wet springtime road conditions, the doctor had to be brought out by team and democrat. While Egge had started off to town, Menckens, with the

buggy, raced over to pick up Leni Witte. She, a nurse, was there within an hour, and just in time. Gerta was in a hurry and Mother was not in labor for long. When the doctor arrived at seven in the morning, it was all over and he did not have to stay long. With a fresh team of horses, we took him back to Spirit River at a more leisurely pace.

After ten days I brought Mother home, and when she had regained her strength, the plastering in our house was completed, and later the painting as well. How mother managed all this in her condition and still kept up her spirits is almost unbelievable. However, our house now was cozy --- warm in winter, cool in summer, and above all, free of bed bugs! In it live two very happy parents with three children. Dieter and Ursel are proud of their little sister and old enough to play with her."

Omama Gesien responds to another grandchild:

Yesterday we received news of the birth of your little Gerta. What a surprise! I had just remarked to Mrs. Kublum how nice it was that all my children have one girl and one boy. But it's good this way too. You, dear mother, need lots of helpers. We share your happiness, and wish God's blessing on the child. Each child brings more work and worry, but the heavenly Father will continue to help, and will give you all that you need. For the parents, we wish you good health, strength, patience and lots of love. The little ones will be overjoyed with the baby. Urselchen will have a real live doll to play with.

Gerta's Baptism
Else Pankow (standing)
Hedy Schack with Barbara
Elise Egge holding Gerta
Leni Witte, Children in front:
Dieter, Ursula, Jochen Witte

Two years later, on June 19, 1938, Heidrun Maria, the fourth Pankow child was born. She was welcomed as a strong healthy baby, with only a momentary disappointment that it wasn't a boy. She, too, was born in Egge's house, as the whole family had moved there for the summer. Egges were away for a visit to Germany and Günther had rented their land. Dr. Reavely, who was close to eighty years old now, was brought out by Ewald Jacobs, the store-keeper. His car could make it to within four miles, where he was met by team and democrat. Before the doctor arrived, Hermi Delfs had come to be with the waiting mother. It was a long difficult labor but there were no complications. Next day the three other children, who had been staying at Solty's, came home to see their new little sister. During the mother's confinement Günther looked after house and family. Good neighbours Martha Janssen and Ursula Solty, having no small

children of their own, came often to lend a hand. And the reaction from Germany came in a letter from the Gesien home:

Heidrun Maria Pankow 1938

We parents send our congratulations and best wishes on the birth of your little Heidrun. With God's help, may she thrive in body and spirit. Dieterchen, I feel sorry for you, that you didn't get a little brother, but sisters are nice too.

Tante Mieze adds her greetings and congratulations and wonders:

How did you ever come up with these names? Are they old Germanic?

Uncle Ernst and Tante Käthe write:

Congratulations! We drink a toast to the Canadians, especially to little Heidrun. By the way, it's a pretty name.

Whatever relatives may have thought of the name, it was Heidrun on paper only, and the little one was henceforth called Heidi.

Irmgard Lotte Pankow 1940 (Held by Sister Ursula)

On May 15, 1940, the world was already at war, but peace still reigned in the backwoods of Northmark when Irmgard Lotte arrived at the Pankow log cabin. Doctor Reavely, pioneer doctor who had helped so many in the homesteading country around Spirit River, had died. No replacement had been found. An experienced nurse had promised to come if she was summoned, but when Ewald Jacob's car drove in, it was without the nurse. She was tied up with other cases.

What to do? Panic was not the answer, though the pregnant mother was already in advanced labor. Tante Lisi (Egge) was totally rattled (as was her wont). But Günther remained calm and cool (as was his wont) and managed everything well. Actually, he had been witness to and assisted with the births of the other four children, so was not totally uninitiated. All the while, the brave patient herself gave running instructions, and little Irmgard arrived safely. Sometime later, the nurse did arrive and gave her approval that all was well.

Since spring seeding had been completed, Günther looked after his wife, the four other children, and the household. Proudly he bathed and changed the tiny infant, cradling her gently in his large work-worn farmer hands.

He enjoyed this period of domesticity and the happy harmonious family togetherness. Its like was not soon to come again. Brushing, breaking and myriad other homestead tasks were always waiting.

Certainly the families in Germany would have reacted and sent their congratulations on the birth of Irmgard, their fifth Canadian grandchild. But unfortunately no letters from that time period were available, so no excerpts could be translated here. This inability to communicate with the family in Germany was just one of the many hardships brought about by the war.

1940
Family Photo to Send to Father in Camp.
Taken during a Visit at the Otto Delfs Home.
Shown back: Ursula and Dieter.
Front: Heidi, Mother with Irma, Gerta and Prinz.

Chapter 12 The Depression Years

*There is no medicine like **hope,** no incentive so great, and no tonic so powerful as the expectation of something better tomorrow.* … O. S. Marden.

It seemed that nothing could mar or blemish the love and harmony that reigned that first year in the little log house. In its idyllic setting, surrounded by unspoiled nature, it seemed far removed from the hard economic realities of the outside world.

The settlers in this remote community were still filled with hope and optimism engendered by the past twenty years of growth and progress in Western Canada. Each had come with an opportunity to start a new life, with an iron determination to build a new home with the raw materials at hand. Each had 160 acres of free land which was to form the basis for his family's future.

Alas, this optimistic spirit was short lived. When the depression struck in late 1929, its effect was felt by all. It was characterized by a devastating drop in commodity prices and a rapid drop in consumer demand. This led to a depressingly high number of unemployed. There no longer prevailed any "upward mobility." People were forced to stay on their farms and homesteads, for lack of opportunity elsewhere, and live off the land on spare, sometimes harsh subsistence levels.[2]

The new Burnt River settlers, including the young Pankows, just struggling to get established, found this a time of hardship and discouragement. Some abandoned their homesteads in despair. Men tried to find jobs on farms in the surrounding more established areas, or in sawmills. If they were successful, they were forced to accept very low wages. All that the homesteaders could hope to do during the depression was to maintain a status quo, thankful to keep their families fed and sheltered. Günther and Else Pankow, too, found themselves in this position. The years that followed the "homestead honeymoon" were much more difficult.

But at this point they were by no means discouraged or without hope. In a letter of September 12, 1930, Father writes to Tante Anna, giving her an inventory of his pioneer operation, to console her, and perhaps to reassure himself:

> *Don't think that we are hanging our heads – you know us better than that. To reassure you, I'll give you a little overview of our situation, which I think will interest you. Our inventory includes one wagon, one sleigh, and a disc. My neighbour, Fred Egge the son of a veterinarian from Mecklenburg, has a seed drill, binder and plow. This way we help each other out with the machinery and won't have to make any*

immediate purchases. During seeding and harvest, we share horses as well. I have two horses and he intends to buy two in spring when he returns from Germany, hopefully with a wife. Besides my two very good horses, we have two productive milk cows. To make good use of the skim milk, we have three pigs, two for butchering and one for breeding; also twenty-three chickens that will, hopefully, lay lots of eggs this winter.

We have our warm comfortable house, a good barn with a large loft, a garden and 52 acres of land under cultivation. So you see, dear Tante, that although I have put considerable money into this, there is something positive to show for it – and all this within one and a half years, built and achieved by my own two hands. Again and again, particularly this gives me so much satisfaction. I have no intention of letting our first year's crop failure get me down. We have enough to live on and you need not worry. Our cost of living has become less since we got the cows, and since a woman has been managing the household.

They were indeed proud of their progress, and made the best of what they had. The house and barn were built of logs with dovetailed corners, and the house had cedar shingles. The inside walls were lined with varnished lumber. This provided an attractive background for the few pictures they had brought along. In the summer of 1931 a verandah was built on to the south side of the house, so that one would not "fall in with the door," as Father put it. Not as much dirt would be tracked in, and the snow would not drift right in front of the door.

There was very little real furniture, except the odd piece skillfully constructed by Horst Anders. The steamer trunks and packing crates brought over on the sea voyage, now served as storage units. Apple boxes were used in a variety of ways — as cupboards, drawers, end and night tables or stools, and were dressed up with bright paint or gingham curtains. (Apples used to come in large family size wooden boxes.) The spring-fitted army cots which had been purchased at an auction sale served as their first couch and extra bed. The kitchen, most important to the housewife, was described by Mother:

The stove in the kitchen is not large, but burns well, even though it's old. At the top of the back wall there is a warming oven which is very practical. To bake, I just need to pull up a lever and the firebox heats the oven. It gives off a cozy heat as well, and we often eat in the kitchen. Blue and white checkered linoleum covers the table in the dining corner. (I remember later, that for warmth and coziness, Mother fashioned a wall hanging for the area behind the table. It was made of brown cotton material, the top edged in a multi-coloured border made of scraps in a patch-work pattern. The little ones especially, loved it and would run their hands along the border as they climbed on chairs around the table.)

The floors were made of planed one by six boards, at first lye-scrubbed white, later painted or varnished. After washing them, a final rinse of skim milk mixed with water was applied to produce a shine.

Dieter, Ursula and Father Bringing in Firewood

A box for firewood stood beside the stove, as in every pioneer kitchen, and a large pile of wood would be found in the yard. Perhaps at the beginning of winter this would be in the form of long tree lengths that had been limbed and hauled out of the bush with sleigh and horses. Later there would be a large pile of blocks, because the neighbours had come for a wood-sawing bee. Splitting these blocks into smaller pieces for use in heater and cookstove was an ever-present chore.

So many times Father's letters told of crop failures — due to too much or too little rain, late springs, newness and lack of tilth in field and garden soil, and most often, early killing frosts. It makes me wonder how they could possibly, following year after year of this, have the will, the perseverance and optimism to continue. Perhaps it was the "next year" syndrome, so commonly held by farmers to this day. And occasionally it happened. Then the letter sounded so optimistic!

> *Day before yesterday I cut my wheat with the binder, so now, through the kitchen window I see a field of stooks. Tomorrow I'll cut the rye, then the oats. On the whole, we expect an average crop, certainly a lot better than last year. This time at least we'll have enough for feed and seed, and hopefully the burden of having to buy grain will end.*
>
> *We're very satisfied with the garden too. Especially the newly broken piece in the creek flat, with its sandy humus, turned out very well. The garden by the house is much better too, as the soil develops better tilth. Since early summer we've had radishes, lettuce, and all kinds of vegetables. But we'll have no beans. An early frost got them. By covering, we saved the cucumbers, tomatoes and pumpkins. As a result, we had cucumber salad for dinner today!*

In the too-short summer season, it was always a struggle, and very long hours of hard work were necessary to make progress.

> *We didn't finish seeding until the middle of June. The last field was for green-feed and then the land breaking began. My neighbour Egge (who*

had just returned from Germany with his wife) and I bought a big breaking plow in partnership. We hitched our teams up together, so with eight horses, we broke land until early August. We not only broke land, but also broke a lot of harnesses! Now we have it down to a system, and next year things will go better. It was slow going. July was hot, so for the sake of the horses, we worked from three in the morning until ten in the morning, and then again from five in the afternoon until ten-thirty in the evening, to avoid the greatest heat. We lost a lot of time with the frequent harnessing and then unharnessing, and searching for the horses, who, between work times, had to be allowed to feed in the pasture. I'm sure that neither man nor horse gained a pound this summer.

Father and Egge Breaking Land. Dieter Learning How

Fencing, a time consuming job, had to be worked in somewhere as well. In 1930 some eighty acres of land, mostly creek banks, were fenced in for pasture. And there was no break. All too quickly harvest time had arrived.

At threshing time I went to work for the same farmer as last year, near Spirit River, to earn some cash. And hopefully in the winter there'll be relief road work available. The government has to do something to give the many poor homesteaders an opportunity to work and earn their bread. The outlook here is not good. Grain and cattle prices are so ridiculously low that we can't even cover expenses. For example, last year I got seventeen dollars for a 200-pound pig and this year I have to be satisfied with seventeen dollars for three of them. But when we have to buy something, especially machinery repairs, the prices have not gone down. I wonder how long this can last. But these conditions prevail all over the world, probably worst of all in Germany. I got out just in time to come here. To make a beginning here now would be almost impossible.

In spite of these depressing conditions, the young Pankows were not depressed. In spite of all the hard work and seemingly little reward, they continued to be optimistic:

Here we live so peacefully secluded. Admittedly, our work, which often does not allow early quitting time, often no Sundays, can be exhausting and overwhelming. But we are content. And this year we can see some results from all our work. Above all, we are doing this for ***us*** *and for the first young Pankow heir. Our little boy is thriving because his mother still has milk for him. He smiles now and nods his head. We are so happy and thankful for this precious little sunshine. Dieter was*

baptized the last Sunday in July during a church service at Wulf's house.

(It is comforting to know that at least this part of Father's dreams and ambitions, that of working for his son, became a reality. His hard work, his foresight and perseverance, did indeed ensure an easier and better life for his son and future generations.) Ed.

The son and heir, understandably, brought great happiness and pride, especially because he was the first-born. I'm sure all we other children were as dearly loved, but the newness, the primal position of the first child can, it seems, never quite be replicated. Furthermore, the depression was worsening, and with each child the time became ever more scarce, the detailed letters became fewer. Therefore, excerpts such as those that follow will not often be found again. In January 1933 Father wrote to Tante Anna:

This year we couldn't set the beautifully carved figures of your gift creche under the Christmas tree. Dieter would have claimed each piece as undisputedly his own, and would have been anything but gentle in handling them. But what happiness that little rascal brings us! From week to week we can see his progress, and always he's discovering something new. He can't talk yet, but understands nearly everything. Upon request, he without hesitation, points to his own or his parents' body parts, or he brings his father whatever he asks – slippers, socks, shoes, cap and mittens. And you should hear him laugh! Especially when the cat and dog tear playfully around the house, then he holds his stomach in laughter. But he can be cranky and stubborn often enough too. His little sister is progressing splendidly too. She's a little round ball, laughs and flirts happily. I'm afraid that her father will spoil this sweet little lady! As soon as the weather is half-ways decent we want to take pictures so that little Urselchen can finally introduce herself to all of you in Germany.

These were the many precious moments in their home, that kept away feelings of hopelessness and depression when the dirty thirties were conducive to just that. Again Father shares his lot as he writes to his beloved Tante Anna, in whom he finds a true

Mother and Dieter

confidante:

It's nice to have wife and children all in good health in our happy home. In spite of the bad times, we've always had enough to eat. We really have to tighten our belts, we live in a foreign country far from home and loved ones, but in spite of all this we are not dissatisfied. But during these difficult times, without family, without the work and striving on our very own land, life here would hardly be worth living. Family happiness is an inexhaustible source of health and strength; my good wife and the children never fail me. This winter especially has been the worst one for me since I came to Canada.

Urselchen is a sweet little fat noodle, calm and quiet, always in the mood for laughing and playing. I'm afraid she will become her father's spoiled child. Already in the six months of her life she has robbed me of several valuable work hours. I just can't get away from this little girl, always giving in to a few more minutes of playtime. Who does she look like? Her figure is her mother's, her ears are mine, her face is yours.

And Dieter? — a real boy who discovers something new every day, is cheeky and wants his own way, so that more than once he's had a spank on the popo. But he's very cute, sometimes a real clown, so that we have to burst out laughing. He runs around quick as a weasel, and feels that he is the master over not only the cat and dog, but also horse, sow and cow. He scolds loudly when they don't get out of his way, or when they curiously sniff at him. He has no fear and always wants to go outside. Whenever possible, I do take him along on short sleigh rides.

Dieter Asserting his Authority Over the Pig

He can hardly talk at all, but seems to understand everything. Sometimes we're baffled. For example, when I casually mention to Else that I'm going to feed the pigs, he immediately gets the pig pail and wants to come along. If only spring would come so that he could be outside more, and he wouldn't whine so much.

The winter of '33 was one of the most difficult because of feed shortage, brought about by a very poor crop and an exceptionally cold and early winter.

In order to get together enough feed this winter I traveled roughly a thousand kilometers, one step at a time with my sleigh, hayrack and two horses, sometimes in snow storms and temperatures as low as –45

Fahrenheit. The night before one of these trips we would go to bed early, because at three in the morning I'd have to feed the horses. The first night would be spent on some farm in La Glace, and the following night, if I was lucky, I'd arrive back home with my load of straw. I certainly didn't get fat, and my poor horses are thinner than ever before. There were a total of fifteen trips, at thirty to forty miles each, taking two days, sometimes three. At times it took real careful driving. On the "road" there is only one packed track, with three feet of loose snow on either side. Even more difficulties arose when a strong wind had drifted in the track. If we got even six inches off the beaten track, an upset was the likely result. Meeting another loaded sleigh became quite tricky, but we helped each other, and I managed to upset my load only three times!

At least I gained something "culturally speaking" on these long hauls. How? You ask. When it wasn't too extremely cold, I took along reading material, finishing a book on nearly every trip. So the time passed more quickly, and when I got back to our comfortable little house, Mother and I would "review and discuss." She had read many of the same books, often while she was nursing the babies. So we got in some reading while we worked, the only time we had. I'm so glad that we were able to do this. That's all we have for intellectual stimulation.

The Pioneer Log Church on Site of the Present Cemetery

It was also in this winter of '32 – '33 that the settlers got together and built the little Lutheran log church on the river bank. Now services no longer had to be conducted in the homes. Father helped during the log hauling and building bees. Mother was part of the organizing committee, along with Fred Egge, Harry Schack, Mrs. Querengesser (the pastor's wife) for a Christmas program in 1935.

In spite of cold temperatures and occasional drifting snow, winter was the season of preference for traveling, especially freighting. Grain, straw, hay, livestock, lumber and firewood were all much easier and faster to move

with a smooth running sleigh over snow-covered, frozen hard ground, as opposed to the big rumbling wagon over rough roads and sometimes near impassable mud holes. It was easier for horses and passengers too. Occasionally, in winters of little snow, the steep hills on the poor ungraded roads became very icy, and the horses, though well shod, struggled to keep their footing.

In 1933 it was with mixed emotions that Father applied for his citizenship papers:

> *I must apply for my citizenship as this is a requirement before I can secure title to my homestead. There are mixed feelings connected with this but certainly I am fair-minded enough to acknowledge gratefully, that Canada has given me my very own piece of land. So becoming a loyal Canadian citizen is a price I am willing to pay. Last week two other Germans and I appeared before the high court in Grande Prairie. The whole procedure took less than half an hour, the judge presiding in his robes, the policemen (RCMP) in their smart scarlet dress uniforms standing guard. Now the papers will go to Ottawa for final approval and Canada will have three new citizens.*

Pring's Sawmill 1934

The financial situation in 1934 was not good. Crops had been poor and job opportunities were few and far between. So, when offered a job at a sawmill some fifteen kilometers from home, Father decided to take it. On January ninth the big move took place. The whole family, necessary household goods, two cows and two horses all went to Pring's sawmill. Uncle Horst Anders stayed to look after the remaining livestock at home. Mother could earn money here too, by cooking for the boss at seventy-five cents a day, and they were able to sell fresh milk. Father had a logging contract, so his horses were earning too. Altogether they could average three dollars a day. That sounded really good, but the catch was — these dollars were not in cash but in wood! They were paid in lumber. This was not readily marketable but it did make a good barter medium. In this way Father hoped to acquire some of the machinery still needed on his homestead.

In some ways they enjoyed that winter at the mill. In a large bunk house they had a roomy kitchen and a bedroom. Above them lived a number of hardy lumberjacks. Beside them the boss, George Pring, had his room and office. The youngsters, Dieter and Ursula, often stood by the window and

watched the busy operation of the mill close by, and being the only children there, were quite spoiled by all. It was nice too, that several Germans worked here. Six bachelors lived in one bunkhouse, and new residents were the young newly-wed Wittes. Leni had just come from Germany in December and was a good friend and neighbour for mother. The mill workers visited from door to door, played Skat and enjoyed German gramophone music. But ten o'clock was curfew hour — this was camp law, and for good reason. Mother had to have the boss's breakfast ready at six-thirty and work started at seven.

At Pring's Sawmill: Men Left to R. Otto Delfs, Günther Pankow, Hans Delfs, Hans Becker, Charlie Muehrer, Georg Witte, Horst Solty. Front — Else Pankow holding Dieter, Leni Witte holding Ursula

It was not an easy life. For six days they worked from dawn to dusk, then on Sunday they'd take a load of lumber home and bring back feed for horses and cows. They realized even more the value of having a home of

Hauling Home the Lumber

their own, and waited anxiously to get back to it in April. They also realized the value of good health, as for the first time in fourteen years, Father was seriously ill and bedridden for two weeks with a throat infection. That winter was not like the cozy family life they had become accustomed to, but the family could stay together and a reasonable income was realized. During those depression times, many had to put up with less than ideal circumstances.

After putting aside lumber that would be needed for building projects on his own place, Father thought he would have enough left to deal on a used binder. New, these machines cost an unaffordable three-hundred dollars. Bartering was difficult for him. Whereas some reveled in this dealing, it was not part of his nature. But how else was he to acquire the machinery which was still needed? The building plans at home had suffered a setback in time due to the mill work, but had gained in lumber. By July '34 Father was able to report that there now were five buildings on the farmstead — house, barn, combination workshop/granary, smokehouse and toilet! Mother enjoyed the new verandah on the south side of the house and made the most of it. Pansies and nasturtiums bloomed profusely in her planter boxes and brightly enameled tin pails. Trailing hops had begun to surround this attractive little retreat. Some progress was also made on the picket fence around the garden to protect it from the scratching hens.

The Pankow Homestead Buildings in 1934

In those difficult early years, another task that had to be worked into the busy schedule was road building. During the first year of settlement all the young homesteaders got together on Saturdays to build or improve roads — voluntarily, without pay. Gradually, as the population increased, the government took over road building, and the locals were hired at a fair wage, completing some miles every year. First, the stretch from Chinook Valley towards Spirit River, including the steel bridge over the Burnt, was completed (graded), then from Northmark corner to the store, and eventually west to the end of settlement. This included a good crossing through the creek at the Hans Delfs farmstead, south of the location of the present church, which had always been a trouble spot.

Father took a road building job in the fall of ’33, which took him to the very west end of the settlement on the north side of the river. He rode six miles to work, leaving in the dark, then cut brush and grubbed stumps for ten hours before riding home, again in the dark. It was a very strenuous job, but he did not have to move away from home and was given the opportunity to earn some much- needed cash.

When the road on the north side was completed, the settlers on the south side of the river started pressuring for a road on their side. More than once, Father rode around seeking signatures on a petition of request. This finally brought results when a government bridge crew with pile drivers was brought in. Wooden bridges were built to span the creeks at Dale’s, Pleis’, Oltmanns’ and Egge’s, the local men doing all the earth-moving with their horses. Teams of four were hitched to a large fresno (a large shovel) with which innumerable cubic meters of heavy clay were moved from high to low spots and to bridge approaches. All this was finally finished in 1938. Now the settlers on the south side had a direct access road to Woking. No longer did they have to cross the Burnt River twice as they detoured via Northmark Store when hauling grain to the elevator. By today’s standards the roads were still terrible. The grading had provided ditches for better drainage. It was possible to travel by car in dry weather, and even in wet conditions, the mud holes were not quite as bad. Winter travel was still preferred. When temperatures dropped far below zero drivers sometimes walked behind their horse-drawn grain boxes in order to keep from freezing. Lighter sleighs, called cutters were used for passenger travel and some people had built on an enclosed box with a heater inside.

Mother and Dieter on the “Bridge” over the Creek

Families were concerned not only with their own, but also with the welfare of others. On December 1, 1933, while doing his Christmas mail, Father writes:

I am home alone with the children this afternoon because Else went to our neighbour Dick Moll’s house. She wanted to clean and tidy the house up a bit so it would be nicer for Mrs. Moll when she comes home from Spirit River with her new baby. Dick has been batching, and Egges, who have none of their own, kept the two older Moll children.

Our two little darlings are doing fine. While I’m writing, Dieter is sitting on my knee and following my every move most intently. He says quite a few words now, although only we can understand some of them.

The rascal is quite smart! As Else was leaving, I mentioned to her that I was going to write letters. Promptly he came with the bottle of ink "Here Papa." He can tell all our horses, cows and calves apart, even when they are inter-mingling outside. And Urselchen? She is taking her first careful steps without hanging on, all the while grinning from ear to ear. She's plump and chubby and always has a good appetite. That's not always the case with Dieter and he's quite thin. But all four of us are happy and healthy.

Dieter and Ursula by the Flower Beds

In July of that same year, after telling Tante Anna something of his pride and enjoyment in the growing numbers of livestock in his operation, he continues:

But my greatest happiness is in my family. With his sister, Dieter is definitely the boss, but at the same time he can be quite cavalier – without fear and beyond reproach. Now he quite often brings my lunch to the field or bush. If it's not too far he brings his little sister along. The lunch pail clutched in one hand, his sister's wrist in the other, the two come trudging towards me. It just looks too comical! At noon or in the evening when I'm unhitching, he comes to meet me and has to ride along. He'll be a real farmer! His speech is coming along now too. He's coming out with new words almost daily, first coyly with care, then with confident pride. One can't possibly write it all. Every day we experience our children in their innocence, their moods, their learning and their sweetness.

Following the moves back and forth from Pring's sawmill in '34, unwelcome guests had infested the Pankow log home as well as many others in the settlement. Bed bugs had become a real unpleasant nuisance. So the decision was made to do a major renovation. The attractive boards lining the inside walls were all removed and replaced with lathes (edgings from the sawmill). One of the neighbours, George Baschawerk, a Hungarian German plasterer was hired. Under his direction, Father mixed the plaster which consisted of sandy loam, straw and water, stirred to just the right consistency. Then George, with his trowel, deftly filled the cracks between the edgings and left a hard evenly finished wall. When all the surfaces were done, they had to dry for four weeks, at which time a finishing layer of thinner plaster, using chaff instead of straw, was applied. Finally, the smooth hard walls were painted with bright pastel colored kalsomine, a powder that was mixed with water. What a change! Now the house was bright, cool in summer, warm in winter, due to the insulating properties of the plaster, and above all, the bed bug situation was greatly improved.

A harmonious home and family life saw us through many difficult times. Most winter months were not quite so hectic, even though there was feed and grain hauling to do, firewood to cut, harness to repair, and the many livestock chores — a daily commitment. The long winter evenings could be quite cozy, the children all tucked in, the coal oil lamp casting a dim glow, the fire crackling in the heater. Occasionally a loud crack sounded as the deep frost permeated the log walls. Mother had an endless supply of sewing and mending, these chores increasing with each child. Her deft fingers darned many a sock, altered many an item of clothing to make it fit and fashioned many a new dress for four girls to wear to the Christmas concert. Especially if the family planned to go visiting or expected company the following Sunday, which happened quite frequently, Mother often worked very late. Her patient washing, mending, and last minute ironing with the heavy unwieldy iron, had us all looking our best.

Dieter and Ursula at Bedtime

Father often made these long work evenings more enjoyable for his wife by reading aloud, so that she too could enjoy the book he happened to be reading. In this respect, perhaps Father was “ahead of his time.” Today young husbands and fathers take an active role in housework and childcare. Not so in the early 1900s. Father helped in the house whenever he could. Especially during Mother’s pregnancies he washed the floor, helped with the laundry, or whatever needed doing. Wood and water supply was always his job, later helped by the children. He took on bath night and quite enjoyed this Saturday night ritual in which one youngster after the other would be scrubbed down in the square galvanized tub, then allowed to romp in fresh clean nighties.

Hair care was all “in home.” None of us went to a hairdresser. I can’t recall having shampoo, until sometime in the fifties. We used bar soap, and for a little extra shine, a few drops of vinegar were added to the rinse water. Mother was the barber and did all the hair cutting. For the girls this

was not a frequent chore because we all wore “pigtails” until we were well into our teens. For special occasions, our long braids were sometimes wound around our heads, or crescent-like, pinned over our ears. With three younger sisters, “doing their hair” was often my job and I became quite practiced at braiding, making sure the parts were perfectly straight and centered. Then there came a phase when I learned to create curls instead. Hair was wound around strips of cloth (rag curlers we called them) with the resulting head full of “ringlets.” Toni home-permanent kits became popular, and neighbours “did hair” for each other. Each strand was rolled onto metal rods, snapped into rubber vices, then soaked with nose-tingling, ammonia smelling setting lotion. For a newer look , we graduated from metal rollers and wave clips to “pin curls” twisted around the finger, and fastened flat to the head with bobby pins. The pin-curled head was often covered with a triangular bandana tied at the top.

Managing a household with no electricity, no running water and indoor plumbing, no central gas heating, was so much more difficult, so much more labor intensive. Washing clothes took a whole day of hard physical labor, starting with heating the water in a large boiler on the wood-stove. Then each article was rubbed with soap on a corrugated glass or metal wash board, then agitated by hand, then rinsed and wrung out. In the summer the rinsing was done down at the creek by kneeling on a board crossing the water. When diapers were part of the laundry, as was the case for most of the thirties, the workload increased. During these depression years when there was such a dire shortage of cash, Mother made soap by boiling together lard (home-rendered on butchering day) and lye, letting the mixture cool and set, then cutting it into squares. We had no bleach so whites were boiled, or in the winter, spread out on the snow on a sunshiny day for a dazzling whiteness. There was another unusual task on wash day. Used sanitary napkins were not discarded, but washed and reused. Mother made them from used underwear or other porous material, sewing several layers together. The used ones were stored in a paper bag, then soaked in several changes of water, scrubbed with soap, dried, ready for use again. This may have been done purely for financial reasons, or perhaps because these personal hygiene items just were not readily available. Again, Mother’s trusty old treadle sewing machine served a useful purpose. Ironing day should follow washday, but was worked in wherever possible. With sad irons and hot-coal irons, it was necessary to have a hot stove, so ironing was often combined with bread baking. Never-press and easy-care

The Board Crossing over the Creek
Dieter, Gerta, Ursula

had not even been dreamed about. Cottons were starched, sprinkled, then ironed – tedious hard work.

Feeding the family in the thirties, in a pioneer kitchen, with little or no money to spend, required ingenuity and imagination – perhaps wizardry. Mother must have possessed a little of each. She could produce a tasty meal from the most humble ingredients. We as children were not aware that we were poor, and I don't ever remember feeling deprived. We knew no other lifestyle and our neighbours were all in the same position. Our garden provided vegetables, our fields, grain for flour, our livestock produced meat, milk, cream, butter and cheese. These were there for us regardless of the economic climate, and we were fortunate indeed that we had a mother who made maximum use of these resources.

Butchering day and the sausage making which followed remains as an unpleasant memory of a messy kitchen, steamy odours, greasy utensils and short tempers. I must have been about twelve years old when I was cranking the handle on the meat grinder, stuffing in piece after piece of raw meat. Alas, in a moment of day dreaming, my finger pressed too deeply into the cutting mouth of the grinder. I drew back, shrieking, as my blood enriched the sausage mix with a touch of extra protein. Mother was not sympathetic. She seemed to think it was a ploy to get out of work, as all she said was "Verschwind!!" motioning towards the stairway. I crept away, nursing my injured finger and my wounded pride. After all the work was finished, including the stuffing with a community-owned sausage machine, a supply of liver sausage, lung and blood sausage, and the most popular, mettwurst, lay on the large table, ready for the smoke house.

The Creek Flat Garden

Baking with a temperamental wood stove was a skill that had to be learned, but Mother soon mastered it. We always had homemade bread and buns. At times during a given year there may have been a shortage of butter. As a substitute, we used rendered lard with bits of onion and apple

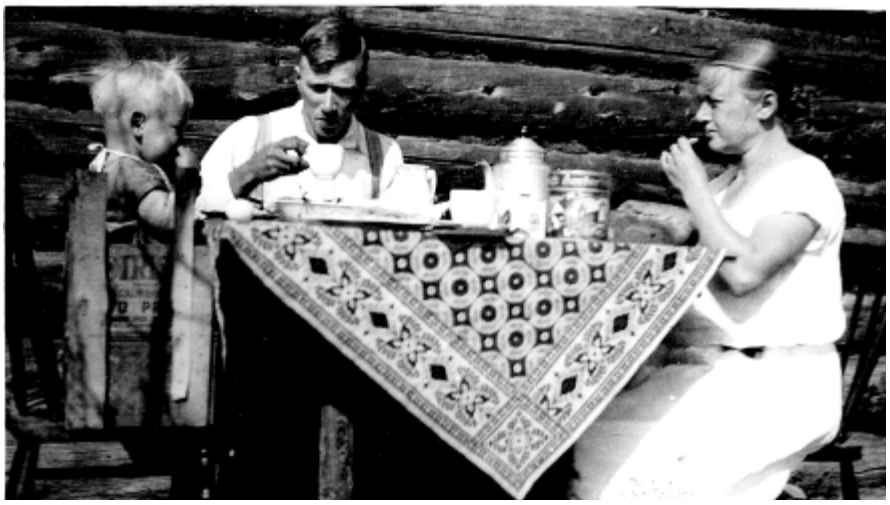
mixed in. Favourite dishes that I remember as part of my childhood were Königsberger Klopse, (meatballs in mustard sauce), fresh pea soup, cream of beet soup with miniature meatballs in it, potato pancakes, rote grütze (pudding made with berry juice), floating island (chocolate or vanilla flavoured milk soup with dollops of stiffly beaten egg white floating in it). A special rare treat was zucker (egg yolks beaten with sugar until thick and pale). Eating raw eggs seemed to hold no fear of contacting salmonella poisoning.

A bacteria-free home would have been much more difficult to maintain, given that there was no running water, no indoor plumbing, and none of the numerous cleaning and disinfecting products on the market today. But basic soap and water cleanliness was the rule and proved effective. One daily task was that of keeping the cream separator impeccably clean. The Germans called it the “centrifuge” because that was the principle by which it operated. The warm milk was strained into the large vat on top, then we cranked and cranked the handle until the speed was just right. Then the tap was opened, sending thick cream through one spout and skim milk through the other. That part was almost fun. It was the daily dismantling to wash and scald, then reassembling the several parts, including twenty thin metal discs in just the right order, that was the tedious part.

But it was worth it all. We drank whole milk, which was taken out before separating. When Heidi and Irma were toddlers, they stood with their cups ready, when the milkers came in. They loved “neue” (new) milk while it was still warm from the cow, and got their calcium at least twice a day. And the delicious thick cream! We used it on everything — porridge, pudding and other desserts, berries, fruit, coffee, and a special treat — homemade cottage cheese with cream and sugar. It seems everyone did enough hard physical work to burn up all those calories, and no one ever talked about cholesterol.

At times we had enough cream to “ship”. We took it to the train in Woking in large metal three or five gallon cans, to be taken to the Northern Alberta Dairy Pool in Grande Prairie. We were always pleased when we got No. 1, for excellent taste, freshness and consistency, and the resulting top price. We kept enough cream to make butter in our earthenware churn with the wooden paddles which were repeatedly plunged up and down. The length of time it took for the butter to “come” depended on the temperature and consistency of the cream. Butter making was a tedious task, but we could read while doing it. After the buttermilk was saved, the butter was washed and squeezed in several changes of cold water. If it was to be sold at the local store, it was pressed into one-pound wooden forms, then wrapped in parchment paper especially sized for a pound of butter.

During the hard times Mother made marmalade out of carrots, adding just a touch of lemon or orange zest to enhance the flavour. Our creek flat garden had a long row of rhubarb. This had been raised from seed supplied by Opapa Gesien, then small transplants set out in the garden. Rhubarb became a staple of most pioneer kitchens for preserving, making jam and juice. Nature also provided. After a rain, lovely brown capped mushrooms



Sunday Morning Breakfast

or the white champignons popped up all over the pasture, and our fingers turned black from picking and cleaning them. In the spring, Mother sometimes put gloves in our lunch pail so we could pick stinging nettles on the way home from school. There was a good patch beside our trail, and we knew we'd have nettle greens, boiled potatoes and scrambled eggs for supper that night. We often picked berries. Wild strawberries grew along the creek banks, and their delicious flavour, especially with cream, made a very special dessert. To the northwest, along the school trail, there were several good patches of the tasty low-bush blueberries, which we harvested with homemade pickers, then "winnowed" them clean in a gentle wind.

Sometimes we picked raspberries near Oilund's mill, perhaps four miles south into the hills. We left in the morning, on horseback, following a trail that bore faint traces of an old winter lumber-haul road. The terrain was rugged, covered with bush and high grass, and crossed by small creeks. The rusty remains of an old steam-engine and some sawdust piles were all that remained of a once active lumber industry. We were a bit wary, knowing that there was always the possibility of coming face to face with a bear, enjoying the same berries. We picked until late afternoon, stopping only for a quick sandwich. Then, our pails of juicy berries strapped to the saddle, or held in front of us, we rode home, tired and stiff, but pleased with "the fruit of our labours." We also picked saskatoons, but had to go farther afield for them. I remember on at least one occasion, that Toerpers

took us along in their truck, to a site along Emerson Trail, where these berries grew in large , juicy purple clusters.

Even though the heavy workload and short summer season often necessitated working on Sunday, Mother and Father always tried to make Sunday morning breakfast special. In the summer it was served in the south side verandah, a bright cloth covering the rough table and
often there were rolls fresh from the oven. This became a traditional time for conversation and seldom-granted relaxation.

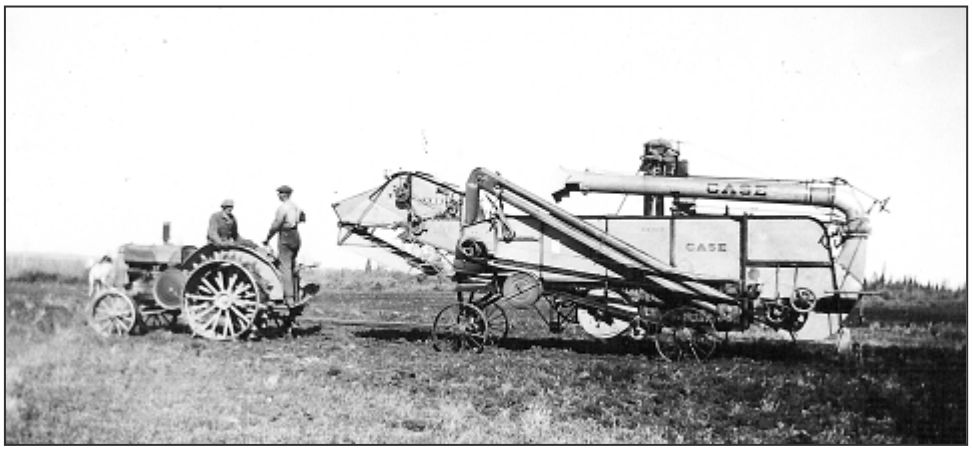
Harvest time in the life of a farmer should be the highlight of the year, the reward for all his hard work, the time to reap what he had sown. Unfortunately, during those first years, then the depression era, it was often a time of disappointment and let down. The first small fields were cut with a binder, stooked, then hauled to the farmsteads and layered in stacks. Pring's threshing machine was the only one in a large area, and he could not risk coming until the ground was frozen. It could not have been a profitable business with the few small stacks scattered here and there.

Cutting the Crop with a Binder

As the fields got bigger and the roads improved, more threshing machines came into the area, and the sheaves no longer had to be hauled into stacks. With their horses and hayracks, the crew of men, armed with pitch forks, quickly dismantled each stook in the field, feeding the sheaves directly into the machine's hungry maw. Each farmer took his turn on the crew, in order to pay his own threshing bill. I remember Otto Toerper had a threshing outfit, with Lloyd Mack as separator man, and on the south side it was Hans Delfs Sr. who moved his machine from farm to farm, with Johann Oltmanns as the separator man.

Threshing day on our farm was a time of excitement. Mother could be heard in the kitchen very early in the morning, starting a hot fire in the cookstove. Bread, buns, cakes and pies had to be baked. Feeding the threshers was a matter of pride, and reputations were at stake. To serve cornflakes (with no staying power) for breakfast, as one lady did, was not acceptable. One farmer, not known for his generosity, told his wife to serve the wings, necks, and lesser parts of the chicken to the toiling crew,

so that his own family could savor the breasts and drumsticks. The bundle pitchers were not sure what to make of an "onion pie," quite strange to them, served by the new Swiss woman in the west. It was probably a delicious quiche! Mother took pride in serving her flaky-crusted lemon meringue pies for dessert. At any rate, the hard workers were given sustenance and strengthened several times a day by the best efforts of the womenfolk.



Hans Delfs' Threshing Outfit

I remember the putt-putt of Delfs' John Deere tractor as its long belt powered the rattling separator; the rumbling of the wagons and racks, the occasional snort of a horse. Throats became dry and voices raspy as dust and chaff filled the air; the straw pile grew steadily wider and higher. My excitement changed to anxiety when it was my turn to climb into our log granary to wield the grain shovel, in order to keep the incoming grain spout clear. My panic level rose as the pile got higher and higher, and my space got ever smaller and dustier. Mercifully, someone would come to change me off.

Pitching Bundles into the Thresher

Being the farthest away, the Westmark farmers were often the last ones to "get threshed." The machines were very busy, sometimes bad weather interfered, and with winter on the doorstep, everyone wanted to be first. Given all this, and the fact that this was their very livelihood, there were bound to be hard feelings and frustrations, even some behaviors bordering on the unethical. After a long day of pitching bundles, Father came home one evening, bone weary and discouraged, but, shaking his head, his only

comment about a neighbour's conduct was "Kleiner Mann" (little man.) He was not referring to physical stature.

In the end everyone usually got his grain in the bin, and there would be the good feeling that another harvest was finished. Regrettably, this euphoria soon waned. When all the bills and debts were paid, the realization came, that there was not much left to live on for a whole year.

Father had been keeping his eyes open for more land, especially for hay making. So in 1936 our family got caught up in a bit of the excitement so prevalent in Western Canada in earlier days during the land rush. A homestead on the Burnt River had been owned by a German count, von Berlepsch. He gave it up and returned to Germany, making this land again eligible for homesteading. Father was informed of its availability, but the timing was rather crucial. Father had gone to Spirit River to attend the celebrations for the coronation of King George VI, going as a representative of the German settlers in Northmark, and pledging their allegiance. When he got home after midnight, there was a letter from the Land Titles office. Seven hours remained before this land would be open for homestead application in Grande Prairie, fifty miles away. Knowing that others were interested as well, they had to act quickly. The children were left in the care of Uncle Horst, and Mother and Father jumped into the buggy and headed for Northmark Store. Ewald Jacobs, the storekeeper, was awakened and coaxed into driving them to Grande Prairie. They arrived one hour before the office was to open and waited at the door as the official came with his key. Mother filled out a form, they paid the ten dollar application fee, and twelve dollars for the small cabin situated on the land. Now Mother was the proud owner of 160 acres of bush land, well cut up by the river and small creeks. They deemed their nocturnal rush trip a success.

Unloading Hay

Certainly this new acquisition brought with it even more work. True, they could grow more feed – hay and green feed in the river flats, and thus sell more of their grain. But first there was an incredible amount of work. The flats had little bush, but windfall, driftwood and stumps had to be removed before hay could be cut. Access was fraught with difficulties. Roads and river crossings had to be built through terrain that was anything but level, and encroached on the

property of others because of the difficult location of the legal road allowance.

I remember this river quarter with mixed feelings. The landscape was beautiful; the dips in the river, the horseback rides through its valleys — these were enjoyable. But the haymaking was not easy. It meant maneuvering the horse drawn mower, then the rake, into many a difficult corner, on many a treacherous slope. Long, hot, sweaty days were spent making haycocks, then pitching them high up on the rack. The ride home through rocky river crossings, up and down steep hills, was not for the faint-hearted. Sometimes the big load, with the kids perched on top, listed rather precariously as Father carefully guided the straining horses. We were always glad when we got to the level road on the home stretch, and snuggled into the hay for a short siesta before the unloading began. This too, was hard work, with its pitching, pushing and stuffing, to utilize every last corner of the hay loft. I can still feel the hot, dusty, itchy, muscle-aching sensations of that task. When the loft was full, hay stacks had to be built. This took skill and practice, placing each forkful just right in consecutive layers, to make a straight- sided, rain impenetrable and stable stack.

Forest fires were a mixed blessing to the homesteaders. They helped in land clearing by burning up acres and acres of bush, but could also be dangerous. In the summer of ’37 the Saddle Hills to the south were on fire and for days the sky was dark, the sun a red orb, and the acrid smoke stung eyes and nostrils. On several occasions settlers were called together quickly to save someone’s house or barn as flames raged too close. For Uncle, help arrived too late, and his home was burned to the ground. Serious ground fires were also an aftermath of forest fires, sometimes smoldering for months, and burning up valuable topsoil.

Memories of a Wood Sawing Bee

In spite of the Spartan existence of the thirties, or perhaps because of it, the community spirit was alive and well. Everyone was in the same position — had the same problems to deal with, the same small victories to celebrate. Working together, helping your neighbour, was a

necessity and a way of life. In addition to the many "random acts of kindness" there were threshing, woodcutting and building bees.

For fun and entertainment, to break the monotony of the long hard workdays, the settlers made their own good times. Of necessity, these had to be within horse-traveling distance. A moonlight sleigh ride could become a party in itself, a load of revelers tucked into the sleigh box, with the happy sounds of song and harmonica to accompany the crunch of horse's hoof on snow. Visiting, mostly on Sunday afternoons, was a very common outing. Especially the bachelors sought the company and home cooking of a family home. Women were sometimes left alone for weeks while their men worked away from home to "keep the wolf from the door," and visitors were a welcome sight. Father writes, in 1931:

> *My neighbour Egge did finally become engaged and the wedding is on March 30. On May 2 the young couple sets sail for Canada. We are so glad that another young German woman is coming here. It'll be especially nice for Else, as Egges are our close neighbours. Hopefully the young women will get along as well as we men have for a long time.*

The following winter, an enjoyable outing together with that same young couple was undertaken:

> *Two weeks before Christmas we took a nice sleigh ride outing together with Egges, to visit two German families who live in La Glace, some thirty kilometers south of us. It was a cool –20 but we had fur coats and warm blankets. All you could see of Dieter was the tip of his nose. In order to make the trip go faster, we hitched up "four long" — quite royally! The four horses fairly flew along, so that it was pure enjoyment for all. The winter scenery was beautiful too, as we sped through miles and miles of hoar-frost covered bush and forest. Especially for the women, a trip like this is a welcome change because they don't get out often. We didn't leave until afternoon, but in three hours we had reached our destination. Molls are Mecklenburgers. Dick had already visited us before, and now we got to know his wife Else and their little daughter Ingrid. After an evening of lively conversation, it was time to think about sleeping arrangements. The three women occupied bed and mattresses downstairs, and we three men bedded down on the floor in the attic. Next day we visited another German family, then in late afternoon we hurried home again.*

In 1932, Mrs. Baker, wife of Northmark's storekeeper and post-master, organized a type of ladies club in the area. The idea was to provide a bit of entertainment and change of pace for the local women. They met twice a month and one of their mandates was to help the new immigrants with the English language. Mrs. Baker, as well as another homesteader's wife, had formerly been teachers so were well equipped for this task. Mother rode horseback to these meetings while Father was the baby-sitter. That also became his job on several Sundays before Christmas. A holiday celebration was being planned for all the Northmark families, and the

Germans were to perform a number of folk dances. Mother took part. Joe Hitzlberger and Charlie Kolmus are remembered for their spirited performance of the “Schuhplattler.” Practices were held every Sunday, usually at Egge’s, because they had the largest house.

That same winter was described as particularly early, cold and harsh. Knee-deep snow and heavy frosts began in early November, prompting Mother to write:

> *Close to the stove it’s quite nice and warm, but we can’t spend much time in the far corners. I hope it won’t be this cold on Sunday, because we had hoped that Urselchen would be baptized, and it’s quite a ways to the church.*

New Year’s Eve saw a lively gathering with a costume party at Wulf’s house, to see in the year 1934. That summer the settlers hosted a big picnic in July:

River Flat Picnic

> *For next Sunday we have organized a German fest to be held on a nice meadow by the Burnt River, with all kinds of amusements — sack racing, tug-o-war, pole vaulting, target shooting, folk dancing, stab-the-ring,(a horseman’s game originating in Holstein,) and more. In the evening there’ll be an outdoor dance. It could be quite a nice affair.*

For some time these picnics were held regularly in the summer and became quite popular with all the settlers, not just the Germans. It was fun to be a part of the development of the little pioneer settlement. Since Father arrived in 1929, five of the bachelors had married. The addition of five young women made a huge difference to the social life of the bush land. Houses were becoming more numerous, the fields were getting

larger. Where five years ago there was a wilderness without path or road, rarely trod by human foot, now there was a blossoming settlement.

For recreational and cultural development, the Deutscher Bund (Canadian Society for German Culture) was established in Northmark. This society was registered with the Canadian government and was a cultural organization which did not participate in party politics, and respected the laws of Canada. These "bunds" existed in German settlements throughout Canada. Their mandate was to further German culture — language, art, literature and music, by supplying the membership with appropriate materials, such as books, films, gramophone records, song books, theater production materials, speaker and discussion subjects. Members paid a small membership fee and were expected to contribute to the growth and welfare of the local group, come to the aid of the needy, to respect the flag and the laws of Canada. The goal was to maintain goodwill and friendly relations with Canada, even while keeping German culture alive.

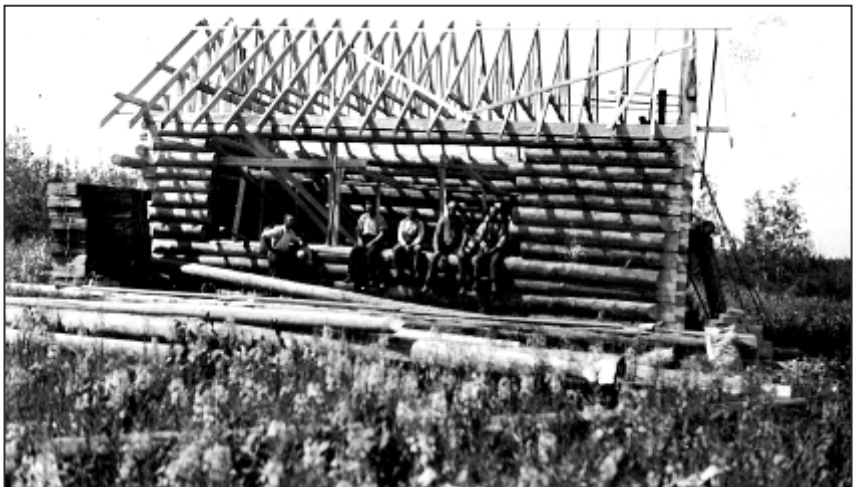
Outdoor Dance Following the Picnic

Much of the social life of the Germans then centered around this organization. Father was the president of this society, a fact he would live to regret. Mother was always very active in helping with the entertainment aspects — drama, choir, folk dancing, shadow and puppet shows, for their social evenings. This involved much planning, brain wracking, hard work, and sometimes frustration. But when things turned out well and people enjoyed, then it was all worthwhile. People had to resolutely take time to do these things, or they would never escape from the yoke of work that shackled them daily from dawn to dusk.

The families often got together for birthdays, an excuse for a party with singing, friendly visiting, and the standard wiener and potato salad supper.

We children sometimes had birthday parties, but they were a far cry from today's loot bag, go to MacDonald's affair. I remember one gift in particular and can still see Willie Janssen walking up the hill on the west side of our house, carrying a doll bed he had crafted for me — a thirteen year old building a gift for a six year old girl! And on a later birthday I received a bright green barrette for my hair from Clesta and Elma Dale. I felt special, and in no way disparaged. Our values and our expectations were so different.

The year 1938 marked a very important milestone in the life of the pioneer settlement and our family was also involved. When it was established that the required number of children now lived in the area, steps were taken to open a school. At a meeting held during the winter of '37 – '38 a school



Westmark School Under Construction

board was formed, with Günther Pankow as chairman, Clara Oltmanns as secretary, and Harry Sloat, Fred Janssen and Johann Oltmanns, trustees. Father circulated a petition of request signed by the electors residing in the proposed school district. After some controversy, and finally a vote regarding the location of the school house, construction began in the spring of 1938. Nearly everyone participated in some phase: yard clearing, log hauling, building, furnishing, fencing and outbuildings. School building and improvements could be done in lieu of taxes, a big help to the cash-strapped settlers.

In September 1938, the doors of the school opened for the first time, and the district would henceforth be called Westmark. Children from seven families attended, Dieter and I among them. Many of us spoke no English, and several pupils were older than six when they enrolled in Grade one. The contribution of the rural pioneer teachers cannot be too strongly commended. With dauntless spirit and determination, they did their best under adverse conditions. In addition to the three Rs, each in his own way, gave something of himself to enrich the lives of these

homesteader children. The annual Christmas concert, now held at the schoolhouse, added a new dimension to the social life of the community.

In the fall of ’38 another devastating disappointment struck the small settlement. Hopes had been high and again there was a lot of optimism. The crops had grown well and matured nicely. Even the usual August frost had stayed away. Alas, in early September a snowstorm flattened all the grain. This in itself could be managed and many bought pick-up guards and fastened them to the binder knife, planning to cut from only one side instead of going round and round the field. But now the waiting began, for the soft, wet fields to dry enough to carry the binder. This waiting and hoping continued until mid-November — a most nerve-wracking time — during which rain fell frequently, and the fields became even more impassable. When winter really set in, they knew that another crop was lost. Father wrote:

> *Our plans and dreams were shattered once more, because we had yet another disaster. We don’t even like to write to you any more about all the failures and setbacks, most of which are not of our making. Up to now they’ve always been caused by the forces of nature, but they are nevertheless very real. But once the bitter truth has been faced, we find ourselves slipping back into our thick skin, something we absolutely need here. Again we will hope for next year, and have decided to stay for a while.*
>
> *A happy harmonious family life is the foundation that makes it possible to bear it here and to be happy, and children add so much. Dieter is a bright lad, small but strong and healthy, very good-natured and not as whiny as he used to be. Ursel, in spite of the one and a half years age difference, is just as tall, but stockier and heavier, and thus more awkward, not nearly as agile and quick. She loves dolls, is quite affectionate and a bit smug. She loves “mothering” her little sister. Gertachen is a real sweet angel. I could play with her for hours. She’s just starting to talk and understands everything.*
>
> *Right now I’m home alone with the children for a few days. During the night before last our neighbour Johann Oltmanns came to get Else. His wife’s first baby was arriving a week earlier than expected. For eighteen hours the poor woman was in labour, before her big boy finally arrived. The eighty-four year old doctor had arrived from Spirit River, in spite of thirty below with an east wind. He was able to travel most of the way with his car — in February, in northern Canada! That happens only once in ten years. We have very little snow. At first Doctor Reavely was not home when they tried to get him, so Doctor Goldberg, a Prussian Jew who has been in Canada for ten years, was supposed to come. But he refused (the third such incident) because it was too cold, and he’d have to see the money first. The worst of it is that, legally, there is no way to get at this wretched person. Fortunately Doctor Reavely soon arrived back in Spirit River, and was immediately prepared to come out to Oltmanns. He is a man of rare magnanimity always ready to help, and so often he sees no financial return. Unfortunately he’s getting so old and shaky.*

Else will stay at Oltmanns for two more days, until Clara's mother can come. In this respect, she's more fortunate than most of the German women here, because her relatives live close by and are readily available in such cases. This is Oltmanns' second wife. His first died three years ago of a lung ailment. He has been through a lot and we were all happy when, last spring he married a nice young German girl, born in Canada. Now he has his son and heir. In his first marriage, two children died at a very young age. Yes, there are many cruel twists of fate. This is much more noticeable here, where only a few people live. Everyone knows everyone else and there is a greater sharing of joys and sorrows. In Northmark alone, an author could write a wonderful and valuable homesteader novel. Too bad I can't do that. It would probably be an easier and surer way to make a living! But life is good. We are and remain optimists.

An optimistic outlook was imperative in order to continue. A decade had passed since Father set foot on Canadian soil, and a large part of this time could be described as "depression years." It was inevitable that some doubts would begin to creep in. He was asking himself many questions.

Dieter, Gerta, Ursula .

Chapter 14 They Took Father Away

The difficult decision had been made, following many serious discussions with family, friends and neighbours. The Pankow family would give up their hard earned Canadian homestead and return to their German homeland.

However, fate intervened before this decision could be translated into action. In the summer of 1939 the Northmark homesteaders had been listening anxiously around the few battery radios which existed in the pioneer settlement, trying to hear the latest news. Hans H. Delfs remembers September first, 1939 very clearly. He was fourteen years old. After hearing the news, he hurried out to his father who was stooking in the fields. "Dad, I just heard it on the radio. Germany has invaded Poland!" His father, a calm, reserved man, answered quietly "Don't worry, son. It probably won't amount to anything." But Otto Delfs was wrong. The move of Hitler's armies into Poland did indeed amount to something — the second World War. England and France declared war on Germany on September third, 1939. The number of lives that were changed, indeed lost, by that war cannot ever be comprehended. The consequences would be felt around the world, immediately and for decades to come, in our family and families everywhere.

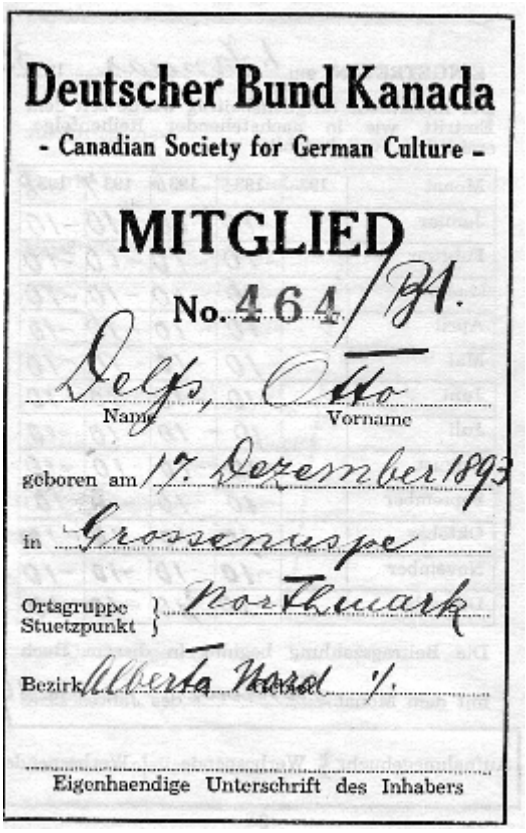
The declaration of war created an uneasy situation for the people who had been born on German soil, including many of the Northmark settlers. There was an escalation of the already existing anti-German sentiment. The Mackenzie King government got caught up in war hysteria which created a climate of suspicion and mistrust amongst the people. All German-born residents over fifteen years of age, naturalized or not, were treated as enemy aliens. They had to report to their local R.C.M.P. detachments for finger printing, were asked to give up their firearms and to report to the police on a regular basis. The loss of firearms was a very real hardship because in the pioneer settlement there was a heavy reliance on wild meat for the year's food supply. Regrettably, firearms were not returned until the end of the war, some never. [2]

War changed the once harmonious little community. The ethnic song, dance and drama staged by the German Canadian Society, once mutually enjoyed by all nationalities, were now viewed with suspicion. Activities to further the cultural heritage of a homeland are usually considered highly commendable, and are widely supported. But now these very activities to uphold German culture became suspect.

Individuals reacted in different ways. Some became over-zealous in their "patriotism" and reported every remotely suspicious movement by the German-born settlers. When Hans Delfs built a larger than average hip

roof on his barn, it was reported "the Germans in Westmark are building an aircraft hangar." And Otto Delfs was to be watched carefully because he was once part of a submarine crew in Germany, and is bound to have German U-boat information. These were totally ridiculous accusations, but nevertheless real. There were those who chose to deny their heritage. This kind of cowardice could not command respect from either side.

As the war dragged on, the Canadian government introduced military conscription which called upon all physically fit males over eighteen for military service. Ironically this included men who had previously lost the right to possess personal firearms. There was a sad irony in receiving a conscription order in the mail one day, and a letter edged in black the next, announcing the death of a brother, killed in action on the other side. Uncle Horst Anders was a case in point. While his brother Hellmut fought in the German army, he enlisted in the Canadian counterpart.



Deutscher Bund Kanada

- Canadian Society for German Culture -

MITGLIED

No. 464 / B1.

Delfs, Otto

Name Vorname

geboren am 17. Dezember 1893

in Grossenuspe

Ortsgruppe / Stuetzpunkt } Northmark

Bezirk Alberta Nord 1.

Eigenhaendige Unterschrift des Inhabers

Membership Registration

German Canadian Societies became objects of suspicion. Local groups such as the one in Northmark, had no desire to provoke authorities, so they simply went into limbo, ceasing all activities during the war. Local leaders, however, were singled out to serve as an example, taken into custody and interned in concentration camps.

One of these leaders was our Father. On August 11, 1940, he had intended to go to the river quarter to cut hay, but decided instead to help other neighbours with manse renovations at the pastor's place. His generous volunteerism was interrupted by a visit from Corporal Watts of the Spirit River R.C.M.P. detachment. "I'm sorry Mr. Pankow, but my orders are to take you in for interrogation" said the corporal. I don't know that this was a complete surprise to Father. Several of his fellow "Bund" leaders had met the same fate several months earlier.

Father packed a few things, changed his clothes and said his good-byes to the family. All the while, the policeman, wishing to grant them privacy, went to the woodpile and split block after block of fire-wood, until a large pile lay on the ground. Corporal Watts was a decent and compassionate man who knew in his heart that he was taking in an innocent man. But he had to follow orders. As Father embraced his wife and three little girls, the corporal said "Would you two like to ride along for a bit?" Dieter and I hopped excitedly into the back seat. A car ride was a rare experience. We drove north along the narrow winding road that followed the creek bank through our, then Sloat's land. When we reached the main road, Dieter and I hopped out and waved goodbye. How could we know that we would not see our father for two and a half years? What thoughts would crowd the mind of seven and eight year old youngsters as they trudged home on the hot dusty road? What would be their conversation? Why did the policeman come and take their father away?

Two men from the little settlement were summoned for interrogation that day. One paled and groveled, declaring that he had just married his young wife. And although he had a large Nazi swastika painted on the wall of his farm shed, this man went free. The other responded in quiet dignity. The man with five young children was taken away to be interned.

Pankow Family 1941
Dieter Holding Gerta, Mother Holding Irma, Ursula Holding Heidi

Thus began two and a half lonely difficult years for Mother and her five children who were too young to understand. Adding to the stress, the government implemented rationing of essential goods and some food products. Sugar, butter, meat and coffee required ration coupon books. Farm families did not suffer as much from this, except for the sugar and coffee. Many people got their own hives of bees and honey was widely used to replace sugar. I can remember Mother roasting barley, then grinding it with a bit of chicory, for a coffee substitute. Tooth paste and shaving cream could be purchased only if the empty tube was returned. We brushed our teeth with salt water! For Mother these material deprivations were not nearly as onerous as the

mental anguish, the loneliness, the absence of companion, bread winner and father.

Neighbours were very helpful — out of genuine concern and kindness, and a sense of duty. There was probably also a bit of "there but for the grace of God go I." Any one of them could have been in Father's position. Mother wrote:

> *The helpfulness of the neighbours is most gratifying. They're saying "Günther's internment is not a reflection on him personally. He is the least dangerous of any. But he is serving time for all of us."*

This feeling seemed to exist not only in the immediate community, but in other surrounding German settlements as well. Individuals were moved to try and help in some way and would enclose five, ten or fifteen dollars in their letters of encouragement to mother. These included Fred Paschatag of Clairmont, Scribas and Rozinskis of Heart Valley and Erich Andersens of Wembley.

A group of local friends and neighbours (Hans Delfs, Pastor Krisch, Alfred Sellin, Otto Toerper, Reinhold Witte) got together to be guarantors in case Mother ever defaulted on her grocery payments. Gus Nagel requested not to be overlooked if it came to taking a collection. She hoped fervently that it would never come to this — that these measures were only put in place in case of dire emergency. Certainly the goodwill of these people was evident and commendable. It was not easy, however, for Mother, self-sufficient and independent, to accept these acts of generosity, even under these unusual circumstances.

The neighbours, who were also family friends, took their sense of responsibility and friendship very seriously. Fred (Fieten) Egge and Horst Solty were true stalwarts. Otto Toerper looked after the north side of the river quarter because he had easier access from his side, and Mother didn't have to worry about that part. In nearly every letter Mother told of the helpfulness of someone in the community:

> *One day last week Hein (Schuett) and Horst (Solty) came to fix the roof. Today Helmuth (Glimm), Fieten (Egge) and Papa Witte helped with the stooking. Horst was on his way to our place to fix the granary floor when he met Frank (Schulz) on the road. So Frank came and helped too. Helmuth, Pastor Krisch, and Mr. Maltzan worked hard today to help us haul the rabbit-ravaged haystacks home from the river quarter. Last week Orm Bryan from Chinook Valley came to castrate the colts. Dick (Moll) helped haul our wheat bundles into stacks. Last week he took our calf to the stockyard and had to use four horses because the roads were so muddy. Hans Delfs offered to thresh our grain for the price of the gas and oil, and the bundle haulers volunteered their work. Karl (Stein) was one of the first to come forward.*

> *You know those old pieces of saddle that were always hanging around in the barn? One day they disappeared. Horst (Solty) had taken them, fixed the saddle and made it usable again. This was my birthday present. You know how he is a man of few words, but always quietly helpful.*

For obvious reasons, Sellin seemed to feel more duty bound and obligated to Mother than many others did, and sometimes brought little gifts, like Easter eggs for the children. The war, with its belt-tightening on the home front, made local self-sufficiency seem even more imperative. Mother became quite adept at mending not only the family clothing, but also horse collars and harnesses and binder canvasses. Hein Schuett had a mechanism for making twine into rope, and other settlers brought him jobs. He also had an artistic bent, and made colorful wooden puppets which were used for presentations at social functions. Hans Delfs had a grain crusher and did custom work. Loads of grain were hauled to his machine to make chop for feed. He also did land breaking with his John Deere steel-wheeled tractor and plow. Otto Delfs and Jacob Knoblauch were blacksmiths and were kept busy sharpening plow shares and making repairs. Johann Oltmanns was "the man" when it came time to butcher or make sausage. Fred Neiser had a wood sawing outfit with which he travelled around to cut the neighbours yearly supply of firewood. Local men helped each other by making up the crew. Egges owned a sausage-making machine, which was, it seemed, used by every family in the community at some time. Eilert Pleis was handy with clippers and scissors and served as barber for many a neighbour.

Ewald Jacobs, operator of the Northmark General Store, and Edmund Krisch, pastor of the Lutheran Church were two of the few owners of a motor vehicle so were often in demand for taxi service. One had to reserve a ride ahead of time, unless it was an emergency. Visiting the doctor or dentist, getting machinery repairs and reporting to the police, were reasons for a trip to town. In April Mother wrote:

> *We're so sad that our young pastor is leaving. I can understand that he would be fed up as a pastor here and I certainly don't begrudge him a better parish. I believe part of the reason (for him leaving) is his wife. She never really wanted to be here.*

Edmund Krisch had been a true benefactor in the community. It is hard to imagine anyone more helpful, more unselfish and generous. Medical emergencies were rushed to the hospital in his car, at all hours, in any kind of weather, over all kinds of roads or non-roads. Under these conditions he served both the Northmark and Heart Valley parishes. This was an example of one of his trips:

Last Thursday (it was in March) we went to the dentist in Grande Prairie and for now our teeth are OK. But what a trip it was! In the morning as we travelled on frost, we had no trouble, but it was very rough. But on the way back — Dieter and I, along with Helga Delfs, were pastor's passengers. We eyed each oncoming vehicle with apprehension, because turning off the track was very difficult. Nevertheless, our dauntless driver got us safely to just before Ralph Otto's. There a culvert that had been newly filled in last fall was our undoing. We got badly stuck. It took two hours before we finally got out. After that we had to drive our waiting horses home from the manse and finally arrived home at one in the morning.

Back ---Pastor Edmund and Mrs. Krisch with son Teddy, F.W. Egge, Else Pankow with Heidi, Friedrich and Martha Janssen. Front --- Elise Egge, and Egge and Pankow Children.

Another time the pastor drove to Scriba's in Heart Valley for the baptism of their baby, Fritz, and got hopelessly stuck on the muddy road near Prestville. After spending a cold night in his car, he managed to get a farmer with his horses to pull him out, and arrived home at noon. Is it any wonder that his wife was not deliriously happy about living in this parish under these primitive conditions? How many times was she awake at night, sick with worry because her husband had not come home?

Some of his final duties as pastor in this community were the baptism of our little Irma, Hans Egge and Sieglind Solty, at Egge's house, and the confirmation of Otto and Emil Hessler, William and Alvina Knoblauch at the church. In early May Pastor Lütkehölter from Edmonton came to a meeting at the church to see what could be done with this isolated congregation. On May 25 a service was held to bid farewell to Pastor Krisch and to install the new pastor. The church was full and Mother described the new Pastor Grober as "a tall strong man with dark hair and eyes, and a little black moustache". His wife Esther, "a tall blonde with a

stately bearing" is the daughter of Pastor Wahl. When Mother visited at the manse, she found him to be friendly and kind, very talkative, perhaps too much so. His twenty-three year old wife had plans to start a choir and liked to have young people around her.

In the summer holidays Dieter and I attended Saturday school at the church. We learned prayers and the catechism, and came home singing "Weil ich Jesu Schäflein Bin." I remember that it always took us a long time to walk home. There was so much to explore along the river and around the sloughs. We discovered robins and red-winged blackbirds' nests, garter snakes and tiger lilies. Nature study was more exciting than church school.

Father had been active in getting Westmark School District # 4799 established in the settlement, and was chairman of the local board when he was taken away. On October 27, 1940 Mother kept him informed:

> *Yesterday a meeting was held to elect a new Westmark School trustee, to fill your spot. Very few people attended and Fieten Egge got stuck with it. They had to go and pick up Mrs. Schulz and Mrs. Janssen to provide a quorum. Clarence Dale was the only non-German to attend. He is pressing for Grade nine to be offered at our school. Twila is that age now, he said, and next year there'll be Willie Janssen and Hans Delfs. They agreed that an application would be made to get grade nine.*

The local board met again on January fifth in the new year. Mother describes that meeting:

> *Just imagine, this meeting lasted all night, from seven p.m. until seven a.m.! True, there's a lot to discuss regarding the takeover by the Department of Education, but certainly most would not have taken **that** long. It takes an eternity for Schulz to think, then speak; for Egge to think, then forget; and for Dale to figure out and fill out forms! At least in this respect you can be glad that you aren't here.*

In 1941 for the first time, all school supplies were sent out to the schools from the Department of Education, and families did not have to purchase their own. Mother happened to be at the store when a large shipment arrived, and she was able to deliver a load of scribblers, pencils, erasers, chalk, and more to the school.

In the fall of '42, Mother told of the new teacher:

> *Now school has started and a young student teacher is here. The children love him. He is German — Weisgerber — nineteen years old, still speaks the language, and ended up having to stay at Egge's in the upstairs bedroom.*

In the Grande Prairie School District that fall, twenty-four schools could not open because they had no teachers — certainly an effect of the war. Weisgerber, too, did not stay the full term, in spite of local meetings and efforts to keep him. When he enlisted in the army, local resident Mary Rowe became Westmark's teacher for some years.

Teacher Pat Weisgerber

These years were not easy for many families. Women were often left alone while their husbands found off-farm jobs. The building of the Alaska Highway, with its military supply depots and airports, created jobs for many, including local men. Otto Delfs, for example, worked for the U.S. army at Muscwa Airport near Fort Nelson, B.C. Bridge timbers and lumber were required in large quantities in the building of this new highway, so these products were in high demand at area sawmills. Homesteaders had no trouble getting jobs, but wages in '41 were still low. In February '41 Mother writes:

> *Dick Moll went to work at Sedore's mill for thirty-five cents an hour. Although he had lots of time to prepare, Egges and I are frequently getting letters from Mrs. Moll, via the children. She needs milk, potatoes, butter, chicken feed, oats, chop. I feel sorry for her.*

Moll and Pankow Children:
Back – Ingrid, Ursula, Margaret, Dieter.
Front – Maria, Gerta, Jürgen.

Mother's situation was quite different. Father could not come home on weekends or even once a year. He did not have a job and was not in a position to support his family. He was sitting idle and helpless in the internment camp. This was the most difficult part of his confinement.

The regular reporting by all German-born settlers became a real chore and inconvenience, especially during busy seasons:

> *On Monday we three women, Frieda Witte, Lisi Egge and I went to Spirit River to report. Papa Witte took us to the store. We waited for*

two hours but no Jacobs appeared. We were about to leave when Ivan Higginson came along. Seeing our predicament, he promptly took us to Spirit River in his old car. On the way in, the roads were good, but on our return trip it had poured at Bridgeview and the road was very slippery. Corporal Watts was very friendly.

Being alone with the children meant many adjustments for Mother. She had to make trips and attend to business matters usually undertaken by the men. In spite of her short stature and small build, she soon became quite adept at harnessing and unharnessing, hitching up and unhitching the horses — her sole mode of travel. On January seventh '41, Mother undertook a "day trip." She got up very early, in time to do the chores, then hitched up the horses and took the two oldest children to school. Gerta and Baby Irmchen were dropped off at Egges. Heidi couldn't stay there because she and Erika couldn't get along. Their constant scrapping made it too hard for Tante Lisi. Mother, with three-year-old Heidi headed west, then north through the Burnt River at Witte's crossing, to Otto Iseles. Olga, the young mother, had just lost her new-born baby Albert and Mother administered what consolation and encouragement she could.

The next stop for mother and child was the Hans Delfs home, at that time in Northmark, opposite the present church. She needed to discuss the stock water tank "rotation." There was a water shortage that winter, and not enough snow to melt for livestock. Delfs had a large tank which fit on a sleigh and he lent it to neighbours who took turns hauling water from the river for their animals.

Northmark Store was the next stop, where the very talkative Peter Frank, brother of Christine Jacobs, was looking after the store while the owners were in Grande Prairie. It was evening by the time Mother arrived back home, after picking up the children, and having made many a mile with horse and sleigh, over cold, snowy roads. This part was always difficult:

It had turned very cold and we were glad to be home. It's at times like this that I feel especially vulnerable, lonely and deserted. We arrive home shivering and tired, to a cold dark house. Quickly I carry the little ones, all bundled up, inside and make a fire in the heater, and light the lamp. Then I unhitch the horses, let the cows in, and do the chores.

Our father loved little children and had often written about his own to his relatives in Germany, describing, in some detail, our growth and development, our behaviors and antics. Now he was missing out on these precious years in the lives of his little ones. This was one of the most painful aspects of his confinement. Mother was very aware of this, and now she took it upon herself to keep him posted — it was her turn to write about the children.

Even Dieter and I, eight and nine, would not have understood the full significance of Father's absence from our home and family, and the responsibility and difficulty this created for our mother. All discipline, all comforting in time of sickness or trouble, she now bore alone. Even seemingly small problems had to be dealt with. In September a pack rat had moved in upstairs and made a terrible racket, so that every night Gerta cried and couldn't go to sleep. We hoped it would soon be caught in our trap.

Heidi, Irma, Gerta in "dress-up" Hats.

During the first months of Father's absence we children got to take turns sitting in "Vater's Platz" around the table at meal time. At first the little ones did ask a lot of questions. Heidi often called for father. When Prinz barked at night, she would come running, "Vater kommt! Vater kommt!" Mother would have to tell her "No, Prinz is just being silly." Then, thoughtfully she'd say " Father far away. Father no comes home. Just Nummi here."

Dieter and I grew up fast, I think, during that time. We had to assume responsibilities that were beyond our years. When Mother had the flu and was bedridden, I had to stay home from school and look after three little sisters, one of them a wee baby. I was eight years old! A trip to the dentist was planned, so a spot had to be reserved in Jacobs' "taxi." Dieter drove the team, with a sleigh full of girls, including two of Molls, to Northmark Store to make the appointment. No adults accompanied us, and at ten, Dieter was the oldest!

Mother seemed to have confidence, and placed a great deal of trust in us. But sometimes we were not so confident ourselves, felt abandoned, and needed reassurance:

> *Two weeks ago, on Friday, I went to Solty's to help with sausage making. I left Gerta and Heidi at Moll's, where Ursel and Dieter would pick them up after school. I took Irmchen with me on Moritz. When I returned before noon the next day, as we rode out of the bush, I glimpsed a red dress flitting into the house. Immediately all three came running to meet us. Dieter was in the bush where Uncle was cutting firewood. The girls had cleaned the house and Ursel was washing dishes. That night at bedtime they all crawled into the big bed — needing a greater feeling of "togetherness" and security.*

In September, Mother praised our work:

Finally, with great difficulty, our wheat is cut. The children and I did all the stooking . Even if they can't do a lot, the little ones are not so alone and I don't have to worry about them. Yesterday the children did the milking alone while I finished setting up the last bundles. Now Uncle has gone threshing in La Glace and we are managing well by ourselves. The children are helping so nicely. Sometimes I don't have to do the milking at all, and now we are digging potatoes.

At Andersens, Wembley
Vera & Oscar Thiel, Dieter & Ursula Pankow
Front – Karen and Erika Andersen

When Mother plowed the summerfallow field, Dieter and I took turns staying home from school. We looked after the household and the little ones, helped water the horses, and dragged manure out of the barn.

During the summer holidays Dieter and I had been invited to the Erich Andersen's at Wembley. We spent a week there, together with two Thiel children from Elmworth. We were impressed with Andersen's extensive chicken operation, and their large garden which included many long rows of strawberries. We had never seen or eaten that many tasty berries! These friendly people were most generous and empathetic towards our family's situation.

Back – Dieter, Mother, Ursula
Front – Gerta, Irma, Heidi

Mother had missed her two big helpers, and although she was very glad to have us exposed to these new experiences, she was happy to have us back home. Following our visit, Helga Andersen wrote a letter to Mother:

What a lucky mother you are to have such dear good children. It was with a heavy heart that I saw them drive away today.

This prompted Mother to share with Father:

The children — how we love and cherish them. To live for them, to provide for them, to nurture and protect them, is our sacred duty. That they may go forward to face a brighter future is my constant prayer.

The first Christmas of separation was difficult, especially for Father. Mother had the children, and was too busy to spend time brooding. Her pre-holiday schedule was crowded:

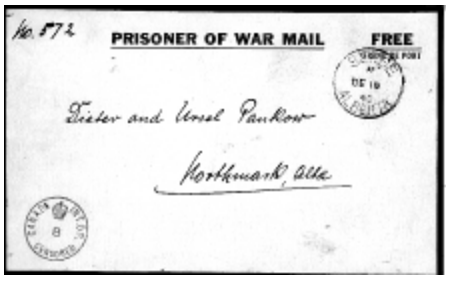
We will start our Christmas Eve early, around four or five, so that Irmchen will not be such a disturbance – the evening is always her restless time. The children are so excited! The two little girls will each get a small doll. I got these from the pastor. The two big ones will get school supplies—a scribbler, a pencil and a cheap fountain pen. Dieter will get a plain book bag because he has lots of homework now to keep up in Grade four. Uncle was in La Glace with Solty so he probably picked up some little things. I have new underwear for him. So everyone has a little something.

And you were remembered too. Hopefully the censor won't cause too much delay. The large parcel from Tante Minna is intended especially for the bachelors and the orphan boys. You see, many are thinking of you and your fellow internees.

The school concert is on the twentieth. The children are busy learning their parts. Uncle has to make a wooden gun for Dieter's part, and Ursel has a long recitation which she already knows well. All they think about these days is Christmas. Heidi sings "Alle Jahre Wieder" all day long. She still calls you every day and then scolds "Bad war!"

Dieter and I had picked out the Christmas tree that year. It had to be tall and thin to fit into a corner of our crowded little house. We proudly came home with one we had found on the creek bank beside our school trail.

The second Christmas, Father could still not be home with us. We hoped and prayed that it would not happen again. Mother had sent him a little package of homemade goodies and a cushion cover she had fashioned.



My dear children!
I wish you a happy Christmas, which this year you will experience without your father. Hopefully my parcel will have arrived, and I'm sure the Weihnachtsman will remember you. Always be good, obey and help your Mother, and look after the little ones.
Your Father.

Once more, she worked hard to make a nice Christmas for her children, in spite of their father's absence:

On Sunday we want to do some baking. You will remember that there's no use doing it too soon. Nothing lasts long around here and I can really notice that the children are getting bigger, and that there are five. Egges butchered yesterday, so I got some meat and lard on loan

until we butcher. So we'll have pork roast for the holidays, and try to make things festive. The radio will help entertain us with good music.

My latest game with the children on Sundays is a card lottery with beans and marbles. What fun that is! It reminds me so much of my own childhood when mother played it with us. And I think, just as I have these memories, our children will later have them too. I want to contribute as much as possible towards making happy memories for them, even when their dear father is not here. How we miss you! What we wouldn't give to see you, to speak to you! But life is hard for so many during these difficult times.

On Boxing Day Mother's letter became a "Thank-you" for Father had sent a Christmas parcel containing simple wooden treasures which he himself or his camp friends had made:

You wouldn't believe how happy the children were over the little barn. Even the big ones left everything else to put Moritz, Suzie and Blackie into their stalls. The little pigs are especially cute, and the big dog turned out well for you. My tears fell hot and unbidden on its black head.

Everything arrived safely. The sewing box is splendid! Dieter doesn't believe that you made it. I find the egg cups particularly nice. Did you do the painting on them? You see, now I too, am doubting your artistic skills! And the barn — the way you did the logs — it's ours in miniature isn't it? Gerta is fascinated with the see-through windows.

The belt buckle is just right for Dieter. Ursel's little heart with the forget-me-nots is charming and Heidi wailed loudly because she didn't get one. The sewing box came filled with German materials — probably gifts? Uncle Dick did a wonderful job on the wooden salad sets. Thank him kindly for us. You must have had a real craft workshop going at camp during the last few weeks.

In winter when the roads were frozen, Larson's General Store in La Glace was a popular place to shop, and was the same distance away as Spirit River. One person or family would make the trip, and the Larsons must have been happy to see them, for they carried "store lists" from several neighbours, as well as their own. The Sieberts and Metzingers, La Glace Mennonite families, often welcomed these Northmark shoppers to rest a while and feed their horses.

Everyone had an Eaton's catalogue and mail order was a popular way of shopping. Household goods, furniture, gifts and clothing would arrive from Winnipeg, either by mail or by rail freight. It was always an exciting day when an "Eaton parcel" came. Such enthusiasm reigned at the Toerper house one day in 1940 when Mother was visiting there. Tante Minna, with great pride, (as was her wont) showed off her new washing machine and radio, as Mother returned home to her tub and scrub board.

But she was never one to wallow in self-pity, and knew others also had a "hard row to hoe." Thinking of them, she brought some records over to Mrs. Moll, and later had to report to Father:

> *You had asked for some records. I picked these out from the ones I gave to Molls. Unfortunately they broke the one from the Bund, with the beautiful lieder. I should not have given them to Mutti, but these were not being used, so I thought someone may as well get some enjoyment from them, especially since she's home alone so much.*

Mother kept up her progress reports to camp, even though she was often physically and emotionally drained by the end of her long workday:

> *The little girls love to play with the toy tea set. Yesterday, with Erika and Elke, the kitchen was drenched from all their dish washing. It is quite touching to watch Heidi play with her little doll Dora, which is carefully put to bed in a shoe box. She is quite proud that she has **two** pigtails now, and declares that they should be very long when her father comes home. Better not! They're all quite enthusiastic about the tiddly wink game that you sent. Gerta's eyes just sparkle when she gets a button in the pot.*
>
> *Our Irmchen is everyone's darling. She sits by herself in the carriage now and I'll soon have to tie her in. She is small but her little body is plump and firm. Now she eats potatoes, carrots and grated apples. When her big brother plays with her, she laughs so hard she can't stop. That boy is often full of nonsense, always teasing and annoying his sisters. In spite of myself, I am pleased at his boyish ways. He has so much female influence around him.*

Ursula and Dieter behind Gerta, Irma, Heidi

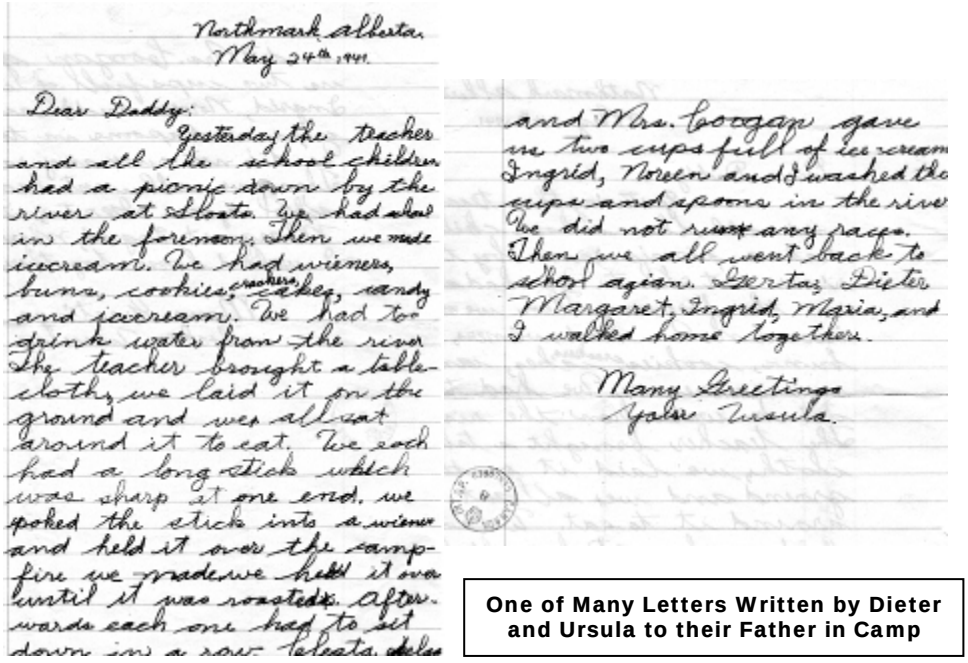
> *When it warms up I'll have to take some pictures of the children. We especially want to show you our little Irmchen. She is such a cute little bundle — a real ray of sunshine. I am so happy and thankful to have her.*

Much as the little ones provided pleasure and enjoyment, there were times when five children under the age of nine, in a crowded small house, made for stress and commotion. What a to-do there was one afternoon as Pastor Krisch and his son Teddy came to the door. Heidi was howling uproariously because she had been scolded for biting the tip off the large nipple, and Irma cried even louder because she was hungry. Pastor

promptly grabbed the little one in his arms, trying in vain to console her, until Mother could assemble another bottle. Following the clamorous beginning, the adults were able to have a pleasant visit over coffee, and were joined by Fieten Egge who had just come for milk. With the fourteenth coming, the older children had been occupied, painstakingly tracing, cutting and colouring hearts in all sizes for Valentine's day. Gerta was getting very excited, because as a pre-schooler, she would be allowed to go to school for the party.

In March Mother writes another "progress report":

> *Did I tell you that I got some "relief" clothing for the children? It's mostly underwear — good quality things. The children are happy that they can be outside again. Gerta and Heidi always go in search of eggs, but the old hens are eating many of the eggs again. All five kids have really grown, I can tell by their clothes. I said to Heidi "Your father won't know you!" Close to tears, she replied "Yes, Father know me. I know Father too. He a man, a big man."*



Northmark Alberta.
May 24th, 1941.

Dear Daddy:

Yesterday the teacher and all the school children had a picnic down by the river at Sheata. We had class in the forenoon. Then we made icecream. We had wieners, buns, cookies, crackers, cakes, candy and icecream. We had to drink water from the river. The teacher brought a table-cloth, we laid it on the ground and were all sat around it to eat. We each had a long stick which was sharp at one end. we poked the sticks into a wiener and held it over the camp-fire we made we held it over until it was roasted. afterwards each one had to sit down in a row. Sheata. Mrs.

and Mrs. Boggan gave us two cups full of ice cream Ingrid, Noreen and I washed the cups and spoons in the river We did not rinse any paper. Then we all went back to school again. Gertas, Dieter Margaret, Ingrid, Maria, and I walked home together.

Many Greetings
Your Ursula.

One of Many Letters Written by Dieter and Ursula to their Father in Camp

As a result of their immigration to Canada, one of the fears that our parents had, was that their children would be educationally and culturally deprived. These amenities were unsurpassed in their homeland, and could not possibly be replicated in a small one-room country school in the Canadian wilderness. Mother tried to reassure father that it was not completely hopeless, especially with our musical ability:

> *Irmchen is a dear little rascal. In her white crib, she bounces up and down on her little bum, especially when she hears music. She bounces with me when I hold her in my arms and twirl to the rhythmic beat. Maybe **she** will have inherited more from your dear mother, as I have*

*hoped with each child. But they're not **that** unmusical. They would learn a lot if they had singing lessons available to them, like in Germany. Nevertheless, in this too, Mrs. Coogan is quite good. Every morning now they sing previously learned songs. Ursel enthusiastically performed Silent Night and it was pretty well right. Gerta followed with "Alle Jahre Wieder." Now I'm singing spring songs with them, and we're learning "All the Birds are Here Again."*

The gramophone is a fair substitute for a radio, and I'm so thankful to Glimms for the nice records. Gerta can recognize the records by the outside labels, and together with the big kids, they have a lot of fun playing guessing games. The first few beats are sufficient for them to recognize each piece. Even Heidi knows quite a few. So you see, they're not totally lacking in musical ability, and I'm glad about that.

Mother had ordered a hand wagon from Christine Jacobs' catalogue, and Helmuth Glimm, who happened to be at the store, brought it out for us. Uncle helped assemble it and we were all excited about this new addition. It would come in handy for many chores as well as games. Perhaps Irma benefitted most as everyone was happy to oblige when she wanted a ride.

The Children with the new Wagon

Irmchen is happy in her little red wagon. She has two teeth now and is crawling around everywhere. The cupboards are her favourite places and she clears everything out of them. I have to carefully guard the medicine shelf. She is sometimes quite cranky, goes into a tantrum, throwing herself on the floor, blue in the face and screaming. On the other hand, she can be so happy and endearing. Tomorrow it will be one year since I brought her home from the hospital after her terrible illness. She has grown so nicely, is healthy and plump, runs around so nimble and quick, climbs onto the couch by herself. She's still a bit lazy with her speech though, managing only "Mama" and "Acka" (Uncle) and her own babbling. She is everyone's darling, but Heidi is often very jealous. If I dance around playfully with baby, Heidi comes running for attention. She hits too, when Irmchen won't give up something that she wants.

Heidi and Gerta often play house. Apple boxes are arranged in different corners — by the bookshelf, behind the rocking chair, or by

Dieter's bed. Once when one was visiting the other, I heard Heidi say "My father is in camp. He always has to camp." One wonders what goes on in that little head.

When the weather was nice, playing house was done outside, on the sheltered east side of the house. Here a collection of boxes, pails, pots and pans made up a farm kitchen. Dieter had built them a real clothes line so occasionally they had a big wash day. After an evening of this playing, Mother was at the barn milking, when Heidi came running, brokenheartedly weeping "I can't find my Dora and she'll be out in the cold all night!" Mother took her by the hand and started the search. The missing doll was soon recovered, tucked carefully into a shoebox and pushed under the couch so that Irma couldn't find it.

For her own mental health, Mother tried to find a little quality time for herself. When possible, she tried to have even just fifteen minutes of quiet contemplation in the evening before going to bed. Sometimes she played the beautiful "Adagio" by Brahms or some other classic, and read a little. Usually she was so tired that she'd soon be nodding off. Sometimes she read aloud to the children at their bedtime, a chapter each evening, of "Biene Maja", a beautiful story which Mother remembered from her childhood.

Mother also tried her best to continue another family tradition — the annual "signs of spring" walk-about. First stop was at the hotbed to see the emerging seedlings; then a look beside the pig fence to see if the nettle was coming up; down the hill to see the rushing ice-freed creek; and in the nearby garden, a search for the first fresh red shoots of rhubarb. The return route would take us up the hill path to the south, circling back to the house. During this outing too, Father was sadly missed.

They granted themselves few luxuries, but in 1941 Uncle scraped together his money to buy a radio, and set it up in our kitchen. Mother describes the reaction:

The radio has arrived, and it's wonderful! We play it nearly all day long, but we'll have to stop that soon, to save the battery. I'm afraid this first one won't last long! But we've waited a long time for this. The children listen to their "Uncle Tom" and Dieter even writes the song lyrics into a scribbler. The continuing dramas are highly exciting too. There are the western stories with lots of neighing and galloping horses, barking dogs and yelling people. I'm not impressed with the ghost stories on "The Mystery Club' and just now there were tears again when I shut it off. Most importantly, we can get news from Germany once a week. I built a little stand for the radio out of three apple boxes.

Keeping clothing in order for five growing children, considering water and laundry facilities, lack of money and shopping places, was always a

daunting task. We were fortunate that Mother was so capable with her old sewing machine and needle and thread. She cut one letter short by saying "It's getting late and I still have things to do. The boy tore his last pair of pants while coasting down the hill today, so that nice green pair from Uncle Werner is finished."

We always came to the Christmas concert performances proudly when Mother had fashioned our costumes, whether it was a fancy cheese-cloth dress for a star drill, or a ragged outfit for Dieter's role as a tramp. And we girls always had special dresses for the concert, whether new, or altered by Mother as she sat stitching by the dim light of the coal-oil lamp.

She was good at "making over" clothes, and was so happy when some article turned out well and she'd saved money:

> *Imagine, I've fixed up Lena's fur coat! You know, the one with great grandmother's pelt? With the collar from an old "relief" coat it turned out quite nice, and I'm so happy. For fifty cents I bought some trim for the old coat, mended, brushed and pressed it, and it looks quite decent too.*

Mother was generous in letting others use her trusty sewing machine, and in assisting those with less experience. Ursula Solty came over more than once for a day or two of sewing. During this time of war, and during Father's absence, Mother was not too proud to dress her children in used clothing, and gratefully accepted gifts from Lutheran Relief, the Red Cross, or from her American friends, the Rampoldts. Nothing was wasted. Clothing no longer fit to wear or outgrown, were bundled up and sent to a mill to be made into blankets.

Garden with Sunflowers

Spring was always the time of new hope and new beginnings. After the little "spring exploration" walk with the children, planting the garden soon followed. And Mother wrote "Again I planted many sunflowers especially for you. Hopefully this time they won't stop blooming before

you see them." During the first spring, and then harvest, of Father's absence, Uncle managed, in spite of his tedious ways, and with the help of neighbours, to get the crop planted and harvested. But Mother soon realized that trying to work together was impossible, and the neighbours couldn't be expected to help every year. They had enough work of their own. So for the year '42 Mother rented our land to Uncle, thinking this would give him more incentive. He was very proud of this arrangement, as he told the neighbours, and at first made a great effort. But nothing changed — he could not get things done. Mother had the same worries and responsibilities, saying "He can't help how he is."

Otto Toerper and Horst Solty had agreed to make hay, on shares, at the river quarter. Mother would get one third, and was pleased with the exceptionally good yield:

> *The haymaking is finished. Imagine, fifty-nine loads! It has been an exceptionally good year for hay. Unfortunately, at the end there was an ugly scene. For two weeks our "friendly neighbour" had always allowed Horst Solty to drive through with his loads of hay. But then he'd had a fight with Fieten Egge again regarding some fence. Having to vent his rage on someone, Stein promptly barricaded the gates. When Horst came along with his load of hay, he opened them to get through as he had always done. Like a madman, out of the blue, Stein grabbed the horses' reins and yanked them around. Then it came to bloody blows. A blow from an iron rod resulted in a hole on Horst's head, and a very swollen black eye. The frightened horses, now without a driver, ran back down the road , where Toerper was able to bring them to a stop at the lower gate. He had been raking hay in the nearby flat.*
>
> *Horst went to the police, who suggested he should lay charges against his assailant. Tommy (Crawshaw) was in Spirit River for eight days, as replacement for the chief.*
>
> *"My friends have advised me to hire a lawyer," said Stein. Although Oltmanns supposedly drove around with him, no one would lend him any money; not Shofner or Bryan, or whoever else he asked — just Oltmanns' ten dollars! The police probably expected that they'd be keeping Stein there right away, but the judge was lenient, considering the war and the shortage of personnel. Stein received a warning that next time he wouldn't get off so easy and had to pay twelve dollars in costs. The judge said that as long as he didn't have his fences in the right place, others could drive through. Walter Lawrence had testified that neither gate was on Stein's property. For now he has been dealt with.*

The weather, as in farming everywhere, again played a crucial part, and harvesting was fraught with difficulty that fall of '42:

> *The children and I are busy stooking. Unfortunately, rain is coming at the wrong time again. Yesterday we made only four rounds. Gerta and Heidi ride the binder-pulling horses; they're the "whips." Yesterday*

they were soaking wet when a shower came very suddenly. I was down in the garden, and with Irmchen on my back, I just barely made it up the hill before the rain came. The two big ones are a big help in the garden. (I remember weed pulling as our least favourite job. Those long rows in the creek flat garden seemed endless to us. Digging potatoes and hauling them up the big hill was not quite as bad Ed.) *They help water the horses and bring them out of the barn — otherwise Uncle wouldn't get going until evening!*

The knotter on the binder is not working right again, but I told Uncle not to stop on that account. It's so cold, we fear snow is coming. I carry a big pile of binder twine by my side and tie up the loose bundles. At first my finger was blistered, but now the skin is tough.

Stooks of Oat Bundles

Threshing was always an exciting and hectic time, also a time when feelings ran high. No wonder — livelihoods were at stake! In September 1942, Mother wrote, telling some of the "complexities" of threshing time in Northmark and Westmark:

This year Otto Toerper threshed for us. Unfortunately, he threshed a lot of grain into the straw. I noticed it the next day as I was cleaning up around the straw pile. I immediately sent a note over to Egge's where he was threshing , to alert him of the situation. Better that I tell him, than having someone else make fun of it, especially Oltmanns. Otto had already noticed the problem and corrected it. Of course I won't talk about it.

You can't imagine how hectic this "race for the dollar" is by these threshing outfit owners! Earlier they always thought "oh those people on the south side can wait. They won't run away." This year three outfits were here! Egges and Soltys had ordered Toerper from the beginning. Hans Delfs had indicated, that anyone who didn't thresh with him wouldn't get their feed grain ground. Under this threat, Wittes switched back to Delfs. He was out west, threshing feed grain, but when it wasn't dry enough, moved out again, to Mitchells, leaving Wittes high and dry. So then Joe Murray moved his machine from the north side, and threshed the whole west. What a performance! You wouldn't believe it!

In September, Uncle went threshing in La Glace. At other times, too, when he would leave in anger or frustration, unhappy with his own inefficiency

or after a "difference" with Mother, there would be an air of relief and calm around our farm, even if there was more work. We children seemed to help more willingly when Mother was alone. And she took pride in little "accomplishments" like backing the wagon up perfectly to the hog barn door to unload the chop. She even borrowed Egge's sulky plow, and with three horses she plowed the summer fallow. Frieda Witte always does it. Why can't I? she reasoned. And Mutti Moll admired her newly plowed field with its straight furrows.

Mother on the Plow

Water Barrel

Before winter set in, we all did a major cleanup around the yard. We cleaned the chicken house and put fresh straw on the floor; we picked up and hauled away scrap wood and garbage; we cleaned up the workshop and tool shed; we cleaned the barn and hauled the manure to the garden. Last of all we hauled two large barrels of water. Although we were very tired, we felt pride and satisfaction at this family effort.

Our entertainment was simple and we demanded little. Perhaps this was because everyone was in the same boat, and we knew nothing else. Cowboy song records, serial radio programs, the "funnies" with "King of the Royal Mounted" and "Blondie" once a week in the Free Press, Mother's reading to us — these were all simple enjoyments.

In June when Dieter was eleven years old, he wrote to his father:

> *Yesterday most of the kids from Westmark School walked over to Northmark School to play ball. Northmark won 55 to 9. On the way over there we found two birds' nests, a prairie chicken's and a graybird's. On the way back we had to stop at school to pick up our lunch pails. When we got home we ate Heidi's birthday cake.*

Picnics, Christmas concerts, birthday parties with simple home-made or no gifts, these were attended by all and cost very little. Any outing, no matter how short or simple, was a treat. One day Mother put the three little

girls on the back of Uncle's bay mare and led her east along the bush and across to Tante Hermi's. That was great fun for the girls and they got to play with Christa and Hella.

Ursula Solty's Birthday Party, July 2 '41
Back: H. Solty, R. Moll Holding Jürgen, H. Glimm Holding Peter, R. Witte
Middle: U.Solty, E. Moll, M. Toerper, O. Toerper with Otto, F. Egge with Erika
Seated: E. Egge Holding Hans, E. Pankow Holding Irmgard, F. Witte Holding Siegi Solty, Trudy Glimm Holding Ulrich
Children in front: Geesche Glimm, Heidi and Gerta Pankow, Elke Egge

Ursula's 10th Birthday Party
Back: Clesta Dale, Ingrid Moll, Margaret Moll, Ursula Pankow, Elma Dale
Middle: Klaus Delfs, Dieter Pankow, Victor Delfs, Gerta Pankow, Maria Moll Ursula Delfs. Front: Elke Egge, Erika Egge, Irmgard Pankow, Christa Delfs, Heidi Pankow

Father could never get enough of hearing about his children, especially the baby he didn't know. And Mother complied:

> *Irma is quite a little rascal and is mimicking a lot now. When she gets scolded, she goes to the other children for sympathy and protection. She loves Dieter most of all, which makes the big boy proud and he plays and jokes with her.*
>
> *It's good that the snow isn't deep. Heidi packs one or two layers of kitchen stove wood into the wagon and hauls it into the porch. She does this all alone until she has a large pile, and then she's very proud. She's a real little schmoozer, the first to get up in the morning, the first to go to bed at seven at night. Heidi is a strapping, strong little girl. She can be very sweet to Irmchen, but usually there's war. She wants to be first in every situation, especially with Gerta. They're very competitive when it comes to gathering eggs, each wants to carry the most or be the first to announce how many there were. Heidi's tears flow very easily these days. It's comical to see how she hides her things — hat, mittens, doll — just to keep them safe from Irma. Her favourite song is Wilf Carter's "Back to the Bible" which they hear on the radio, and she sings it with gusto, to her own tune.*
>
> *Gerta recognizes a lot of songs. The little ones have an advantage over Dieter and Ursel, because they've had a lot more exposure to records and radio. Gerta, as the middle child, feels that she belongs to "the big ones", especially when the Moll children are around. As they walk home, she accompanies them a ways — up to "Dick's foot". That's her sign, near the south gate to where the dog dragged the old horse's foot. She's getting quite good at hopscotch and wants to be prepared in a lot of ways when she starts school. The two girls follow Uncle everywhere, and are a patient audience when he extols the virtues and condemns the vices of the horses and cows.*
>
> *Ursel is quite sensible for her age, even when it's not always easy to be the "big sister," and to have a brother who wants to be boss. They have quite a bit of homework now. Dieter is starting to read fairly big books, mostly cowboy and Mounties stories. He wants to be a policeman but worries that he won't be tall enough. Sometimes he takes down the guitar and pretends to be Wilf Carter, singing and yodeling.*
>
> *It was good to have the big ones back after their week in Wembley. They help quite a lot — you don't realize it until they're gone — with so many little jobs that I had to do myself. Now they take the cows out to pasture, and bring them back in the evening. They do most of the milking. Even Irmchen brings her little syrup pail and has to be allowed to squeeze out a few drops.*
>
> *That little one is a real sweetie and has the other children wrapped around her little finger. I think she has the cheekiness and clowning of your brother Hansi. She has to see and examine everything, running around saying "Let me see!" At bedtime when it's time to say prayers, she calls "Mama, Amen."*

I feel so sad for you, that you can't enjoy these precious years with your youngest. When she sits on Uncle's knee and they laugh and play together, a feeling of sadness and bitterness comes over me.

Heidi is still a real egoist, always has to be first, have the biggest and best of everything. Gerta usually gives in, just to keep the peace. Heidi always wants to speak English now, and was very proud when Mrs. Hague in Woking understood what she said. Gerta is really looking forward to school, but the prospects of finding a teacher are not very good. Dieter is complaining that the holidays are too long. He's rather moody and reluctant these days, complaining about every task. He, most of all, needs his good father. Ursel is very ambitious about learning, and though it doesn't come as easy to her as to Dieter, she's ahead of him in Catechism. She helps in the kitchen too. Today she had to make dinner — sauerampfer suppe — while I patched overalls. Then she's quite pleased.

During those "camp" years, letters were the all-important link, the ties that bound, the bright spot in the week. For Father it was relatively simple to time his mailings to arrive regularly for the Friday mail day. Mother wrote faithfully every week, but for her to get letters mailed was an ongoing problem, and opportunities had to be actively sought.

Egge was going to Woking to haul a load of wheat to the elevator, or Mother had to go to Spirit River for binder repairs, Janssen was going to Woking to ship pigs, or the pastor was taking Mrs. Witte and Mrs. Delfs to Spirit River to "report." Dieter or I could ride Lucie to Northmark Store; the truck driver who hauls lumber from the mill would mail a letter. All these were opportunities to make sure Father got his letter. Sometimes it was more difficult. During busy harvest season, no one could take the time. Sometimes after a chinook the roads were so icy that one could not travel with unshod horses.

Even church services presented possibilities for getting the mail away:

On Sunday Ursel and Gerta rode to church to take the mail to the pastor. But they missed him. Apparently he had gone back home because the parishioners were all too busy with these terrible harvest conditions to attend a service. So the two girls rode on, all the way to the manse. You can imagine how proud Gerta was!

Mailings at Northmark had to be timed so that Jack Ranch, the local mail hauler, would not be missed as he took the mail to the train in Woking.

Mail to and from Germany came to an almost complete standstill during the war. While interned, Father could receive 25-word post cards from Germany, and could in turn let Mother know any news about her family. The International Red Cross also served as an intermediary for short messages. Before the U.S. entered the war, American relatives received letters from Germany, then sent them on to Canada. Else Moll's Aunt Kate Rover in Seattle, and Elise Delfs' sister Martha in San Francisco kindly served as "mail forwarders" for several Northmark families.

Since Father was allowed to send cards to Germany from camp, Mother admonished him:

> *When you write to Germany again, please do send a card to my family in Cranz, with congratulations and best wishes for my parents' golden wedding anniversary which is on May fourth — if Mother and Father are still alive. How I had always hoped, that under any circumstances, I would be home with them for that occasion. I have to try somehow to get greetings to them.*

All mail in and out of camp had to pass through the censor and his little red stamp could be seen somewhere on each letter. Father cautioned Mother never to write anything that could possibly incriminate her or arouse any suspicion. The length of his letters was limited to twenty-four lines and could not be sealed. Given the rural postal system, Mother never knew how many curious people had read Father's letters before they finally arrived in her hands. Pastor Grober alleviated some of this by picking up Mother's mail and delivering it personally. The Northmark post mistress was one of those "over-zealous" patriots who was rumored to examine all mail to and from Germany in a "more than careful" manner.

One day when we visited Witte's, Mrs. Janssen had just brought over a letter from George, which they shared with Mother. They knew that Father was in camp, and Leni had immediately written to Königsberg although Mother didn't know how she knew the address. George was active in the western campaign in Germany where Harald Glimm, H.von Berlepsch and Gottschalk are all proud military men.

During that same time, Gertrud Glimm had been notified by the Red Cross that her only brother, younger, just twenty-one years old, died during an air battle. And Karl Stein's brother, the captain of the Lloyd, is supposed to be in a Canadian prison. They nabbed him near Java.

Mother knew how much our father missed his children, and again she wrote:

You will be reminiscing a lot about the past, because the present holds so little for you now, and who knows what the future will bring? If only the war were soon over! The waiting is so hard, the yearning so strong. But I mustn't complain, and should instead, think of you and your comrades, whose freedom has been taken away, and of all the misery caused by war all over the world.

Sometimes when I am so tired, I have to force myself to write, but my thoughts are with you always — daily and hourly. No writer could keep up with all the letters I compose in my head. And sometimes, so unlike you, I break down and the tears come unbidden. But in spite of all, the children love their mother, and the little ones come and stroke my hand and wipe away my tears, so that a forced smile reappears. Oh, I should not have written today, in this mood, but the children are going to church school in the morning and can take my letter for the pastor to mail.

Mother was curious and asked Father if a Pastor Harder had ended up in camp. Apparently he had preached in Chinook Valley School a number of times, and said that England's downfall had been predicted in the Bible! Thornton and company immediately reported him. Tommy (Crawshaw) burned or took away all the Bible study materials. She also wondered if a Pastor Wulf had recently become an internee. Apparently he was also a "sacrificial lamb" like Father. And Wolfram, does he hold services for you in camp? she wondered.

George O'Hara, the elevator man, had once hunted in the mountains, and told Mother that Kananaskis is the most beautiful place in Canada. But beauty was a small consolation for having to kill time there.

The homesteaders in Northmark noticed little of the war. Everyone was pleased with the good livestock prices! The economy was on the rise. Shortages, however, were becoming evident. The many customers who shopped at Larson's in La Glace — Delfs, Nagels, Molls, Egges, Wittes, Soltys, Toerpers — used to buy in large quantities to make the long trip worthwhile. Now they were lucky if they got half as much. At Jacobs' store they could buy only the bare essentials because he could not afford to buy large stocks. Eaton's mail order goods were "war quality" and only a portion of each order would arrive. For those with money, opportunity beckoned and competition thrived. When a whole business block , with four stores, burned down in Rycroft, Mrs. Dodge in Spirit River was not properly sympathetic. Probably envisioning future business, she commented "What's that in comparison to the sufferings of war?"

Mother was not impressed with the comments of another woman in the community:

At the Woking Store, Mrs. Hague, that old bag, is always sweetness personified. But she has spread unbelievable rumors about you. And

now she pretends to feel sorry for me, and purrs "He was always such a nice man." What a fake.

Another sign of war was evident as Mother and the children stood on the station platform in Woking, waiting for the N.A.R. to take them to the dentist in Grande Prairie. As its whistle sounded loudly, a long military train whizzed by, each car filled with grinning and waving black American soldiers. Apparently it was the second of its kind that day — probably headed towards the Alaska Highway.

One day in July, '41 while Mother was working in the garden, she heard a very loud roar. Seven planes flew overhead, heading north on the old postal route. Three had often been seen, but now these seven gave them a small glimpse of what war is like. The first one was flying very low and could easily be identified as a bomber. "Are they going to bomb us?" asked Gerta in a frightened voice.

The effects of conscription began to show and local men went off to the military. The young teacher, Pat Weisgerber, would enlist in the new year; next Willie Janssen and Hans Delfs would be old enough. Clarence Rye joined the R.C.A.F., Norman Rowe, the MacDonalds and Tommy Crawshaw joined the army. Freddy Mitchell, because of his large farming operation, was excused from duty. He had just married Dixie Gray, the young Chinook Valley teacher. And there were indeed many mixed emotions when our Uncle Horst Anders got his call!

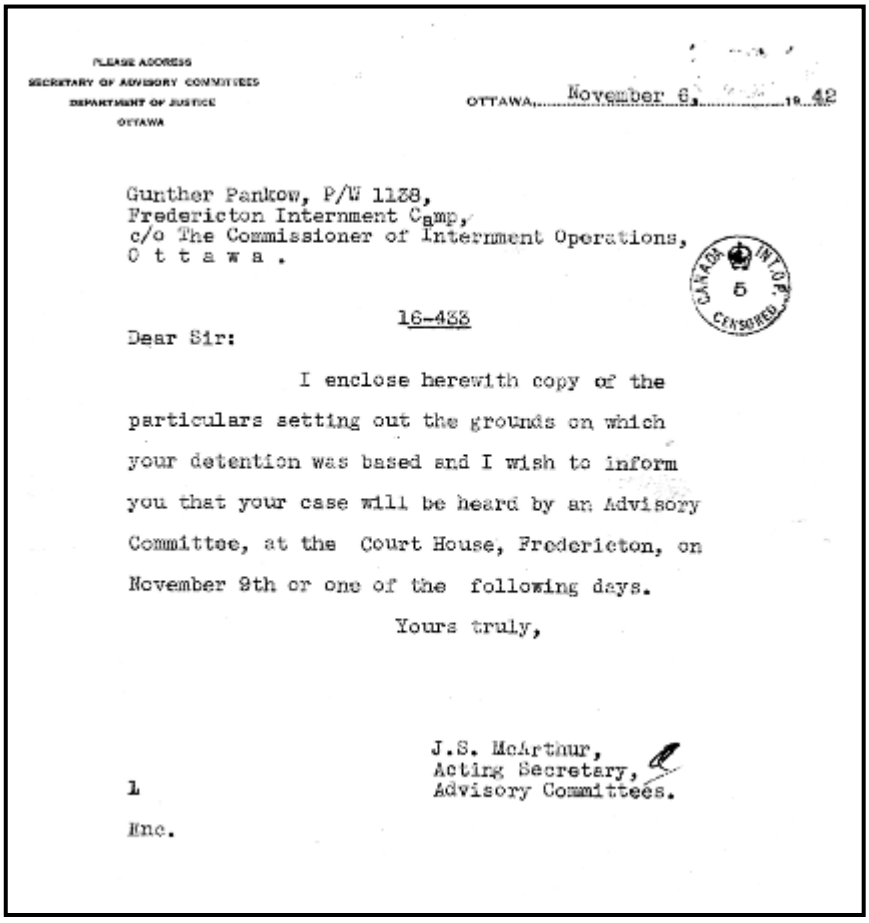
In a letter of encouragement, Mother tells Father to keep his spirits up, and reminds him of his experiences when he was first taken in:

We just shook our heads at the idea that you would ever have to be in handcuffs in this "land of the free." If it weren't so serious, you could laugh yourself to death at the thought — Günther Pankow in handcuffs! Really you should be quite proud that they consider you so dangerous! But that's war. And as Tante Anna always said of any questionable situation "Who knows what it's good for?"

In an effort to gain freedom, the prisoners of war and their families sometimes requested a hearing to have their case reviewed. These hearings, if granted, were held with the prisoner at one end, and the family and home community on the other. Mother knew that their request had been granted, when on November 21, 1942, she received a telegram. Later, noticeably excited, and quietly daring to hope, she wrote Father the sequence of events:

I want to start out by telling you that our impression is one of hope, and we think that from Ottawa's viewpoint, you are already destined to be freed. But here, we're not sure. Because the telegram came via the

post office, our opposition knew about the hearing. They have had time to plan and were working very hard.



PLEASE ADDRESS
SECRETARY OF ADVISORY COMMITTEES
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
OTTAWA

OTTAWA, November 6, 1942

Gunther Pankow, P/W 1138,
Fredericton Internment Camp,
c/o The Commissioner of Internment Operations,
O t t a w a .

CANADA INT. O.P. 5 CENSORED

16-488

Dear Sir:

I enclose herewith copy of the particulars setting out the grounds on which your detention was based and I wish to inform you that your case will be heard by an Advisory Committee, at the Court House, Fredericton, on November 9th or one of the following days.

Yours truly,

J.S. McArthur,
Acting Secretary,
Advisory Committees.

L

Enc.

On Friday the 21st there was a meeting at the school, which I attended. We wanted so much to keep our young teacher (Pat Weisgerber) a little longer and this was up for discussion. Afterwards the men of the U.F.A. had their farmer's meeting. Sloat's children called to me "Mrs. Pankow, there is a telegram for you. We put it on the table at Egges because no one was home." Naturally, I rushed right down there and read the good news. I was just going back to the school when I met the police. They were looking for Dale and found him at the meeting. Harvey had disappeared from the army training camp. Poor Dale became very agitated, and everyone immediately thought of the other brother, Harold. But it turned out that Harvey was perfectly O.K. and just didn't want to be sent overseas. So Dale calmed down and was able to turn his attention to my problem. He promised to be in Spirit River on Tuesday for the hearing.

On Monday, Fieten rode around trying to recruit. I was very discouraged with his report. Many were backing out. On Tuesday I got up early in order to get going on time. Uncle agreed to look after the children. The roads were icy, but at the store I was very happy to see "my delegation." We were in Spirit River much too early, because the train carrying the dignitaries was, again, late. I had taken along some knitting, and from my seat in the hotel lobby I could see out to the

street. "The others" were whispering and scheming with the fox and the post mistress. Corporal Watts' presence had thrown a monkey wrench into their plans. He is stationed in Manitoba and wasn't expected to appear.

The "opposing" group consisted of Frank and Maude Rowe, Marie Eyres, Don MacDonald, Fred and Lloyd Mitchell, all brain-washed by Rowe. My group appeared first, and consisted of Hans Delfs, George Shofner, Orm Bryan, Clarence Dale, Joe Murray and Don LaPointe. Others had agreed to come but were afraid to openly support you, fearing to appear pro-German and suffer retribution.

The biggest help for us was the appearance of Corporal Watts. Judge Miller was a humane gentleman with a sense of humor. One of the observers was Doctor Levy, the eye specialist, who recognized me right away and spoke to me in German. The other observer spoke German too, and was quite friendly. I couldn't place him but felt I'd seen him somewhere before. They looked a bit surprised when they saw me and smilingly asked "How did you manage to harness the horses? Did you have to climb on the mangers? You're not very big!"

The judge asked me "Can you promise me that you will look after him and see that he never again spreads propaganda?" Promptly George Shofner spoke up "I will accept full responsibility for that." All the men who came along with me knew that "the old fox from the west" was the ring leader. The good part for us was that they all thoroughly disliked him, and this was an opportunity to stand up to him publicly. And the postmistress has a reputation for dubious behavior.

But Watts was the greatest help as he said "Yes, I know all of you better than anyone else." The judge commented "I can see that Pankow is the honest one in the settlement, but what is his opinion of the Third Reich? I think the concentration camp will have cured him."

While the opposition prepared for its appearance, I just remained sitting in the lobby, much to the consternation of the ladies. They had unexpectedly met Mrs. Poirier from Chinook Valley as they were coming in, so she was cajoled into coming along. She kept whispering nervously "But Mrs. Eyres, you have to tell me what to say. I don't know anything." I'm sure she doesn't know you. It was nauseating to watch. They kept leaning over the table, stretching their necks, trying to hear what was being said in the next room. So these are our proud and loyal Canadians! It's this underhanded skulking manner that our men so detest.

During the interrogation, they said that they had nothing against Pankow personally, but certainly moral would suffer if a man who was once found guilty and dangerous, were now allowed to go free. I'm sure they will, in the fastest way possible, send fat letters to Ottawa. We'll have to be patient until some answer comes.

I have completely lost my peace of mind, that which I had so painstakingly tried to achieve in the past few months. I keep thinking there's more I should have said, things I could have done better. But it

was such a nerve-wracking experience. After the fact it's always easy to think of what one should have said.

The first half of December came and went. No answer, no indication had come. Mother feared that her Christmas letter wouldn't arrive at camp in time. She had put it off as long as possible, secretly hoping that it would not have to be written. We were all hoping so strongly that Father would be home for Christmas. But that was wrong, and we all sent our greetings and best wishes for his third Christmas away from home. Our parcel to him was rather "war like" with sugar rationing and all, but it was prepared with love. Dieter had to be admired for his self-control and did only a little "taste testing." Karl Toerper had come over for the address. So Tante Minna must have packed a little parcel too.

Mother's mood and peace of mind were not conducive to writing a happy Christmas letter, but she did not want to disappoint him:

My dear, this will not be a decent letter. I have so little time, so little peace. Last night I finished costumes for Dieter and Ursel. Then the chop was all gone, and Solty couldn't come. So I had to go to Hans Delfs again to get the grain crushed. Daisy had a big healthy bull calf and she's turned into a nice quiet milk cow. Water was getting scarce again, but the recent chinook cured that.

Now a little about the children. Dare we hope that you will soon see them? They're very busy learning their parts for the concert. Remember just a few years ago they were the beginners. Now they're the big ones. The young teacher is very conscientious. Even Gerta has a recitation. I told the children I'd rather stay home, have peace, and keep the house warm. You should have heard the protests! Dieter said "Why am I learning all this if Mother isn't coming?" So maybe I can make a deal with Dick Moll. I'll offer him our big sleigh, so he can take us all along, and I won't have to see to the horses.

Gerta is managing school just fine and likes it. The big ones are often impatient because she dresses so slowly, can't find her things ….. Heidi and Irmchen start in the morning, playing with the barn and the animals. All old building blocks are gathered together to build a fence. The living room is always one big playroom. Dieter thinks it's terrible when he comes home and finds everything in a mess. It's the same on wash day when the table is piled with wet clothes. "Ja, der Herr Sohn!"

The children are suddenly big, the house too small, the sleeping arrangements insufficient. Irmchen is looking forward to seeing her father, and Heidi says knowingly " Father will come. Mother went to the police."

.

Yesterday a car drove west on the main road, and Hans Delfs thought the police had brought you home. He was all excited. But probably the big law men won't have time to review your case before Christmas. So we have to be patient. Our minds will search you out on the twenty-fourth.

Else Pankow 1942

Father's hearing at the Court House in Fredericton, and the presentation by Mother and her supporters at the hearing in Spirit River were not in vain. By the end of December, Father was released!

Excitement ran high in the little house on the homestead. Mother made hurried preparations. She had always dreamed about meeting Father "when he got out." Now arrangements had to be made so that she could be absent from house and livestock for a few days. We children would stay at Solty's. I can remember so clearly the day Mother left the Solty house to go to Edmonton on the train. She had skillfully "fixed up" a hand me down dress from the states, and it now fit her perfectly. We children thought she looked beautiful — so slim in the blue outfit with subtle rose and gold patterns. Her face glowed with happiness and anticipation.

A few days later, our parents came home — **together.** The long-awaited homecoming was, no doubt, a happy joyous occasion, but it was very subdued. The little girls smiled shyly at this man, and Irmchen peeked cautiously around the corner. We had to become reacquainted with our father, who had become a stranger. It did not take long, and he was **so** happy to be home. Father's sister Anneliese in Germany learned the happy news from a camp friend, and would let other relatives know.

Fredricton, N.B.
December 25, 1942

Dear Mrs. Anders

I can give you good news that your brother Günther Pankow was released from here and has gone home to his farm. Although he won't be able to correspond with you from there, I would be happy to serve as an intermediary.

With best wishes,
Manfred Ropp.

The war was not over, and the results, it seemed would not be as Father had anticipated. There was no possibility and no desire now to return to Germany. He returned to his family and to his homestead, happy to be in Canada.

(For Mother it must have been quite a change, and a relief that she didn't have to write a letter every week. But how fortunate we are that she was such a faithful letter writer, and that she preserved them all. Otherwise the many excerpts used here would not have been possible.)

A Family Reunited 1943

Chapter 18 Post War Developments

It was a wonderful way for a new year to begin — that year of 1943. Our family was whole again. Our father had returned home after two and a half years of internment. There was a period of getting reacquainted and a time of adjustment. Mother was able to concentrate more on house and children as she helped Father ease into his old homesteader role. After the first few days our estrangement turned into warm affection and we truly had our father back.

Back: Dieter, Else, Günther, Ursula.
Front: Irmgard, Gerta, Heidi Pankow.

For Father, the many adjustments had to be made not only in his family, but in the community as well. It was almost like a re-assimilation and he took it slowly and cautiously. He felt it was prudent to "lie low" and was content to stay quite close to home. The Germans gave him a warm welcome home; some still a bit reluctant and afraid to openly show any pro-German sentiment. After all, the war was not over. To meet those who had conspired and testified against him sometimes created awkward situations, but could hardly be avoided in such a small community.

It was no longer necessary for Westmark residents to patronize the post office in Northmark. When Father came back home, he found that a cooperative mail delivery service had been organized by eighteen Westmark farm families. The reason was not entirely clear, except that the Northmark postmistress had gained a reputation for not being entirely trustworthy, especially with war-time mail. Now this new cooperative by-passed Northmark and got the mail directly from the Woking post office. The farmers took turns. Every Friday one family would be responsible, not only for picking up the district's mail, but also delivering it and posting out-going mail for all members of the co-op. Each family erected a mail-box by the main road. Friday became special because it was mail day, and there would be plans and discussions about who got to read the "funnies" first. For our parents it was the day they eagerly awaited mail from home – letters from Germany.

It was during Father's second winter after internment, in 1943. Given recent experiences, our family chose to keep a low profile when dissension developed in the local congregation of the Lutheran Church. Differences peaked in December '43, and the congregation split in two. One faction decided to build a new church on the land belonging to the church in Northmark. For some years, services were conducted at two locations —the new church and Westmark School. Given the circumstances, perhaps building a new church was understandable. But coming like thieves in the night, and demolishing the original pioneer log chapel, then allowing the logs to rot on a creek bank, was **not** understandable. It was

probably one of the most dastardly deeds ever committed in this community. In the minds of many, the names of the perpetrators would be forever tarnished.

Irmgard Brings Lunch to Creek Crossing Builders, Father and Uncle Horst Anders

There was a lot of catching up to do on the farm. During Father's absence, not even maintenance could be managed, and progress had come to a standstill. That first winter, Father did a lot of repairs around farm buildings and fences, harnesses and machinery in preparation for spring seeding.

In early summer, after the crop had been put in, work began on building an addition to the house, which had become much too small for the growing family. A structure made of strong straight logs was built on to the full-length north side of the existing house. The flat roof was covered with heavy tarred building paper, and a tall brick chimney was added to provide good draft for the kitchen stove. The interior walls and the ceiling were covered with lathes, and again the skilled plasterer, George Baschawerk, was hired to come and apply a professional finish. At this time he also plastered the sloping attic walls upstairs.

The large addition became our kitchen and dining room. With white kalsomined ceiling, two-tone pastel painted walls with enameled chair-rails, bright gingham curtains on windows and cupboards, it was a bright inviting room. A large all-purpose home-made table, used not only for eating, but as a work surface for many things — homework, letter-writing, games, sewing, baking, laundry, was the focal center for many daily activities.

Finishing a Meal in the Homestead Kitchen (1954)
L to r: Irma Pankow, Anneliese Witte, Ursula and Hans Delfs, Dieter Pankow
Front: Else Pankow and Elise Delfs

The old bedroom was transformed into a living room, with varnished floor, matching varnished valances with bright homemade curtains. The old kitchen became the master bedroom, and upstairs were two small sleeping places with low sloped ceilings. Dieter slept on the west side of the stairway and we girls had the east side; the "rooms" divided by the chimney and a short wall. Heat came up through a grill in the ceiling above the round airtight heater below.

Father drove a bundle wagon with Hans Delfs' threshing crew that first fall back, and was soon a part of it all again. In the winter that followed, there was severe water shortage, and I can remember "trailing" a long line of livestock, single file on a narrow path through the snowy bush to a spring south-east of our farm.

East Side of the Pankow Log House

After spring work in 1944, a fairly major project was the construction of fences on the river quarter. Besides the hay flats, there was an area of hills and valleys covered with lush growth, ideal for cattle pasture. Importantly, the river was a dependable source of water for the livestock.

During those early forties, even though the war still raged in Europe, life on the farm in Westmark went on as usual, though in a more buoyant economy, and with more modern farming methods. The workload never diminished, with the quest for more land and larger cattle herds. Perhaps it was good that our parents were so busy, so tied up in making a living on their little farm. There was no time for brooding and worrying. In spite of that, their thoughts must often have travelled to the homeland and their loved ones, wondering sadly "Are they still alive? Will we ever see them again?"

Then in June, 1945, came D-Day. The allies had won the war. We went to school as usual, and were met by taunts and cheering from the small minority of non-German children. Understandably, they were celebrating, but probably knew little of the full significance of what had happened. They mocked us and we did not know how to respond. What do children know of war, its losses and victories? Were we not all Canadians?

The first news from Germany since the war came from Tante Anna, Tante Annaliese and Tante Herta in June, 1946. The long-awaited letters were opened with bated breath, and great fears for the worst. Father replied immediately, this one to Tante Anna:

> *We are just so thankful that we can write again. It was through Annaliese that we got the first family news. What misery and heartache! We had braced ourselves for the worst, but as long as there was uncertainty, a small ray of hope had remained. Now the dead have peace, and hopefully in the meantime the surviving relatives will have overcome some of the terrible pain of being left alone. We already knew of Hellmut's death, but then when we heard that Lotte, Helga and Hansi are no longer living, it was very hard for us too, even though we haven't seen any of them for eighteen years. Then from Herta came the sad news about*

Else's parents. They died on the terrible trek out of East Prussia, and Mieze didn't want to leave them. Lotte is still in Cranz, and Herta in Sachsen. Her son Martin was declared "missing in action" two years ago. There is no word regarding Else's brothers, Ernst and Werner.

And why all this? It is a futile question. How did we seven Canadian Pankows deserve to be spared? By a mere hair's breadth we would have experienced the same fate as all of you. People say "Perhaps it was meant to be." In spite of our hard and never-ending work, we never forget how good we have it, compared to all of you. It was a kind fate that saved us from a similar lot. At that time in '39, did you have a premonition, when you kept advising us, until the very last, not to come to Germany?

But who knows what awaits us, even here in the bush? In the next war there will be no distances, and we in north-western Canada are not all that far away from the Russian border. What a world this is! And the whole thing is called "civilization." Who can comprehend it all?"

That summer Father gave Tante Anna a bit of an update, explaining how farming methods had progressed, making it easier to get ahead :

At least in the last five years the farmer has been getting better prices. As a result it is easier to make ends meet now, than before the war. During my absence we got behind, but now we are making progress. We have seventy acres under cultivation, and this summer I plan to break another twenty acres. Since last fall we don't have to brush by hand with the axe anymore. Now there are huge caterpillar tractors which have a V blade in front that cuts down the trees. The necessary money — ten dollars per acre — can be borrowed from the bank on a two-year loan. So now there are prospects of being able to break ten to twenty acres every year, to get ahead faster.

For a few years now, the government seems to be taking a greater interest in the farmer, and supports him through a number of programs. In this way, we were able, this summer, to have a large dug-out excavated — forty-five feet wide, one hundred and sixty feet long and twelve feet deep. Hopefully next spring we will be able to catch enough run-off to fill it. The cost, after government subsidy, was one hundred and seventy dollars. We hope this will end the water shortage that has plagued us for the past few years. Our nice little creek that used to supply plenty of water for the animals, is getting drier each year.

Now in the spring of '46, we are taking some chances, are stretching our credit at the bank. We have to get more land under cultivation. Only cleared land, not bush, can produce profit and progress. So, just before Christmas we had another forty-five acres cleared with the big brush cutter. Next week another machine will come and push the brush into huge piles. Then we just have to burn them and break the land.
After breaking, the discing, root-harrowing, and especially the root and rock picking by

Brush Piler 1946

hand, is an incredible amount of work. The whole family was out there helping. The cost of getting one acre of land under cultivation is twenty to twenty-five dollars, and this would be higher if the children didn't put in hours of labour.

Field work, and especially breaking, is easier now that Horst (Anders) has a powerful tractor, which is at our disposal at any time, just as our machinery and horses are to him. This working together is far from ideal, but we're more or less dependent upon each other. It is not easy to get along with Horst, but we have to make it work. Neither of us must lose sight of the end result — that of getting as much as possible out of our operation so that we can continue to send parcels to all of you in Germany. And perhaps in the next few years, we can have one or the other of you come to Canada. I have applied to have Gunthard (Anders) come over, but that was refused because he is still considered an enemy alien. But we hope that the hatred will diminish, and that Germans will again be allowed to immigrate.

There has been great progress in this little settlement after the war. Farmers are getting better prices for all their commodities. Isn't it absurd that all this came about as a result of war? We are certainly not as poor now as we were when we had planned to return home in 1939.

.

But to say that they were well off would have been an exaggeration. Farmers made every effort to improve their lot. In September 1946 there was a farmer's strike, organized by the Alberta Farmers Union. The purpose was to try to force the government to set higher minimum prices for farm commodities. The strike resembled a labour strike, with pickets at the grain elevators, signs (on binder twine) stretched across the road, and the odd strike breaker. In this community, commodities in question were grain, livestock and cream. Only pigs and cream would be adversely affected by the strike. A pig would grow over-weight, bringing about a price reduction, and cream would spoil. When strike action ended in early October, the roads to Woking were very busy with loads of grain, hogs and cattle. Elevator operator Howard Christie was amazed and commented that never before had he seen anything like it at the local rail outlet. Farmers' cash flow depended heavily on regular commodity sales. Apparently the strike did not result in any appreciable improvement. Post-strike discussions were on the agenda at the A.F.U. convention held in Edmonton in early January, 1947. For twelve days Mother looked after three little Sellin boys, one, three and four years old, while their parents attended this convention.

Field of Oats South of the Farmyard

Father, as he had done for many years, still went out working at threshing time and in the winter to earn cash or lumber. The farmyard still needed a hog barn, a machine shed and a shelter for the calves, and he could not afford to buy the building materials. In January '47, he, with neighbours Hans Delfs and Hein Schuett felled trees in the bush and lived during the week in a crude shack, while "his five women" looked after things at home. It was an exceptionally cold winter, with deep snow, making bush work difficult. In January the temperatures were constantly between –30 and –50 degrees. It was the coldest winter since they came to Canada.

In spite of all the hard work, time was made for recreation. These homesteaders were still relatively young, and now the babies born in the thirties were teen-agers. The families enjoyed socializing and made their own good times. Westmark School was used for many social functions. I remember crowded dances, music supplied by local fiddlers for a nominal fee; the "stag line" taking up half the floor and the occasional floor-clearing brawl, probably brought on by too much beer.

When money was needed to purchase balls and bats, or for candy bags at Christmastime, then various socials — (box, pie, shadow) were staged as fund raisers. I remember the mothers helping to create nice fancy boxes, (fashioned into various shapes) using crepe paper, ribbon, and paint. Each young lady hoped to earn the highest bid, and to share her delicious lunch with the desired partner.

Back: Ursula and Dieter
Front: Gerta, Mother with Irma,Father with Heidi

One of the last functions to be held in the old West Burnt Hall in Northmark, was a pie social and dance. Dieter and I really wanted to take this in, but our parents were not eager to go. So Uncle, always glad to make us happy, was persuaded to come along as chaperone. I recall the three of us riding horseback in the dark, through the deep river crossing at Witte's. I was on our long-legged black Rex, reins in one hand, a lemon meringue pie tied in a tea towel, clutched tightly in the other!

It was in 1947 that the only "shadow" social ever was held in Westmark School. I don't know whose idea it was or who organized it. A group of young women and teen-aged girls giggled nervously behind a back-lit bed-sheet curtain. Then one at a time they stood in silhouette, and the men and boys bid on each shadow, the highest bidder having the privilege of sharing her carefully prepared lunch box. Henry Sloat paid three dollars and fifty cents for my shadow, a lot of money for a young lad at that time, and one of the highest bids of the evening. I think he had earned a little money at Toerper's sawmill that winter!

In the late forties it was realized that the school building was too small. A meeting was held, an executive and a building committee were formed to plan the building of a community hall. This organization was named the Westmark Farmer's League and was duly registered as a society. After a great deal of volunteer labour, the new Westmark Hall was opened in 1950.

For a few years, before dance bands were readily available, a battery operated record player with amplifier provided music. Every country dance in those days included a square dance or two, a schottische, a heel and toe polka, perhaps a "bunny hop" in addition to the regular waltzes, two-steps and polkas, and the styles and movements came in varying degrees of grace, or lack thereof! A "floor manager" kept it all lively and moving. Coffee, brewed in a large boiler, and sandwiches were served at midnight after the "supper waltz" had been played and the gentlemen had chosen their lunch partner. There were no liquor licenses and drinking in the hall was against the law without one. So there was a considerable amount of "nipping and necking" in cars or dark corners. Given all this, it is understandable that our parents, accustomed to dance lessons, theater and musical performances in their youth, deeply regretted our lack of "cultural" opportunities.

Our parents were of the firm belief that all young people — boys and girls, should finish high school. This meant much decision making when we had completed grade nine, the last grade available in our local Westmark School. The high school of preference was in Grande Prairie, but it would cost approximately three hundred dollars a year for dormitory room and board. This would mean that an animal or two would have to be sold, something done with reluctance when trying to build a herd. However, it was made possible, and Dieter attended Grande Prairie High School in the '46 – '47 school year. For the following term, the rates were increased for those outside the Grande Prairie jurisdiction, so Dieter was enrolled in Spirit River High School for grade eleven. He stayed in the dormitory, and it was easier for him to come home on weekends.

In the meantime I had completed grade nine as well. Mother had been corresponding for some time with a friend in Michigan, U.S.A., Kate Rampoldt. That family invited me to come and stay with them, and attend high school in Michigan. Their daughter, my same age would enjoy the company, and I could surely benefit by getting out of the narrow confines of Westmark, the two mothers reasoned. The long train trip would be costly, but not as much as a year's dormitory fees. As a result, in August, 1947 I travelled to Michigan and attended Niles High School for nine months. I was indeed exposed to many new experiences, socially, culturally and academically.

Piling Brush (1947)
Ursula, Gerta, Heidi, Father, Irma

That summer of 1947, before I left for the U.S., was filled with hard work for the whole family. Forty-five acres on the south-east part of our quarter had been brush-cut and then piled, and now it needed to be made clear and ready for the

breaking plow. Father and I were working side by side, both sweaty and black from the burned brush. As we threw piece after piece of wood on the growing piles, he took this opportunity to "educate" me on some of the finer points of a young lady travelling alone — the dangers, the precautions, the evil of some lecherous men, what to do in case of problems. Never breaking stride, he patiently and quietly talked to his oldest daughter, she with eyes averted, feeling a little uncomfortable, but listening attentively, all the while piling more brush. It was always our father, not our mother, who did this kind of communicating.

In his Christmas letter to me in Michigan, it was also our Father who expressed some concern about my well-being:

> *Have a nice Christmas, and don't let homesickness get you down. For the first time you will be spending Christmas far away from home, and just as we will be thinking of you, your thoughts will be with us. But you are not alone, rather in the friendly Rampoldt family circle. Our greatest hope is that you are happy there, and that you like and understand each other. Every person has his good and bad sides, and in life it's important that we cultivate the good in ourselves, and combat the bad. In those with whom we live, we should accept the good, and reject that which we consider undesirable. Now, my big girl, I don't want to preach a sermon here, but I think you understand what I mean. Be brave, and go your way straight and sure. That's not always real easy, but you will manage it. If you ever have a heavy heart or something is bothering you, then write us or Dieter and get it off your mind.*
>
> *I am just home on Sundays now and am writing this from our bush camp. Hans Delfs is busy preparing the soup for tomorrow. We are at the highest point in the hills, two miles west of Scotty (Maxwell) and can see the whole settlement. Our nearest neighbours are Toerpers and Lloyd Mack, with their mill crew, just a hundred paces away. We built a barn, jointly, and often visit each other in the evenings. The earnings are quite good – six to seven dollars a day. Hans Delfs, Hein Schuett and I purchased a power saw for three-hundred dollars, and we've got the price of that back already.*
>
> *All the pulpwood goes to the U.S.A. where they apparently make plastics and nylon out of it. We have the logs trucked to Woking, where there are mountains of logs at the siding. Everyone's getting into cutting pulpwood. In this way we can make up a little bit, for the frozen crops, although it's very hard work. I'm doing the skidding with Bill and Rex. Mother doesn't have it easy at home either, with all the livestock. We're all looking forward to the Christmas holidays, when we hope to have some rest.*

While these decisions regarding our education, and how to make ends meet, were being made here, terrible unimaginable suffering, and decisions of life and death were taking place in Germany. Roles had been reversed. Now instead of receiving parcels from the homeland, the German settlers in Canada, though relatively poor themselves, were sending food parcels to starving relatives in war-ravaged Germany.