

## Memories of the Valley

By; Gail Fekete

Memories, memories, I have so many, may they take you on a trip to yesteryear as I recall things that once were. We had a French name but no one spoke it, and somehow my mother decided I'd be the first of nine to attend French school. I did learn the language but only spoke it at school.

As time passed we learned of the many hardships my parents had endured during the Big Depression when sugar cost 2cents a lb, however since my Dad only made 15cents a day, they just couldn't buy much.

My parents often told us how hard the men worked in the bush camps from daylight to sundown cutting trees and skidding logs with teams of horses, no wonder they slept like a log at night. I once toured the camps at Algonquin Park with the Deacon Garden club and saw where the men slept, even the beds made from logs. A huge stove sat at the end of some of the beds to keep them warm. One winter both my parents worked in a bush camp, Dad logging and Mom helped cook for the hungry men, then when spring arrived the owner didn't have money to pay them so all they got for a winter's work was their room and board, they were disappointed but not bitter.

Things began improving over time and when I'd come home from school Mom would be peeling potatoes and carrots with meat roasting in the oven for supper. We didn't have fancy food but sure did have good wholesome stews, soups, bread and beans, all homemade. It seemed summers were so hot back then and at times we'd walk to Bellshore, Riverside Park to swim, we went un-supervised, unlike today.

We could earn money at Bouden's Garden's at 7cents a quart picking strawberries when they were located where Deacon Street is now. We'd make about 50cents and thought we were a millionaire, candies were 5 for 5cents. The cost to go to a show at the O'Brien and Centre theatres was 10cents, I recall going from school with the whole class and seeing the Ten Commandments and Ben Hur. Beamish and Woolworth's were stores of choice and when the first Zeller's came to town, it had an escalator something we had never before seen.

Camp Petawawa was ten miles west of Pembroke where we picked many blueberries on the Petawawa plains for preserves set aside for winter and pies for desserts. My Dad worked there for many years, a carpenter by trade however retired when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced the metric system and Dad only knew the Imperial measurement system. Gas sold at 15cents a gallon, imagine a gallon. Radio was the focal point, we listened to mystery stories and the famous songs, "The Log Driver's song", "This Ottawa Valley of Mine" and "The Lake Dore Waltz", one of my favourites sung by Mac Beattie and the Melodiers. In 1956 we got our first television, one channel, very limited choices & poor reception so we had to adjust the rabbit ears to clear the picture. Ed Sullivan's variety show brought people right into our livingroom, like Elvis, The Beatles, Lawrence Welk, Lassie and Howdy Doody. Saturday nights, " Hockey Night in Canada" was a ritual with Foster Hewitt announcing the play by plays, then when instant re-plays began , some not so good words were heard, because Dad thought the opposing team had scored again.

Canada Veneers Ltd brought many jobs to our area with huge truckloads of logs that were brought in, and one by one the logs were placed into the Indian river to soak the bark off. The logs were sliced into thin slices of veneer then glued together to make plywood. My older brother worked there in the boiler room for \$1.25 an hour and when he'd come home for lunch his clothes had an awful smell from the wet logs, sap and glue. We used to swim in nearby water that made our hair so sticky it could almost stand on end. In winter we'd slide down the hill nearby on flattened cardboard boxes. We didn't realize we were poor, we just had fun in the great outdoors & not much pollution back then. Just up from the plant a friend's brother on hearing a train, would climb up to the high trestle and dive into the Indian river below as the train approached.

Pembroke was the first town in Canada to generate electric streetlights and Victoria Hall was the first Municipal building to acquire electric lights, it is just a stone's throw away from our Public Library, both bustling with activities for the young and seniors. Back in the 50's, the Police Station was at Victoria Hall where I'd go to buy my bicycle license for 25cents, we now do watercolour painting where the jail cells once were many long years ago.

A sight worth remembering was when we'd stop on our way to and from school to watch Mr Patterson on Murray street carve the huge log in his yard that was to become a Totem Pole. When it was finished, painted and erected at Riverside Park

everyone could enjoy it as much as we had enjoyed watching it evolve over the years. What pride Mr. Patterson must have felt on seeing his work of art displayed, part of our history. Every Christmas the famous song "Christmas in the Valley" was heard by Wayne Rostad who spent much of his childhood in the Valley. Later on he had a TV show, "On the Road Again", travelling throughout the provinces interviewing people from all walks of life, showcasing their talents. On one episode he interviewed Alex Sztasko in Wilno who painted whimsical scenes of the area and carved puppets of folks he knew around the Tavern. His sister Viola lives in Killaloe who keeps his memory alive with his paintings that hang on her walls.

The boys of the Valley lived and breathed hockey. Rinks were made in backyards and on frozen rivers and a huge bonfire was built at the end of the rink to keep hands and feet from freezing. The first indoor rink was built on Mackay street with many teams organizing. Players like the famous Frank Nighbor, Hughie Lehman, Harry Cammeron are seen on a mural downtown. In 1950 the Pembroke Memorial Centre was built where I went to many of the Pembroke Junior Lumberkings hockey games, Pembroke is now known as "Hockey Town Canada".

On the edge of Killaloe, you'll find "Llomar Sugar Bush". The name Llo/mar, is a combination of Lloyd and Margaret's first names. He retired from making syrup in 2007 and passed the baton on to daughter Susan and husband Doug Chatsick who continue making the sweet gold liquid. In 2012 they lost eighteen trees from wind and in order to sustain the sugar bush, reduced the amount to an 800 tap operation. They are 4<sup>th</sup> generation maple syrup producers. Her great-grandfather bought the sugar bush in the 1920's. This year she told me was an exceptional one leaving them a surplus. When Susan was a young girl, sap was hand collected, now it has a gravity downhill feed line, right to the shack. Our son-in-law Rob Godin often visited them for advice when he tapped some trees to make a few bottles of his own syrup.

The Bonnechere Caves in Eganville, is a historical site and safe haven for bats. Many fossils are seen in the walls and overhead. When we toured the caves we were told they were formed from limestone after a mile-thick ice pushed the earth's crust up. When the glacier receded, the Atlantic Ocean flooded the Ottawa Valley but the rising land stopped the Great Lakes from coming in. Our friend's son Michael Kenny worked there for ten years when Tom Woodward was owner.

The Valley is well known for the Old Time Step-dancing and Fiddling contest held each September, Labour Day weekend at the PMC. Competitors and visitors flock to Riverside Park from as far away as the USA to enjoy the weekend where they play music, dance and sing till early morning hours for this once a year get-together event. April Verch has CD's out, Ben Rutz plays with the Johnny Reid Band, and the step-dancing Gardeners, Rhodina, Shawn and Debbie are seen on a mural at the PMC.

More than thirty murals are seen on local businesses that beautify and remind us of the sacrifices our forefathers made for the Valley to become what it is today. Not even the big fire of 1918 that destroyed much of the downtown discouraged the rebuild of Pembroke my parents told me. We have grown a lot over the years and we have just about everything we need here in our valley, the place I was born and raised and still reside in "The Good Old Ottawa Valley".