

My Working Life as a “Hired Girl”

Lena May (McCullough) Myhre

I was born Lena May McCullough in 1915 in Pelly, Saskatchewan the fourth of ten children while my parents lived on a homestead in Maloneck, Sask. In 1917 we moved back to a farm in the Swan River District of Manitoba where both sets of grandparents had homesteaded in 1898. Many of the family remained in the area and my parents lived there for the remainder of their lives.

When I finished school in 1933 there were very limited employment opportunities, especially for young women. Teaching and nursing were the two main options. At the time I thought that I would like to become a nurse, but looking back now I am sure I would not have enjoyed it. My mother discussed getting a loan of three hundred dollars from some relatives who were better off than us in order to send either myself or my sister Margaret to do a teaching course. I think it was about a nine month course in normal school. That was a huge amount of money then and it would have been nearly impossible to pay back, so it never happened.

Another issue was that in the 1930s there simply was no work available even if you had training. One friend of mine, whom I met later in Alberta, was a teacher. I asked her once if she had any trouble getting a job after she did her training in the early 1930s. She said she had indeed! She managed to get a job teaching in a small town in Saskatchewan only after writing more than two hundred letters requesting a job. In the Durban area where I grew up, I personally knew eleven qualified female teachers who were unable to get jobs. In one family three sisters had all trained as teachers, but only one of them ever managed to get employment as a teacher.

Working as a ‘hired girl’ was a very common practice for young country women in those years between the two world wars. I started to do this work even before I finished school in 1933, and continued to do so until I married at the end of 1941, at the age of twenty-six.

I’ve heard that after World War I, there was some money around, but from what I remember of my early life, during the 1920’s and 1930’s, there was always a shortage of money. There was little pay and I grew up thinking that was just the way life was. I could not imagine there would come times when money was plentiful. Although we always had enough to eat on the

farms, a neighbour, who had grown up in a town in Ontario, said that they had always been hungry during that period.

At that time we lived on a farm about three miles outside of Durban, Manitoba. Dad tried to pay this land off but it was impossible as he only got seventeen cents per bushel for the wheat he grew. When we first heard that they were only paying seventeen cents, we thought it was funny - some kind of joke - but it soon became apparent that it wasn't very funny at all. The seventeen cents barely covered the cost of the seed. They probably needed to get around two dollars per bushel to make a profit. As a result, my parents couldn't keep up their mortgage payments, had to sell the farm and move to the Ruby district nearby and rent land.

I finished grade eight at Ruby school in 1930, and in order to continue my schooling, I needed to travel to the town of Durban about three miles away, where the high school was located. Neither my brother Lionel, nor my oldest sister Blanche had been able to go to school after grade 8 due to family commitments. By the time I was ready, transportation was provided in the form of a covered van pulled by two horses and attendance at high school was more the norm. Money was a problem though and I got my first job during the years I was in high school.

My first employer lived in Durban. Mrs. Ogilvie had been ill and required a long period of rest to recuperate. She was a great cook; her mother had been in service in England with a wealthy family. There were seven children, four boys, two girls and another boy. Their house had two large bedrooms upstairs and one downstairs. The family shared the two upstairs and I had the one downstairs to myself. During this time I received board and room in exchange for helping with the housework and meal preparation after school and on Saturdays. I would get fifty cents for the extra work I did on Saturday. Mr. Ogilvie was the 'elevator man' (grain) and was well off by standards of that time. He earned perhaps one hundred dollars per month.

Mr. Ogilvie was a handsome man, but Mrs. Ogilvie was one of the homeliest women you ever saw. She was very outspoken and many thought her very strange. I became fond of her and it was like a second home for me. It was the practice at the time for people in the area to send along refreshments when a local dance was held. I remember one timid teenage girl coming nervously to ask Mrs. Ogilvie if she would send a cake along for the dance. I can still see the look of horror on the girl's face as Mrs. Ogilvie said, "No!" However, she then continued on to say, "I'll bring sandwiches", much to the girl's relief.

The second oldest boy, Jim, seemed to be her favourite. He was an airplane gunner during WWII and was killed overseas. When I wrote to her to say I was sorry to hear that Jim was missing in action, she replied, "He'll turn up yet." He never did.

In 1933, three of my siblings – Donald, Irene and Cecil – had to have their appendix removed. Don was very sick prior to his operation, but I always wondered if the other two really needed the surgery. My mother felt it her duty to stay in Swan River and visit the children daily. This left me at home with all the household duties, like making meals and cleaning, as well as going to school and studying for my final school year. Blanche, my oldest sister, had already married and Margaret, the second oldest, was working elsewhere. It was a very hard time for me. I would start the day making bread in the morning before school, and then Dad would finish it during the day while I was at school.

I turned eighteen the summer of 1933 and over the next three years, until 1936, I worked at various places in the Durban area, often returning to the Ogilvies between other jobs. Occasionally I would return home, between jobs, or to help out at busy times, but mine was a large family and by not living at home, there was one less mouth for my parents to feed.

Working as a hired girl, even the best, didn't lead to full time work. The work was seasonal and short term, during a family illness or for the first month or so after a baby was born. We stayed around our own home district and went home between jobs or to help out there if necessary. In the country, you usually got your job by word of mouth. My sister Margaret was always very efficient and she never had to look for a job. She was also very assertive but got away with it because of her popularity. At one place she worked, the twelve year old daughter was in the kitchen getting underfoot. Margaret snapped, "Get that child out of my kitchen," and the mother did!

Once I took a job, for about six months, in the town of Swan River, about twenty miles from home. Swan River was the biggest place I had ever been and on Saturday night, it was a very lively place. The shops stayed open and the streets were full of people shopping and visiting. However, since I knew no one there, I was lonely and very unhappy.

The couple I worked for were an older couple with three grown-up sons. The husband had lost a leg, at the hip, in WWI, and his wife was a Swedish woman. Every day he went to the bar around lunchtime and stayed until closing. His wife had some kind of hip or knee problems so she couldn't manage some tasks. I think that was the only reason they had a

'hired girl'. Although he received a pension of around a hundred dollars per month, the six to eight dollars they paid me seemed to leave them short every month, perhaps due to his drinking. When she decided to reduce my wage by two dollars per month, I decided to leave as I had never been happy in Swan River anyway.

Their niece also stayed with them and paid five dollars per month room and board. She was a nurse and always worked night shift. She would come home, have breakfast and then sleep all day. She eventually got tuberculosis and went to a sanatorium. I did hear later that she had recovered.

Times were so different then. I remember one family that lived near Ruby School. One child couldn't speak at all and three others couldn't speak plainly. No one seemed to do anything about it, just took it for granted that was how it was.

Another job I had for about a month or so was with some 'mountain people', the Todds. They had come from United States and lived on Duck Mountain, which was really not much more than a large, tree covered hill south of Ruby school. It was a lonely isolated place. It might have been a 'homestead' where they received title to the land, if they cleared the land. They had two adopted children, a daughter who no longer lived at home and a developmentally delayed boy. The father was a very nice man and they doted on the boy. There was not much to do and I really don't know why they hired someone, as they could not afford the six dollars they paid me. They, too, were always short of money and there was in fact not even enough food to make decent meals. I think he must have been paying off a debt or something because I heard his wife say to him once, "never mind, next month you have all the money for yourself". My sister Irene worked there the next year, and the daughter and her children came to stay so it was much busier. Irene said they had lots of food and were better off by that time.

Also living on the mountain was a family with two boys. The parents came from Germany before the war. They lived on rabbits at first and had a hard time during the war as well. Irene went to school with one of the boys and corresponded with him for a while afterwards.

We could never bring ourselves to eat rabbit. We did however eat a lot of moose and deer. As it was difficult to store meat in those days, we would share the meat between several families when someone killed an animal. I thought deer was a nicer meat to eat as moose meat was quite tough.

My sister Margaret and her husband Wilbur had a farm at Harlington, Manitoba for a short period. One summer during this period, about 1934, I helped out Wilbur's sister, who lived near them. I didn't get paid, just room and board, but the meals were great. They had an ice cream freezer so we had ice cream nearly every day. A real treat! There were many young people in the area and lots of things to do, like going on picnics, so I had a really enjoyable time while there. Wilbur was not really a farmer at heart so they soon moved to Swan River. I helped Margaret for a while when Lloyd, her first child, was born in 1935.

I worked for my sister Blanche and her family one autumn as well. Summer and autumn were always busy times on the farms. There was lots of work to do, including gardening, berry-picking and canning. It took three hours of boiling to safely process vegetables and considerably more time to pick, clean and prepare them. Harvest time also required extra work. There was a bit of a competition to provide great meals for the threshing crews because they discussed the quality of the meals as they moved around the countryside. It was a matter of pride.

Berry picking was an important source of fresh fruit. There used to be tons of berries free for the picking. In Manitoba, there were cranberries, raspberries, saskatoons, and strawberries. The little wild strawberries were delicious, much tastier than the large domesticated strawberries but gathering them was a nightmare, as they were so small and hard to pick. Cranberries were very plentiful, but tart and required a lot of sugar to make them edible. I remember once in Alberta, Mrs. Stephenson and I picked and canned seventy- eight quarts of saskatoons in one day! I liked even numbers so I always thought we should have done two more quarts.

During the winter the hens never laid eggs (they need supplements in order to lay all year long), so in the autumn we would fill a crock with fresh eggs and cover them with a solution which kept them fresh and also stopped them from freezing. This ensured we had some eggs until spring. When spring came the hens laid again. I recall Easter Sunday was a special day when you could eat as many eggs as you wanted!

TO ALBERTA

In 1936 I was home for a while and had started writing to my sister-in-law, Frances. In the summer I moved to Alberta to stay with her and my brother, Lionel, to help with the house work as Frances was pregnant. In those days it was common practice for many people that were having a baby to get a 'hired girl' to help. Lionel and Frances sent me an advance of

thirty dollars to pay for my train journey out to Alberta. Although things were much cheaper in those days, train fares were one item that was relatively costly. It was not possible to save much money in those days and it took me a full four years before I managed to save enough money to buy a ticket home to Manitoba for a visit. I felt sorry for Lionel who I'm sure was homesick, but did not get back to see his family in Manitoba for over thirteen years.

I took a train from Durban to Edmonton and then on to Lacombe. There were no buses yet at that time. It took about two days and one night. For twenty- five cents you could hire a blanket and could lie on the seats and sleep, as it was not crowded. The train from Durban to Melville was a freight train and was extremely slow as it stopped and loaded or unloaded freight at every little town along the way. From Melville to Edmonton, there was a passenger train which was much faster.

Blanche took me to the train in Durban when I was leaving. She was constantly 'shushing' me as she always worried what people might think. She had made me a huge lunch to take with me including a large container of milk. Unfortunately, it tipped over and it spilled on everything I had with me. What a mess!

The train had huge walk-in bathrooms, with mirrors, that really impressed me. They had to be closed while in the stations. I remember one indignant lady saying, "They keep that damn thing closed all the time!"

When I arrived in Edmonton (population of around 85,000), it seemed so huge compared to anywhere I had ever been. It was noisy and no one paid any attention to anyone else. I had to get from one train station to another, to catch the train to Lacombe. I was too scared to take a cab (we were warned about all the wicked strangers in the big cities) and couldn't afford it anyway, so somehow managed to get there on a streetcar for ten cents. Arriving in Lacombe was also very frightening as there was no one there to meet me. I was very panicky, as I was unsure how to use pay phones and worried what I would do if no one answered. Fortunately, I managed to reach Frances on the phone and was soon picked up.

Frances' father had passed away in 1933. He was only sixty-five when he had a stroke and since there was nowhere to send him, he was nursed at home for nine months, until his death. Lionel and Frances lived in a large, beautiful farmhouse with her mother, Mrs. Wyatt. There were four big bedrooms upstairs and one downstairs. There was a long dining room downstairs which was used regularly. The equally long living room was carpeted and never really used. They often had visitors come and stay for a while, including my brother, Wes.

The first month I was in Alberta there was not much to do as Frances was overdue. However, it soon got really busy as Myrna was born, Mrs. Wyatt had a heart attack, and it was harvest time! At harvest time the workload increased greatly as the teams of men would arrive to help with the harvesting. They worked from dawn to dusk while harvesting with breakfast served as early as four in the morning, dinner was taken out to the field. as was an afternoon lunch, and then supper was served after six in the evening. There would be as many as ten extra, very hungry men for several days. Eight loaves of bread were made every morning and this was in addition to all the other duties of the housewife.

I went to help Frances' sister, Doris, for a month or so, later in the year when she had her baby but then returned to Frances'. I stayed there over the Christmas period that year. I remember we would get our work finished in the morning and then sit and do needle work or fancywork and spend time with Mrs. Wyatt. Mrs. Wyatt, who was only sixty-five, was bedridden after her heart attack and was cared for in the downstairs bedroom. I sometimes slept with her and you could feel her heart 'jump' around. Mrs. Wyatt lived for about a year and a half after her heart attack.

Later I worked for a few other farmers in the Bentley district. In the country, you got your jobs by word of mouth mainly. I worked for the Chowens next. They had a farm just a quarter of a mile from Bentley.

A lot of this work was seasonal and you would move on to someplace else when the work was done, for example, when the harvest was finished. When doing this short term work, you never really had days off. One time at the Chowens during the harvest time, I was being paid an extra dollar a day. Mrs. Chowen was a bit shocked when I asked for a day off to go to Nordegg with some friends. She was surprised I would miss out on a dollar - just for a bit of sightseeing. Nordegg was the end of the road in those days.

One poor hired man that worked at the Chowens had lost a foot in a mowing accident and had an artificial foot. In those days people would jump on the train boxcars to get from one place to another. As I said, trains were expensive and there was very little money around. It seemed like the railway officials overlooked this and allowed it to happen quite freely. Anyway, the summer the war broke out, this man who had lost his foot, jumped on a boxcar to go and visit his family. He became locked in a refrigeration car and froze to death. We were all very sad when we got this news.

Times were so hard then that often men would come by the farms and offer to do a few chores in exchange for a meal. Another farm in the area that I worked at was the Stephensons. I recall with horror my first day there: there were thirteen people for breakfast! They had a bunkhouse for the transient workmen. Mr. Stephenson was involved in many money-making schemes. He had share farmers working on his land, one raising pigs, and another chickens.

It was always very busy there. Besides cooking for up to thirteen people, there was also all the housework, washing, scrubbing and cleaning to do. I think I received around eight to ten dollars per month on top of room and board. Sylvan Lake was a resort area which became very busy over the summer. One of the share farmers, Don Stollinger, would truck pies and buns over to Sylvan Lake, two or three times a week, to sell to the holiday people. Baking bread and pies for this enterprise was another duty I had to complete. I don't think they made much money however, after supplies and gas were paid for.

Don Stollinger always had lots of girlfriends and dated my friend, Gladys off and on. Don's brother Barney liked Gladys and was annoyed with how Don was treating her. I recall Barney saying, "Gladys is a helluva swell fella!" Don wrote to Gladys when we were in Calgary, but Jim Jeffrey (her future husband) was already waiting for her to return. Barney died the year before the war of appendicitis as there were no antibiotics yet.

I met Gladys Solberg when I was working at Chowens. She was working as a hired girl in Bentley, just a ten minute walk away. She had worked for Mrs. Chowen at one time and would come and spend the occasional weekend with me there. She was from the Norwegian community west of Bentley, one of ten daughters and five sons. I went to Sunday dinner at her place one time, there were twenty people there and dinner was completely prepared and served by the youngest Solberg daughter, age sixteen. Each daughter took over the cooking when they turned sixteen. Gladys was much more efficient than I was, and no wonder!

On the farms the day started with preparing and serving breakfast. Most had cows and although I rarely had to milk cows, we did have to run the milk through the separator to separate the milk and cream every morning and evening. This was a manual procedure that took fifteen to twenty minutes. As well as washing the breakfast dishes, you had to wash all the pieces of the separator and then pour boiling water over all of them. Some of the cream was sold and some made into butter. Then it was time to plan and prepare the next meal. There was usually a wash day and an ironing day each week. One of the men would haul in

the water to be heated on the stove, and the clothes were boiled for ten minutes before they went into a hand operated washing machine, wrung out and put outside to dry. It was heavy work. Ironing was a challenge as you had to heat two or three sad irons on top of the stove and then attach a handle to one and hope it was not too hot to scorch the material.

Saturday you scrubbed the wooden floors with a scrubbing brush on your hands and knees. You had to get the house spotless for the visitors that would arrive on Sunday. Visitors turned up and it was expected that they would be made welcome and fed a great big meal. No invitation required. One of my sisters always wondered why housework wasn't allowed on Sunday, but you could slave away in the kitchen all day. What was the difference?

I started working in Bentley for Dr. Henry and his wife in 1937 and continued working there most of the time until I got married in 1941, except for the few months I spent in Calgary. He was a very busy country doctor and his wife worked as his secretary. They worked very long hours and he was always on call twenty-four hours a day. They would plan a trip up to Edmonton only to be called back for some emergency before they even got all the way there. They did not make good money, as many could not afford to pay them and they often received goods like eggs or wood in exchange for the medical treatment. Mrs. Henry was very thrifty.

As this was a full time position I did have every Sunday off. My duties at the Henrys included the usual housework, cooking and cleaning. I was paid fifteen dollars monthly before I went to Calgary, but it increased to twenty dollars a month when I returned. I liked it there as Mrs. Henry went to work and I could be my own boss. Mrs. Henry was not a good cook and she let me do all the meal planning. I think the meals were a more important issue for them than the standard of cleaning. While I was in Calgary they had hired another girl but she couldn't cook so they were desperate to get me back.

The Henrys had a two storey house with two huge bedrooms and a small sewing room on the second floor. I had one of the bedrooms and their daughters shared the other one. The sewing room was seldom used as we tended to read or knit in the front room on the main floor. They had two daughters at that time, Isobel and Diana. I looked after their children outside of school hours if necessary, and if Dr. and Mrs. Henry went to Edmonton. There was a movie once a week in Bentley. Mrs. Henry and I would take turns, week about, looking after the kids while the other one went to the movies.

On Sundays, my day off, I would usually go and visit with my sister-in-law Frances. Later they moved to a farm near Ponoka and it was not so easy to get there. Then I would go to the Stephensons or the Chowens for the day. Chowens had a cottage at Gull Lake and during the summer we often went there. In the winter evenings we would go ice skating in Bentley.

One farmer in the area was not very bright and he upset Dr. Henry one day. He called the doctor out to his farm on a cold, blizzard day so Dr. Henry asked him to meet him at the turnoff two to three miles from the farmhouse. The doctor thought if he got stuck and couldn't get to the house, the farmer's horses could pull the car the rest of the way. Joe, however, met him on foot without the horses! Dr. Henry was furious, he did not think anybody could be so foolish. Why on earth would he want anyone to meet him on foot in a blizzard?

CALGARY

In 1939 my friend Gladys and I moved to Calgary to work. It was Gladys' idea and we knew there was always work for maids in Calgary at that time. You just went to the Employment Office and you could get a job right away. Mr. Chowen was a very intelligent man who ran for Parliament at one stage. I remember him sitting us down before we left and telling us not to come back from Calgary smoking!

The transition from being a hired girl to a maid was a big one, and working in Calgary was not as pleasant as working on farms where you were a member of the family. The city people seemed to feel superior, and generally looked down on the people who came from the country. They thought people from the farm were different. At one job interview the woman said, "I know you girls have never been in a house this large." Well, it might have been big, but it certainly wasn't the nicest house we had ever seen.

In the house where I worked in Calgary, the staff were not allowed in the front room except to serve when the husband was home. The man of the house was a dentist and I don't remember him ever speaking to me. The wife was pleasant and nice to me when we were alone. The woman where Gladys worked may have come from a working class family because she was not like this with Gladys, and was not 'stuck-up'. At meal times, we would bring the food into the dining room and the man of the house would cut the meat up and we would serve it to everyone, and then take our portion out to the kitchen to eat. One advantage of this was that we could have extra helpings out of sight.

When Gladys got her first job in Calgary, her employer said that I could come over to visit Gladys. I managed to navigate my way through this huge city (population around 87,000) and find Gladys. About ten minutes after arriving, the lady of the house informed me it was time I left! Gladys was so angry that the next morning she packed up and left without a word.

The first job I got in Calgary was with an American couple, who seemed to think they should have a maid, but could not really afford it. Their mother lived with them and they had three 'devilish' children who I was supposed to look after. They were only paying me fifteen dollars monthly which I was already making back in Bentley, so I moved on as well.

When I left, Gladys took that job for a while, as she was always good with kids. In fact when that family moved away, their neighbour quickly hired her. This neighbour and his business partner had started the Greyhound Bus Lines in Western Canada and his wife had been a Miss Canada winner. They had a gardener, a housemaid and Gladys was a nanny for the children. They had a four year old boy and a baby girl. Gladys was allowed to eat with them, perhaps because the husband was often away. Later during the war, Gladys went back to visit them. At that time they had a new house with thirteen rooms and the wife mentioned that she had to vacuum it herself. Presumably help was hard to find at that time because people were involved in the war effort.

My next job was with the dentist and his wife, Doctor and Mrs. U., who paid twenty dollars per month. Again my duties included cooking, cleaning, scrubbing, washing and child minding. The menu was decided by Mrs. U. and recipes were provided. They did check to see if you brought any recipes with you from previous jobs so they could impress people with some new fancy dish. As was common, the woman of the house planned the meals and then did the grocery shopping. The only other thing that Mrs. U. did was wash the baby clothes. However, she did often have to look after her mother who had rheumatism. I recall one time when her mother stayed overnight, she could be heard moaning all night long.

When the couple went out in the evening, which they frequently did, I was expected to stay upstairs and keep an eye on the children. They had a four year old boy, and an eight month old girl. I was not to fall asleep but this was quite difficult for me as I have always been a sleepy head! They were home by midnight usually, but I had to be up by seven to get breakfast ready.

When I notified them that I would be leaving, Dr. and Mrs. U. took the opportunity to go on holidays and leave the children with me. They got their seventeen year old niece, Florence, to come and help me. Their son was a very 'determined' little boy, and he was a handful. I remember once I found him standing on the banks of the raging Bow River – a near disaster! Anyway Florence decided she was going to straighten him out while she was there. The son said to me, "I like you because you are nice to me when Mom is away; but I don't like Florence!" I am quite sure he would have told his Mother this as well.

All hired girls, at that time in Calgary, had Thursday afternoon off. One Thursday Mrs. U apologised for not doing the dishes because she had not felt well, but she never thought of doing it at another Thursday, she just left it for me to do. We also had all day Sunday off, and Gladys and I spent Sundays attending a different church service every week for something interesting to do. Gladys used to laugh when she remembered one church we went to where they dipped peoples head under water to baptise them. She said as we watched, I would gasp each time they dipped someone, imagining how awful it would be to have your head pushed under water!

After the church service of the day, we would then buy a meal out. You could get a full meal for twenty-five cents. We happened upon a restaurant where a cousin of Gladys' worked so we often went there.

After five months, we had had enough of Calgary and Gladys was ready to go back to Bentley. In Calgary, you could only associate with other maids. We planned to leave on September 1st and then the evening before, we heard that war had been declared. You can't imagine how scary that news was, we were filled with dread. We took a train back to Lacombe which was as far as it went. Then, John (my husband-to-be) who was driving a truck at the time met us in Lacombe and drove us to Bentley. I went back to stay with Frances and Lionel for a few days. Both Mrs. Chowen and Mrs. Henry had been in touch with me in Calgary. I went to the Chowens to help with the harvest; but that year they didn't get the harvest in until the spring because of an early heavy snowfall. I remember Mr. Chowen saying, "If they were up there shovelling it down, it couldn't come down any faster!"

I then returned to Dr. Henry's, but there was not that much work to do so we spent long hours knitting clothes for the soldiers. My brother Wes who had enlisted said these sweaters were used but there was no good method of distributing them and the soldiers had to just dig in the pile and help themselves.

Unlike in Calgary, in the country you were like part of the family. When I planned to get married in 1941, Mrs. Chowen and Mrs. Stephenson argued over who was going to have a shower for me. Eventually Mrs. Chowen held it. She was a quiet determined woman and they lived closer to Bentley. I remember I really hated to go to my own shower. I never enjoyed people making a fuss over me.

The war changed many things. Life in Bentley was far less interesting with many of the young people going off to war. Fewer women were available to take the 'hired girl' jobs. Every week you heard of someone dying in the war, but you just accepted it as part of life.

A neighbour of Mrs. Henry's moved from Bentley to Lacombe and found that she could buy a whole chicken already roasted. They thought this wonderful and Mrs. Henry wished she could get it in Bentley too! This was during the war around 1940.

Two of my brothers enlisted, like many boys in the Swan River Valley. There was much talk about their patriotism, but I think for many of them the attraction was the pay. Cec and Wes both earned a hundred dollars monthly in the services and sent half of it home to my parents. It made a great difference for them and I think it was the first time my parents ever had much money. I remember a family, who had moved to the Ruby District from a drought stricken area west of there, once suggested that Mom and Dad apply for a pension. Mom asked, "Why?" The woman replied, "Because your husband is blind." A pension seemed like taking charity which was frowned upon, and my mother responded indignantly, "Well the rest of us can see!"

I was asked what we hired girls spent our money on, and did we send money home. My response is, "What money?" There was never any left to send home, but living away from home did help by reducing expenses for your parents. What little money I saved, I used to buy a few Christmas presents, clothes and skates. I bought a winter coat once for twenty dollars. And I remember buying Dad some reading records for his gramophone. A friend of mine, Mrs. Dahl, worked as a teacher during this time. Although she earned about five hundred dollars per year, she was paying off some medical expenses and often couldn't afford the two cent stamp to write to her parents.

Many women met their husbands-to-be while working as 'hired girls'. There were usually hired men working on the farms as well. My sister Margaret also went to a lot of dances and met local people. She always had lots of boyfriends. She went out with Wilbur for four

years, until he finally gave her an ultimatum. Either she had to marry him or he was leaving: they got married.

Blanche worked for a gentleman whose wife had died and left him with three young children. They eventually married. Irene, my younger sister, also married the man that she worked for. In 1940, I went back to Manitoba for a visit and brought Irene back to Alberta with me. She got very homesick as she had been very happy in the Ruby District, and she soon returned to Manitoba. Alberta then seemed great to her and my mother said that after Irene returned, nothing was ever as good there as it was in Alberta.

After returning to Manitoba, Irene went to work for her future husband. After his mother died, Clifford, his brother George and sister Lettie continued to live on the farm. Lettie got cancer and Irene was hired to help with the housework and care for Lettie. I recall some of my family were horrified when they decided to marry, as Clifford was much older than Irene, but he was always very good to her. After World War I, he had wanted to move to Alberta, but had to stay to run the family farm in Manitoba. He finally got a chance to sell the farm and by then Alberta looked good to Irene as well. They moved to Alberta during the 1940s and I think they were always happy here.

I met John when I was working at the Stephensons. John usually worked around Veteran, Alberta, where there was a large Norwegian community. John worked at the Stephensons in the summer, usually driving tractors and cultivators. He stayed in a bunkhouse there. He would go back to Veteran for the harvest.

We would have married sooner but just couldn't afford it. One year John stayed in Bentley over the winter and got the job to make and maintain the ice rink. It came with a little house with only one room, but it was warm. The rink was used for skating and curling and everyone in Bentley and the surrounding farm area used to congregate there.

John Myhre and I were married in 1941 and made our home on the South Hill of Red Deer for the rest of our lives. With my marriage and my own home, I left my 'hired girl' days behind. I had three children and in 1956 I obtained a job in the kitchen of the Red Deer Hospital. I eventually became the Head Cook and retired in 1979.

My years working as a hired girl were generally pleasant enough; sort of a continuation of the work you were expected to help with at home. But you often worked very hard and with none of the modern conveniences. In many cases you became like part of the family, just

like another daughter. Working in Calgary and a couple of other places was not so pleasant, but it was usually easy enough to leave and find another home where you were needed. Like all young women who have a job that allows them to move out into the world, build on their skills, have adventures, make lifelong friends, and have pleasant memories, those years as a hired girl served me well.