

ANOTHER HOLIDAY TO THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES, JUNE / JULY 2023 PART II

On Monday morning, July 26, 2023, we “checked out” from the home of Dorothy Ozeroff at Langham, Saskatchewan at about 0830 hours. We thanked her for her hospitality and the friendship that we nurtured over the past fifty-eight (58) years.

Highway 5 East from Saskatoon is a very familiar roadway as I started travelling this way in 1958 from Pelly to the University in Saskatoon. Marilyn was introduced to Highway 5 when our SDY Choir visited Canora, Kamsack and Pelly in December of 1960.

Many thoughts and memories drifted through my mind as we drove through what was once Sutherland adjacent to the East boundary of Saskatoon and is now totally absorbed by the ever-expanding urban Saskatoon.



This photo taken from the Internet shows Highway 5 entering Saskatoon from the East with the City on the horizon. Sutherland was located as the highway angles to the left (South) joining College Drive past the University of Saskatchewan. A Drive-in Theatre once was located just as the curve started on the East side.

My thoughts were racing at the memories of how challenging my world was in the Fall of 1958. How was I going to survive financially? Will I be able to meet the higher educational expectations of the university? Was I up to gigantic changes in my life away from everything that I was familiar with in a strange City that I had never been to before?

Highway 5 continued East for 70 kilometers. There were road improvements and construction speed signs. Oh yes, I knew that Saskatchewan photographed all vehicles and speeding through construction zones caused fines to be doubled as we had learned the last two times, we travelled their highways. So, Elmer behaved himself.



We were scheduled to meet my 1st Cousin, Nadia (nee Chernoff) Stevenson, at a restaurant in Humbolt for lunch at 1130. She was to travel from their farm at Birch Hills (about an hour) to meet us at the same meeting place we used two (2) years ago.

We arrive 15 minutes early and took the same booth we had occupied two (2) years ago and had a coffee while waiting for Nadia to arrive. She

was punctual, as usual.

Here we are enjoying our lunch and visiting. Nadia gave us a thorough recap of the Celebration of Life (CoL) that she attended with her sister Doris who had travelled from Sylvan Lake, Ab to Birch Hills and then the two sisters met their third sister, Jean at Kenville, Mb. Then all three (3) travelled to the Veregin Cemetery to the CoL for our mutual 1st cousin, Donny Sookochoff on June 24, 2023. It was interesting in that Donny's friend chose that date as it coincided with the Veregin Shishliki Event. The CoL lunch was the Shishliki dinner that was enjoyed by all the people who attended the CoL, upstairs in a private room of the former Veregin Ice Arena.



Nadia's mom, Donny's mom and my mom were all sisters from the original Somma Morozoff first family. We had a great deal of relatives to remember and discuss.

We carried on to Canora along Highway 5 to a junction at Highway 9 North to Sturgis. It was imperative that we stop at the Canora Coop Store to purchase a Poppy Seed Roll to take with us to sister Mary's house. This was a Ukrainian pastry that she enjoyed.



The Cooperative facility is complete with bakery, food store, service station and Liquor store. A very busy place any day of the week.

The options to travel to Benito from Canora are via Highway 5 through Veregin and Kamsack and then Highway 83 at Madge Lake to Benito or Highway 9 to a junction near Stenen to Highway 49 that passes by Pelly to meet Highway 83. We chose Highway 9 as it would take us past the Canora cemetery where my favourite cousin, Kathy Sookochoff (Donny's eldest sister) was interred, so that I could share a moment with her spirit. Then we would pass the country road (about 6 miles North of Canora) where about 10 miles East is my birthplace on the second storey of a farmhouse. These memories drifted through my head as I enjoyed the moments.

We then pass Crystal Lake. I heard so many great stories about the beauty of the lake and about a Doukhorob Youth Summer Camp held there in 1957 but alas, I was on my way to B.C. to work for the Summer. My disappointment remains that I have never enjoyed the lake and its recreational aspects.

Highway 9 then joins Highway 49 East. The setting Sun is at our backs again as we pass Stenen where an entrepreneur converted the school into a first-class restaurant that is now patronized by many far and wide. I recall that sister Mary once entertained us there for dinner and we played the VLTs. Yes, I won \$500 by accident!

Hyas is the next town on the North side of Highway 49 all of which are adjacent to the Canadian National Railway that still services these communities. The teenagers of the day nicknamed the community 'Ass High' because it only had two (2) grain elevators compared to Pelly which had five (5).

Norquay is the next familiar community where there was once a hospital in a renovated house. Norquay was fortunate to have had a resident Doctor who removed my diseased tonsils when I was 13. The chloroform was not professionally administered, and I became alarmed and started to "escape" from the

operating table. This is when I first established my “whitecoat syndrome” and fear of Dentists and Doctors alike.

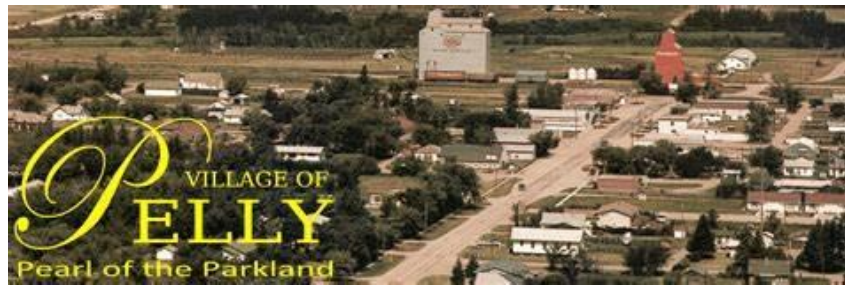
A short while later we cross the “infamous” Snake Creek that flows North to Swan River. Every year there is mating season for snakes. I am told that there are “snake piles” in abundance. This was about 6 miles West of where I lived but I never went over there to confirm all this. Marilyn and snakes do not get along too well and so my offer to inspect the creek now was not accepted.

Then Pelly, a community where I lived near from November 1947 to June 1958.

This is the school I attended from Grade 4 through to 12.

The left room on the lower

floor was for grades 4 through 6 inclusive. The room on the right room lower floor was for grades 7 to 8 inclusive. The upper right room was for grades 9 and 10 inclusive. The upper left room was for grade 11 and part of grade 12. A new school was constructed to house grades 9 through 12 on the same school grounds where I completed grade 12. A one room school on the left of the brick building was where I took part of grade 2 and 3 inclusive. The school became a museum and accidentally burned down about 10 years ago. Many memories flashed through my mind as we drove by, remembering my trials and tribulations while growing from a child through my teenage years.



The next community was Arran. There were some “special” memories at my entering the Beer Parlour when I was just 15 and of course, my first girlfriend hailed from a farm North of Arran at White Beech. Yes, many memories flood my mind.

Then we cross Bear Creek (yes, there is one in Saskatchewan also) and then the road that turns right to Vesna Hall. Many dances and many dancing partners enjoyed Western Music and a polka every third set. Vesna (Spring translated from Ukrainian) is a Ukrainian Community development that includes a church and a cemetery and still operates to this day.

Another opportunity to lift our feet as we crossed the Manitoba / Saskatchewan border just 2 miles East of Highway 83. We turn North to Benito, Mb., our destination at sister Mary’s residence.



The aerial view of Benito is from the South facing North. Thunder Hill is on the upper left. This was the center of the Northern Community that the Doukhobors settled in 1899.

At the South entrance to Benito, the



community proudly posts this billboard honouring their curling hero Ed Werenick, World Champion Curler in 1983 and 1990.

Sister Mary greeted us with her love, and we enjoyed a great dinner that she had prepared. She did not forget that her brother enjoyed a “tot” of Scotch, and I was ready for that pleasure.

The next day I wanted some time for myself, and I travelled to the Pelly area. I stopped at the Doukhobor cemetery (Peaceful Cove) located 3 miles East of Pelly along Highway 49. This was developed by the Doukhobor Society of Pelly and where most of the original Doukhobor Choir members, that I knew, were interred. They had introduced me to sing Doukhobor hymns and Russian songs. Yes, I sang the “Lonely Postman” in respect of all those buried there. I was surprised at the large number of grave sites of familiar names.

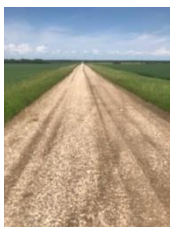


A half mile from the cemetery, a school chum from my years at Pelly, Conrad Vogel, continues with the family farm. He had lost his wife a few years back to Cancer and he himself, is a “survivor”. Connie takes pride in his riding horses and was one of the first to initiate Elk as a farm market commodity in the Pelly area. He admitted that once the government finished all the ever-changing regulations that continued to raise his operating costs, he had to cease herding Elk.

He was proud of his grandson who now works with the Environmental Department of Teck (formerly Fording Coal Ltd) and the good job they were achieving for a natural adaption to the surrounding natural setting. I commented that I had travelled that area since 1955 and I noted the positive change taking place, mostly importantly as we spoke. We all need to be proud.

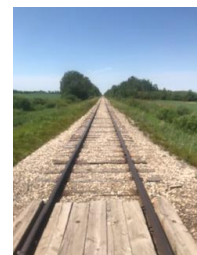
Connie lived just ½ mile East of the Bill and Helen Slastukin family farm. Vivian, Helen and Frances used to bike to school in Pelly with him. I was jealous of Connie as he was a boy with pretty friends. At lunch time, we would practice High Jump and Connie was always one inch higher than me with his longer legs. Connie had served on the regional government committees, and I enjoyed his stories on the challenges of local government. He did know about the current owner of the Verigin farm and suggested that I go inspect it.

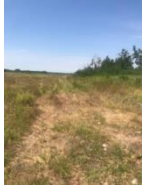
At 2 miles East of Pelly, this country road continues North to the Verigin farm 1 ½ miles. The road is gravelled now but I remember how muddy and impassable the road could be after a rain.



At just over ½ mile or so North, there is this railway crossing. The photo is orientated due West where 2 miles from this spot the grain elevators would normally silhouette right on the

horizon at Pelly. On rainy days we would “slog” to the tracks and walk the rest of the way on firm gravel and railway ties. We used to have contests as to who could walk the furthest along the rails. Brother Russel was the best as he once walked the entire distance.





At 1 ½ miles North, this is the status of the driveway West to the Verigin farm. It appears that no one visits the Verigins (Bill and Annie) anymore and the current farmer, uses another more central access. All the buildings do not exist anymore. I did not have the courage to stand where a family once lived and carried on further North.



This photo was taken on the extreme North side of the 320-acre farm (1/2 section). As I recall when we moved onto this farm (1947), there was only 40 acres “cultivated” and the rest was covered with white and black poplar trees and willow around the sloughs. I recall the many days that we would be “picking roots” and stones to render the fields productive. I picked up a handful of black soil and let it sift through my fingers and fondly reminisced “you can take a kid away from the farm but never the farm out of the kid”.



It reminded me of Meryl Campbell, an older classmate and his infamous essay on his first day at school after summer break. The teacher’s instructions were “write a 500-word essay on how you spent your summer holidays.” The next day the teacher commented on Meryl’s essay, “that is not much of an essay, ‘this summer I picked toots, roots.... for 500 words’”. Meryl’s terse reply “it was not much of a summer!”.

In 1958, my dad was still planting the cash crop of wheat, now Canola is the trend. Yes, tears wet my eyes at the memory of my 3 siblings and I, picking the roots into piles for burning later.

My mother sold the farm in and about 1959 to the Hrabchak family. It has since been resold to Steve Nahachewsky who farms it responsibly.

My mother had little choice in the sale decision as she had farm debts to pay as well as a mortgage on the land. All was retired and Mom proudly paid all four (4) siblings \$1,000 each and bought herself a small house in Benito. She worked as a Kitchen-Aid at the Benito Hospital and managed to send me \$25 a month for my living expenses at the University which was much appreciated. A “pioneer woman” by all definitions.

I looked around for Saskatoon berry bushes but was not successful. This was the result of sprays for weeds and pests. I understand that many farmers cannot drink the water from their wells because of the pollution. Yes, more sadness came over me.

The country road that serviced our farm, had the following families that lived along it; Reibins, Chernoffs, Verigins, Martins and Antifeavs. All these families had chickens, cows, pigs, ducks, geese, turkeys, and sheep as well as some horses. They were all able to subsist on 320 acres to 480 acres of land. “Modernization of Farming” has eliminated the “small mixed farm”. There is nobody living along that road now.

I decided to drive straight East to the N-S country road 3 miles East of Pelly along Highway 49 as these families remained after those who had left the Verigin family road. At the Northern end there were

Chernoffs, then Dootoffs, Rezansoffs, Paul Kondratoff, Fred Slastukin and Alex Kondratoff. Most of these farms were purchased by the Provincial Government Land Bank. There are 2 farmers living on the Kondratoff farms but I could not confirm whether they rented from the Land Bank or may have purchased these lands. Nonetheless, instead of six (6) families there now is just two (2). I comment that my “vision” of the “family farm” at about 60 years from the turn of the century, has disappeared quietly to an “urban sprawl” with the move to the cities and losses to the villages like Pelly.

We had a scheduled Dinner with sister Mary’s children Marianne and Kenneth, in Swan River, Mb.



Bosman, Mb.

Unbelievable portions served by the restaurants. I ordered pork chops and expected a small lunch chop but got two including a large baked potato.

Here we are L to R:

Elmer, Lorraine Steen (Jonathan’s mother); Marilyn, Sister Mary Khadekin; Marianne Steen with arm over husband Jonathan Steen. The Steens all reside in

On June 29, 2023, the Peter’s Day Celebrations were taking place at the National Doukhobor Heritage Village in Verigin, Sk. We were expecting to meet familiar people and so we attended. It was a small gathering of the



faithful to commemorate the religious holiday in memory of St. Peter. The Doukhobors burned their arms on June 29, 1895 at this site at Pescherochki near Orlovka Village, Georgia, This action attracted the attention of the authorities of the time. Many young men were incarcerated at Irkutsk, Siberia for an initial term of 15 years.



Leo Tolstoy and the Quakers took up the cause that resulted in the migration of 7,400 Doukhobors to Canada in 1899. The largest and long-standing, single migration to Canada. As I sat there enjoying the proceedings, all these thoughts drifted through my mind. Verigin, Canora and Benito were the center of the Main and Northern Colonies.



We then visited Dan Horkoff on his farm some 10 miles NE of Verigin. He had lost his wife Adeline recently and is adjusting to being alone on the farm. The hospitality of his mother Mildred (nee Verigin) had been much enjoyed.

Here we are L to R: Mary Khadekin, Dan Horkoff and Marilyn Verigin. We next visited the Trofemenkoff family in Kamsack, Sk.

They are identified L to R: Randy Trofemenkoff; Mateo Trofemenkoff; Taylor (nee Kazakoff); Enzo Trofemenkoff; Kade Trofemenkoff; and Barbara (nee Bear) Trofemenkoff.



Randy has been employed for many years at the John Deere Dealership (once owned by Nykolaishen) in Kamsack as the prime mechanic. Kade took the similar training as did his father Randy and recently the Jimmy Pattison Group has purchased the Dealership. Kade became the Head Service Person so that his father reports to him now. We joked about insubordination and Kade said “so far I have not had any difficulty with Randy.”

Canada Day was very active for multiple visits. We started the morning with a Pancake Breakfast at the Benito Recreation Center which seemed to rouse residents near and far. The male volunteers handled the grilles very professionally. There were pancakes, sausages, and Saskatoon Berry syrup with real berries. Barry Robson drove out from his farm South of Pelly. It was nice to visit with my former classmate. Barry told us that his grandfather had donated the lands to the community of Benito upon which the Benito Recreation Center was constructed.



The Pelly Seniors Center (Happy Hearts) was having a community coffee party at 1000 MST which gave us enough time to travel there. I understand this senior community center was constructed with a substantial involvement of volunteers and local fund-raising. It made me feel great that Pelly was able to achieve this.

Here are all these local Pelly residents that we met.



The male gathering is named as follows L to R:

Gerry Nahnibida; Fred Konkin; Harold Dahl; Lyle Reine; Garry Moroz; Russel Lasko; Zennow Yaremko; Conrad Vogel; Eugene Andrusisiak.

On the lady’s side names are as follows L to R:



Cary Reine; Mary Kadekin; Marilyn Verigin; Eileen Konkin; Adeline Moroz; Nataly Lasko; Sandra Andrusisiak .

Wonderful fellowship and discussions.

We then travelled to a scheduled lunch near Mikado at the home of Cousin Linda Oasachoff and her partner Alfredo Converso located six (6) miles North and four (4) miles East and then two (2) miles North from Mikado.

Their beautiful house is on the North bank of the Whitesand River which



flows from the West at this point. Marilyn Verigin and Mary Khadekin pose on the bridge just below their house.



We were treated to an Italian Pasta, freshly prepared by the Italian Chef himself, Alfredo, with ingredients specially chosen by the chef.

Wonderful conversation with the comfort of a bottle of Sangria de Toro. L to R, seated are seated: Mary Khadekin, Alfredo Converso, Marilyn, and Linda Oaschoff.

We considered one more visit in that busy Canada Day and decided to honor the phone call invitation of my nephew Jason Morozoff who had called as he was landing his plane at the Yorkton Airport from a flight out of Calgary a few days ago.



He had rebuilt the original farmhouse, that was constructed by his grandfather Alex Morozoff to try and duplicate the same with a few revisions to modern day codes. The original structure was destroyed by fire. We were treated to a batch of Shishliki (from his freezer on the farm) that he cooked specially for this spontaneous occasion.

Here they all are on the entry steps L to R:

Back row standing, Marci Morozoff.

Sitting on steps, Mary Khadekin, Jason Morozoff with daughter Allegra Morozoff, Marilyn Verigin.

With a day left (Sunday) in our scheduled visit to Eastern Saskatchewan, we reviewed the list of those



people that we had not visited and decided to “fly by the seats of our pants” and called my nephew Murray Verigin. He was available for a visit.

Here he is in front of the family house constructed by his father Peter Verigin.

L to R: Marilyn Verigin, Murray Verigin and Mary Khadekin.



Murray brought us up to date on his procedure to bring his wife and son Peter over from Thailand. The original yard was immaculate and his mother’s gardening skills were prominently displayed. I think I heard him say that all the surplus vegetables are donated from his gardens.



We next visited Murray’solder bother Tim who was totally immersed in preparing Shishliki batches for market.

Tim has always been an interesting nephew. He is always ready to share a funny story or a joke. The “Verigin” secret Shishliki recipe was a combination of Morozoff, Kazakoff and Verigin family secret ingredients that equal Colonel Saunders KFC receipe. He is known locally as the “Shishliki Guru” or “the place where you can get

good Shishlki.”

We contacted Lydia Cherkas, a former choir member from the Saskatoon Doukhobor Youth. She assembled Cliff Paluck and the G.D. Bennekes to a coffee social at Lams Cafe in Kamsack. Cliff worked with Marilyn and I on the Kootenay Columbia Seniors Housing Cooperative in Castlegar and had built a house for his father and him. G.D. Benneke wrote a book, A Promised Land, about his Mennonite Migrant family who came from USA in 1905 to settle amongst the Doukhobours. Very interesting discussions.

It was great seeing everyone.

We called my former Pelly School friend, Ron Zarchikoff that I heard lived along Highway 5 and on the way to Madge Lake. He invited us over to his country estate.



I used to ride my horse Molly, bareback, into Pelly to attend school in the winter. Zarchikoffs lived on the North side of town and had a small barn where I could leave Molly during the day. I would then walk into school with Ron and his younger sister.



I left Pelly while Ron was still in Public School and so I did not see him again until we met on a construction project in Central Saskatchewan in the early 2000s. Ron grew up in the Carpentry trade and became a successful General Contractor, He built his own house as in the photo. He lost his first wife and now resides with Joanne and their children from separate families.

Ron’s family history was like mine as our father’s were social friends and suffered from addictions that caused family stress. I am proud of Ron as he was able to rise above all this to this present success.

By this time, we decided to favour a local favorite, Lam’s Restaurant in Kamsack for their popular Chinese Smorgasbord. A “going away party”. If you were interested in meeting someone, it was likely they would be feasting here. Just as we were ready to leave, a familiar face came upon us.



Andy Kazakoff is related to most of the Kazakoffs that I was familiar with. He was a 1st cousin to Mary Tamelin, my neighbour Donna Areshenkoff’s mother. He wanted to pass along his warmest regards to Donna (which I did).

Monday, July 03, 2023, was departure day from Benito. It was a sad moment in parting with sister Mary at our ages, it is hard to predict when we would see each other again.

Our objective to was to visit a few friends in Regina, Sk., starting with my cousin John Slastukin who we met for coffee. John’s father is a 2nd cousin to my father, and we were great friends as we lived 1 ¼ miles apart. He attended a country school named Racing Lake which was separate from Pelly School where I attended.

Next was to have lunch with Jonathan Kalmakoff. This was great as we were able to review mutual Doukhobor history and writings. John is a lawyer and works with Saskatchewan Energy. His father farms near where I was born.



Unfortunately, my Pelly friend Ernie Paluck had changed his contact information because of scammers on Facebook. His cousin Cliff Paluck provided me with a contact phone number which was dated and no contact was executed. This was unfortunate.

And so we carried on our trip home and stayed overnight in Medicine Hat. Marilyn was too tired and skipped the casino for a nice dinner at Montana's.

This was the sunset in Benito, Mb. It is one of the special moments on the prairies that makes them so distinctive. Many memories



It is also the "sunset" of our trip

Round trip was over 4,000 kilometers.

This ends Part II our 2023 trip on Tuesday July 04, 2023, as we returned to Castlegar, B.C. at 1800 hours.

Various edits with a final posting in my blog by Elmer Verigin