

This Chronicle is All About Jim

"Did you see all the birds on the highway?" I asked my "co-pilot" as he drowsed beside me on our journey just outside Hanna, Alberta at 0200 hours.

"Birds?" was the shocked response. "I think we should switch drivers" was the opinion of my recent young friend. We stopped and opened the door to feel the cold West wing drift the frozen snow over the highway with about 70 below windshield temperature. "I have never experienced this type of weather" was the confession of Jim Laktin on this maiden trip from British Columbia to Saskatchewan.

Just as I nestled in the recently vacated seat and started to drift off to sleep, I was suddenly awoke to "there they go!" Yes he saw them again, they were the snow birds that were frequent visitors to the highways trying to pick up salt and whatever else may have dropped on the highway.

We were on our way to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan as part of our investigative trip to contact all the Doukhobor Youth in Western Canada to a possible Youth Convention to consider youth unification in Canada. This is how I met Jim Laktin who was representing the Union of Youth from the Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC) in the West Kootenays of British Columbia.

Jim's grandfather Laktin was an independent farmer in Saskatchewan. The family moved to Rossland, B.C., in the early 1920's where he plied a trade as a Carpenter and then contracted various projects including the "Mickey Mouse" houses in Warfield, B.C., in the mid 1940s. Jim's father was a Carpenter that worked on most of the larger construction projects in the Kootenays including the Power Dams under construction at that time.

Jim's grandfather decided that the "urban" life was not for his family and a farm was purchased at Slocan Park on the South side of the Slocan River. There the property was subdivided and became the "stumping grounds" for Jim and his two older brothers Cyril and Peter.

The brothers had an older sister, Ann from their father's first marriage. She had moved off the farm with her mother from the first marriage, who was not a country woman. Jim never saw his sister until a chance meeting fifty years later.

The Slocan Park School was across the river from the farm as well as the railway. Jim's chore on the way to school was herding the milk cows along the railway to a pasture near Kohl Siding. On the way back from school, Jim would retrieve the cows and follow them home. Yes, he knew how to milk cows, separate the milk and store the dairy products in a natural cooler (a dugout into the hillside that kept vegetables and other perishables at current fridge temperatures).

Grade six was graduation from Slocan Park School in order to enter High School he had to attend Mount Sentinel for the rest of his education from Grade 12. Jim always enjoyed sports, especially Basketball and Softball.

The plywood factory at Nelson was Jim's entry into the work world but his friends had jobs on tug boats moving logs along the Columbia River to the Pulp and Saw Mills at Castlegar. It sounded more exciting and besides Jim liked fishing and perhaps there may be opportunities here and he wanted to find out. His interview went well but then he was told that he had to work in the woods as a precursor to a career on the boats. Jim decided to stay with the plywood job but only to the weekend when he was called again to report for work on Monday in Nakusp, B.C., from which the boats were managed.

Jim spent 2 years in this occupation which had many separate functions. Truckloads of logs of various species were offloaded from trucks to marshalling areas. The bundles are then skidded into the water. A raft is made

up of 30 bundles. The rafts are assembled in groups of 20 to 25 rafts and then floated to the Mills in Castlegar. Depending on the weather and direction of winds, the trip times would vary from 3 to 6 days.

Following a trip down the river, there would be days off and those were the times that money was spent. It was one of these times that Jim's brother Peter, a Supervisor at a Pulp Mill in Gold River invited Jim to apply for a job there as after a long strike, the Pulp Mill found itself with a shortage of returning workers. The pay was better and he was able to work in the Steam Plant. This opportunity included entering courses in Fourth Class Steam Ticket. With better pay, this was worth moving.

Jim found the job too mundane after running over log rafts being in the outdoors with scenery changing all the time while the new job had a steady hum and the same gauges to check day after day. Gold River had no young people and his social life was relegated to visits home to the Kootenays. It was on one such trip that he met his future wife Katie. The time had come to settle down and the Kootenays "won the toss."

Jim had met Katie Rebalkin in February 1971 and they married on June 03, 1972 after a year courtship in trips between Gold River. It was obvious that Jim and Katie being separated was not desirable by both and the Kootenay Canal Project was mobilizing. A friend of his suggested that a chainsaw and clearing the Right-of-way was a lucrative change from watching gauges in a Power House and so with chainsaw in hand, Jim changed jobs in the Summer of 1971 and stayed until clearing was completed in the late Fall of that year.

Jim's Aunt was marrying a third time in Grand Forks and a conversation with his cousin Paul Oaschoff revealed an opportunity that Paul was considering to become Operator of the new Union 76 Station in Cranbrook, B.C. Someone needed to keep the place open while Paul attended orientation courses in Calgary in February / March of 1972. Well Jim was the man!

Upon return, Paul and Jim decided that the availability of ice in the East Kootenay was an opportunity not to be denied. An ice-making machine was purchased and the "Ice Guy" was the result which is still in operation today.

Katie was able to get a job as a Telephone Operator in Cranbrook and purchasing a mobile home was the only solution for accommodation or the newly-weds in this new venture for Jim.

After a stint with assisting the Voykin Family in Fernie where they were considering an entry into Chrysler Car sales, Jim was offered a position with Metropolitan Life as Salesman / Agent in 1974 back in the Kootenays. Sales was a natural for Jim and this is where his big start into this occupation really became launched with a tenacity.

We talked about spiritual healing while driving that day on May 01, 2016 and the existence of "Old Lady Healers" that wandered around the Doukhobor Communities. Jim recalled vividly a situation that happened to him when he was 7 or 8 years of age. This is what he remembered:

".....It was a winter day with a large accumulation of snow that year. Mom and Dad had gone to Nelson, that Saturday with my Grand Parents, leaving us three boys at home.

It was a beautiful sunny day and warm enough to take our coats off and we ran around enjoying the day. When the parents returned, we were scolded for not being dressed for the winter and that we were "flirting" with a potential sickness that may result due to the weather at that time of the year. This used to be the advice that all older people gave their brash youngsters and it really was of no concern to Jim.

Next morning on Sunday, Jim was not able to stand on his feet. He had to crawl to the bathroom and returned to lie in bed unable to respond to the frequent calls from his mother to come to breakfast. Finally, his mother, in an irritated fashion charged into the bedroom and discovered her son, essentially immobile.

The family took Jim to Dr. Johnson in Castlegar and he was also perplexed with his condition and decided to keep an eye on him in the Castlegar Hospital for a few days. His final diagnosis was Rheumatic Fever and sent him home to recover with rest.

This was when Jim's grandmother decided to take action as follows:

- 1. Drink a large amount of water and a variety of juices to stimulate urination*
- 2. The accumulation of urine was then boiled*
- 3. Compresses were soaked in this concoction and laid over Jim's legs*
- 4. Jim was not sure if the dosage of an unknown medicine may have even contained some of this concoction*
- 5. He soon fell asleep*
- 6. He awoke the next morning and was able to walk*
- 7. Years later, Jim went to see his regular Doctor, Dr. Hall, a partner to Dr. Johnson. He asked him if the medical notes that Dr. Johnson had taken, mentioned anything about Rheumatic Fever.*
- 8. Dr. Hall confirmed that notation but suggested that Dr Johnson may have misdiagnosed at that time as Jim's recovery could not have been as successful as it was....."*

So we leave it to the Reader to determine whether this was just an "old wives tale". Jim remembered it clearly as fact.

We arrived at High River, Alberta at 1230 hours PST.

I started recording again when we reached Highway 22.

Jim joined me at a time when the independent Contractors in British Columbia were searching for a "portable" fringe benefit package for their employees as competition to the Union's package. This would be a strong competitive edge for the "Open Shop" Contractors who had just organized the Independent Contractors and Businesses of British Columbia (ICBA). In a search for a "Carrier", Jim became involved with Metropolitan Life with which he stayed for a time.

It was at this time that Jim met with a group of individuals that were assembling a business to market office equipment in the Kootenays. The territory offered was the West Kootenays with a possible extension to the East Kootenays to market and service:

- Cash Registers*
- Calculators*
- Copiers*
- Related equipment*

MW Office Equipment Ltd was incorporated with Jim as one of the operating partners.

A key Supplier was Sharp, a large and successful Japanese Manufacturer. This firm was the forerunner for personal computers. Jim described how he was one of those invited to visit their plant in Japan with this vivid observation:

".....we walked into this large room where a simple writing desk stood as a solitary furnishing where the rest of the room was empty. This was to illustrate the original size of the computer mechanism that was required to operate Sharp that was now symbolized by a system that was all handled by the writing desk. A very convincing showing that words could not explain....."

So it was that Sharp computers became a hot selling commodity. International Business Machines (IBM) was quick to realize that MW was the distributor that they preferred and so Jim was taken on a training course IBM for computers, type-writers and related equipment.

Willie was the MW President and handled all the money which eventually became the downfall of the business. Purchase / Rental Agreements required financing to customers. A very suitable arrangement with the Bank of Montreal (BMO) had been negotiated with MW by Willie. Temptation took control over common sense and Willie would make "dummy contracts" that allowed him to receive all the cash from the agreements. This led the RBC discover the impropriety and seize all the accounts rendering MW to become bankrupt. The pay cheques for the large company at this time (125 employees) became NSF.

Willie was incarcerated and Jim's other partners declared personal bankruptcy. Investigations ensued and it was determined that Jim was not in any way associated with Willie's scheme but the fact that Jim was a partner in MW, the legal requirements for payrolls and tax deductions was a potential liability.

Jim was provided with legal advice and it was recommended that:

- 1. All employees sign affidavits absolving Jim of any liability for payroll and deductions that this would absolve Jim*
- 2. Thus Jim would not need to declare personal bankruptcy*

Jim was temporarily out of a business and job but he assumed that he was able to isolate himself from any liability of MW Office Products. At this juncture, Jim started considering

The process involved interviews with Jim Laktin over a period of time.

- 1. May 24, 2015 while driving back from Whatshan Lake Retreat*
- 2. Update while accompanying Jim on a trip to Alberta and Creston, May 01, 2016*

This next portion was part of a discussion while travelling with Jim to the DHRS #1999 Appeals Court held at the Supreme Court in Vancouver, November 12, 2019

In 1983 Jim teamed up with Sam Conkin to establish ERS Technologies (ERST) to market a Night Clerk for Hotels and Motels. Jim served as Executive Vice-President of Sales and Marketing.

This was a unique idea to register guests at hotels and motels using electronic technology.

In principle, a guest could register into a hotel or motel while the operation was locked and closed for the night. It permitted the guest to register and pay after which a room key would be dispensed and the front door would open to allow entry.

This required travelling North America to market and promote the idea. This involved setting up leasing agents throughout 1984.

A prototype was created and manufacturing contract negotiated with Microtel (Div. of BC Tel) Bell Atlantic. Financing was now the requirement going forward.

Sam needed to transfer patent to Easteck from his personal name. Company needed to guarantee to MicroTel.

A great deal of press and attention as the product was unveiled at a convention in Atlanta. At this time IBM was introducing a similar product. Once both products were introduced and the inferior IBM product shown to the convention, IBM removed their product off the convention floor. ERS was given Innovation of the Year with a huge publicity!

Sales began with the first installation at Ocean City Maryland, USA.

Manufacturing of six (6) units at a time was started with Bell Atlantic funding the production to equate the rate of sales and limit the financing exposure with sales coinciding with this flow.

Microtel suddenly, advised ERS that they had built a hundred (100) units for maximum cost efficiency to the surprise of ERS. Microtel sent the invoice to Bel Atlantic and demanded payment.

Bel Atlantic had no alternative but to reluctantly pay the invoice. This essentially bankrupted ERS and the entire project collapsed.



These photographs will fit in to the story at some time:

On the left, this Jim Laktin and his buddy Elmer Verigin, at a "Safety Meeting"

On the right is Jim Laktin his current occupation with First Choice Foods. This is his refrigerated truck that transports fruit to the Hutterites in Alberta with return vegetables, eggs and meats from various Hutterite Communities for merchandizing at the

Biggest Little Fruit Stand (an enterprise by Jim's son Jamie) in Castlegar with distribution throughout the Kootenays



To be continued as of May 16, 2020 1520 hours EWV

To be continued.....as the opportunity to interview Jim if and when it takes place EWV posted this portion of Jim's story August 23, 2022