

The Book of Memories

a memoir



Donald Bowles

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Introduction

A bunch of short stories about what happened to my family as we were born; One after the other, year after year. First, living in our own little house. A world full with the wonderment of life.

My parents had seven sons. When I was six years old, my Mother took her children and fled. She ran away. Travelling from Montréal, Québec, to Lulu Island in BC. There, four of us attended a one-room schoolhouse until the Christmas break.

Then, unable to cope, she took us by train back to Montréal. Living with different Aunts and Uncles for a short time, we then resettled in Ottawa with our Father. But within two years we returned to Montréal. The oldest was maybe thirteen and the youngest, their seventh son, was still just an infant.

We lived in Ville St. Laurent. This was the NorthWest section of Montréal, near the Canadair Aircraft Manufacturing Plant. We lived on a street full of four-story apartment buildings.

Our father eventually took a job as a cook in the Canadian Arctic, and us kids ran wild. Then it was off to New Brunswick, on Miscou Island. By the time I was 11 years old my brothers and I had lived on Islands in both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

I must stress the point that these are my memories, and they differ greatly from those of my brothers. We tell the same story, from totally different points of view. What may have seemed a pleasant experience to one, could have been a nightmare to another. Or a trauma, as we call it now.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to my Mother and Father's seven sons, and all of their offspring. I also dedicate this to my Brother and Sister, from our Mothers second marriage, and their children and grandchildren.



Mostly though, I dedicate this to our Mother, Marguerite Levia Bowles Wright. And I also must honour my father Lender, for without him, none of us would be here, or who we are.



Chapter One

I had two sets of Grandparents, from two different worlds. All I received from them, aside from their genes, I received through visiting them.

Visiting by street car rides, through the city of Montréal to where the Irish lived. Or by train rides over the St. Lawrence River, through the eastern townships of Québec to where my mother's parents lived; Richmond Québec.

In my first memories of visiting them, there were five of us kids; Lender, Richard, myself, Donnie, along with those I considered the babies: Mickey and Johnny. Billie would soon be born, followed by Gerry a few, but very long years later.

Our Father's parents lived near the Botanical Gardens, in the south east end of Montréal.

Rows upon rows of duplexes. Duplexes with double sets of winding staircases, leading up. Duplexes, with wooden sheds in the back yards, connected to the houses by wooden slat walkways, held together with ropes. They moved, when walked upon. All in all, a scary, yet intriguing place.

Grandpa was a stern man. "You kids sit in the front room." He would say. "Keep quiet, listen to the radio."

This of course was after we would have greeted our Grandmother. Irene Kelley was her name, before she had married our grandfather, William Bowles. Then she became Grandma Bowles. She would be sitting at the end of a long hallway. A window behind her lighting up the smoke, always coming from her pipe. She would take a big puff off of the pipe, between kissing each of us on the cheek.

“And which one is this?” she would say, when it was my turn. “Donald? Is this Donald?”
Looking at me, and then at Mom.

“Yes,” Mom would reply, “this is Donnie.”

“A bit of a slip, isn't he?” Grandma would always say, pipe smoke coming out of her nose.

I always wondered what she meant by a *slip*. As she would kiss me on the cheeks, I would always *slip* off of her knees, just to get away. Later, I became the guy whom my brothers would call upon, to *slip* in and out of places they could not.

Mom would catch me, as I *slipped* off of my grandmother's knee. She would send me off to my grandfather, who would sing a song to me, as he would bounce me on his knees (Bumpity Bump).

“Donnie Bowles” (bumpity bump),

“Is full of holes” (bumpity bump),

“He's covered all over with” (bumpity bump),

“Dirty old moles!”

He would send me bouncing off, following Lennie and Richie to the parlor and the radio. Mickey and Johnny would follow, in their turn. They too would be kissed and bounced and sung to.

The adults would settle in the kitchen with cups of coffee. When us kids got bored, unable to contain ourselves, our grandfather would send us outside.

“Out!” he would holler, “Out to the back yard, *all of you!* Go out and play in the backyard!”

Mom would get up then, and lead us through the kitchen to the back doorway. She would keep Mickie and John with her. They were too small to be out with us, as we cautiously explored the rickety stairs, sheds with rope walkways. Later we would be called in for supper. Then the long streetcar ride home, through the night streets of Montréal, to our home on Gawain Boulevard in Montréal North, near the power dam on the back river.

Later when televisions were first coming out, our Grandparents were among the first to procure one. Supper would always be followed by Disneyland. We loved Davy Crockett, the King of The Wild Frontier.

On one of these visits our Grandparents gave us each a set of toy guns, with belt holsters. We were told, "*Don't play with them in the house.*" We were quietly listening to the radio, wearing our guns, when, all of a sudden Richard started, *quietly*, shooting me.

"Pow" he whispered, "Pow pow! *Donnie you're dead!*" I was shocked. I reached for my gun but Lenny already had his gun out.

"Pow, Pow!" he yelled, "Richie, *you're dead!*" Mickey and I, guns in hand, joined in. Couch cushions became things to hide behind. The room was full of screams of the wounded, and roars of the victors. The pow's quickly became bangs. "Bang, bang! You're dead!"

"NO, you missed me!"

"*WHAT the hell's going on here?*" came the roar from our Grandpa, as he came rushing into the room. Followed by our Mother, Grandmother and Father. The latter three had smiles on their faces. Mom was actually laughing a bit. But our Grandpa was furious.

I was the closest to him so he grabbed my gun and broke it. He snapped the barrel in two. I gasped, expelling out air, as if I *really had been shot*. The room went deadly silent. I looked at

mom and saw the compassion in her face. I went to her for comfort, silent tears on my cheeks. My face pressed against her belly. I heard her voice loud and true.

“You didn't have to break his toy, you grumpy old grouch.” she said. “They're just babies.” There was dead silence in the room. I still had my head pressed against Mommy's belly, and I felt the baby inside her kick. Mom felt him kick too, how couldn't she have. We looked into each other's eyes.

“The baby just kicked me in the head!” I said.

“I know” said mom, “I felt him kick too. That's baby Billie.” She looked at Grandpa.

“Baby Billie.” Grandma explained, pipe smoke escaping from her mouth. “You're actually going to name him after his *grumpy old Grandpa*?”

“Yes, we're going to name him William Lawrence Bowles, after his Grandfather.” Mom said. We all looked at Grandpa, who seemed surprised. He looked at Mom and then at me.

“I'm sorry I broke your gun, Donald. I'll buy you another one. Sometimes I do get crabby, I really am sorry. What did the baby feel like anyways?” He asked me. I didn't know that Grandpa could talk so nicely.

“He felt mad.” I said, “*Mad at you*, not at me. He didn't kick me hard, it just felt like he rubbed my cheek.”

At that, everyone wanted to feel Mom's belly, but baby Billie didn't move again until it was Grandpa who put his hand on her tummy.

“I feel him move, Marguerite! He moved for me” the old man said.

“I felt him too,” Mom said, “isn't it nice?”

“Yes.” said Grandpa, “Thank you Marguerite.”

That was my Mother's real name, Marguerite Levia. Before she married my Father, and became Mrs. Bowles.

My Father's name was Lender Bowles. He was the third son of a third son, and I was his third son. He also had a younger brother and sister; Her name was Aunty Mary Hickie.

Grandpa's face was shining as he walked out of the room. I thought he was really glad. Then I saw a tear in the corner of his eye, and wondered why he was crying. It wasn't *his* gun that he had broken.

Then, there was my Mother's parents. First a streetcar ride, this time to downtown Montréal's Central Station. There we would catch a train that would take us off of the Island of Montréal and over the Victoria bridge. Once we were out of Montréal, our modern electric engine was changed to an old steamer.

The steam engine would haul us and our train through the eastern townships of Montréal, to Richmond Québec, where Nelson Levia and Violet Anderson lived. They were my Mother's parents. We called them Ma and Da, because that's what our Mother called them.



Their home was also a duplex, but there the similarities ended. Their house sat upon a large hilly lot. The front and sides were surrounded by a large white porch with a swing on it. There were clusters of flowers everywhere, and little special bushes and ornamental trees. The backyard was a steep hill which we could (and did) roll down, laughing all the way. In the front of the house, right across the street, was a fenced off gully where the CNR train tracks ran through the town.

My grandfather, Da, would drive the train. He was the engineer, and two of my uncles, his sons, were conductors. One evening when we were all getting ready for bed, we heard the train whistle blowing. Mon jumped up.

“That’s Da, blowing the train’s horn! He says hello and a good night to all of us.”

I will never forget the warm glow I felt, snuggled up with my brothers in our upstairs bedroom. Hearing that train whistle blowing.

“Good night Da!” we would all say in turn, and sometimes together. Then we would laugh and fall asleep, knowing that everything was as it should be.

On the other side of the duplex lived my mother’s brother, our Uncle Harry, and his wife Aunty Jeanine. They lived there with their daughter Bonnie, our cousin. We played like the kids we were; Tag, hide-and-go-seek, and rolling down that hill, laughing at our dizziness.

I will always remember when the circus came to town. Its train whistle would blow and we would all run across the street to the railroad tracks. There we would watch the circus pass. The circus train would slow down, and there would be a lot of flat cars with cages on them. Some of these cages would be uncovered. We could see lions and elephants, monkeys, and one time, even a giraffe. Once, after the train had passed, our Uncle Harry took us to where the circus

tents were being set up. Elephants were being used to pull the big tents up. It was an amazing thing to see.

Trips to Richmond would always include a short car ride into the country, to Danville, and our Aunt Dorothy's house, who is one of my Mom's sisters. Her husband Uncle Maynard was also a great friend of our Dad's. He and another one of my Mom's brothers, Uncle Wilfred, would sit around talking, laughing, and drinking beer.



Then, there was our Home.

Our own Mom and Dad, kissing goodbye in the mornings. Daddy going to work. Us guys would play outside all day, and watch for Dad to come home at night.

We lived on Gawain Boulevard. Across the street and down a hill was the back river, and that huge power dam. On our side of the street were fields, trees, and a big swamp. Yet we were just a streetcar ride from downtown Montréal.

We played in the swamp, caught frogs and raced them across the street. Those frogs that survived the ordeal would be raced back to the other side of the street. Then, we would catch more.

We played and fought with the French kids, and they fought and played with us. There was always another brother being born, and always streetcar and train rides to be had.

The Police are Coming

In one of my first memories I am a small boy, maybe 3 years old, playing in our yard with my brothers. I hear an ambulance siren blasting near our house.

“What's that?” I say to my oldest brother, Lender.

“It's the Police.” He answered. “They're coming to take you away! They're going to arrest you. You had better hide!”

“Where? Where can I hide?” I cried out to them. Then to Mom, “Mommy! Mommy, hide me quick! The Police are coming to get me!”

Lender and Richard were behind and in front of me, jumping up and down. Laughing and yelling, taunting me.

“The Police are coming! Coming to take you away!” As the siren grew louder, my fear changed to panic.

“Mommy,” I screamed, “hide me quick!”

“Stop that you guys,” Mom said, as she put Mickey down, “you're terrifying the child. Look at him running in circles, with no place to hide. He's your brother. For God's sake, take care of him. Love each other! And that's all there is to it.”

Mom put her arms out towards me, and I flew to them. As I looked towards Lenny and Richie, I could see that I had been tricked. They were both a bit sorry, and were saying to me that they were only playing a game.

“Just teasing you, Donnie.” said Lenny. “It's okay, the Police aren't really after you. We were only playing. Come on, let's play something else!” As we started walking away, my two older brothers each put an arm over my shoulder.

“Wait for Mickey!” we heard Mom say. We turned as a unit towards Mom and saw little one-and-a-half year old Mickey staggering towards us. We opened ranks, then holding hands in a circle, we jumped up and down yelling. “The Police are coming to get you, Mom! Mommy, the Police are coming to get you!” Mom pretended that she was scared.

“Hide me, Donnie. Hide me quick, the Police are coming!” she cried out. Then us guys all fell down, laughing. Mom started to laugh with us, laughing because she, too, was still also a child.



The Enema

The first time I realised that my Mom and Dad were not on the same side, or even that they were not the same person living in two different bodies, was when he sided with us, against her.

Mom, on the doctor's orders, had to give us all an enema.

“To clean them out,” the Doctor had said, “from the inside out.”

Us kids didn't know exactly what he had meant by that, but we would soon figure it out. Mom started off on the little guys. By the time she had finished working on Mickey, us older guys had gotten wind of exactly what an enema was.

There was a big, orange coloured rubber bag. Mom would fill it with salty water. Attached to this bag was a flexible rubber hose, about three feet in length. And attached to the end of the hose was a nozzle. Mom would stick the nozzle up our bums, then she would gently squeeze the rubber bag and the warm, salty water would be forced into our stomachs. Then, we would have diarrhoea. Shitting the salty water out, along with all the old crap. Cleaning us, from the inside out.

Mom came out of the house carrying Mickey under one arm. The now dreaded orange enema bag was in her free hand.

“Boy, for a little fella this one was sure full of it.” Mom said, as she put Mickey down. “Who’s next?” She had a big smile on her face, like this was going to be fun. She looked from Lenny, to Richard to me.

“Come on”, she said, “we need a volunteer.”

“It's Donnie's turn, take him!” said Lenny.

“Yeah, take Donnie!” Richard agreed, then he sort of laughed.

“Come on Donald, let's get this over with.” Mom said.

“No Mom, please Mom! I don't want to.” Mom coaxed me more.

“Come on Donnie, it doesn't hurt a bit. The Doctor said that you all have to have a good cleaning-out.”

“Look at little Mickey. It didn't hurt him a bit! See, he's smiling at you.” But that was when Dad's voice chimed in.

“Run boys, run to the woods! Go and hide! Run, run to the woods!” He was yelling this out to us. We looked towards Mom, not knowing what to do. And was Mom ever mad.

“You think this is a game?” she yelled at Dad. “Do you think this is fun, getting shit all over yourself? You can do the rest of them!” She had yelled this out, as she tossed the enema bag at Dad. Hitting him in the face with it and knocking over his beer.

He leaned back to get away, knocking over his own chair. Dad's brother, who had been laughing, got scared and jumped up, swearing.

“Oh shit!” he said. That was when us kids started to run.

We scattered, ran to the woods and hid. Though we didn't stay hiding for long. We realised that there would not be any more enemas given that day. The enema bag was hung on the inside of the bathroom door.

To my knowledge, it was never used again. And I, for one, came to the conclusion that my Mom and Dad were two different people.

Streetcar Ride with Dad

One time, Lenny, Richard and I were on a streetcar with our Father. Dad was sitting on the aisle side of the first seat, and us guys were sitting on the first long side-seat. The streetcar must have been full because when a woman with three daughters got on, Dad jumped up right away. Taking off his hat, he sort of bowed, then he pointed with his hat to his empty seat.

“Prenez la chaise, s’il vous plait, madame.”

The woman sat down with a “Merci, monsieur” and a big smile on her face. Then dad looked at us guys.

“Come on boys, get up and give the young ladies your seats.” We all did, fumbling over ourselves, being as elegant as we could. When the three girls were seated, giggling amongst themselves and smiling at their Mother, the girl I had given my seat to looked into my eyes.

She smiled, and said “Tank-you.” I think I fell in love for the first time. No wonder I would always love taking the streetcars.

Throwing Mommy's Slipper Out The Window

Mom was expecting Johnny at that time. She was about to have her fifth child, and her oldest hadn't started school yet. Where was Dad at this time? I don't know. He was going to work, going fishing, doing things with his buddies. Yet it seems that most every night in the summer, Mom and Dad would sit out front with the neighbours, laughing and telling stories. Us guys would fall asleep listening to them.

Mom had an old slipper. She would use it to *keep us in line*. When we misbehaved or just plain got too rambunctious, she would line us all up hands and feet on the floor, butts up in the air. She would walk down the line of us, giving each a whack on the butt with the slipper.

One night, when Mom and Dad were out front with the neighbours and we were in bed, listening to what was being said, Richard spoke out in a loud whisper.

"I've got Mom's slipper, and I'm going to throw it out the window."

We all got a bit scared. But then, there was something really exciting and daring about the thought of it, throwing that slipper right out.

"Mom will see it!" I said. "She's sitting right out there. As a matter of fact, they're all out there! Someone will see it for sure!"

"I'm throwing it out the side window." Richard said. "So, no one will see."

Ritchie got out of his bed and opened the side window as high as it would go. We were all looking at him when he let that slipper fly. We heard it hit the trees! When Richard turned and looked at us, we were all smiling. Our smiles turned to laughter as we all jumped out of bed and

ran to the side window. Looking for the slipper, we thought that maybe it might be hanging from a branch.

Dad's voice boomed out. "Keep it down up there!"

Then Mom chimed in. "Or I'll come up with my slipper and give you all a whack on the behind!" By God how us younger guys laughed. Then Lenny and Richard told us to be quiet, or Mom would find out that her slipper was gone. That night I fell asleep with a bigger smile on my face than usual.



Crow Story

I went fishing with Daddy when I was still a little kid. He took me along with my two older brothers. This was the first time I got to go camping.

At one point, I sort of wandered off. I went for a walk down an old logging road. It was a road cut out of the forest, so trucks could haul lumber out. I remember it as if in a dream. Large trees on both sides of a narrow road. Sun, shining through spaces in the sky. Piercing rays of light, like passages to and from heaven.

I came to a sharp left turn in the road, a place where the trucks used to turn-around. There was a high tree stump and piles of earth blocking me from seeing into the clearing. It was dead quiet, and as I walked around the pile of dirt I almost stepped on top of a big crow. The crow cawed out a feeble caw, more like a k-awwe. As it moved out of my way it almost fell over backwards, flapping its wings to get away from me.

I was so shocked and scared that I jumped straight up into the air. As I jumped up screaming, so did about seven other crows, leaping from the ground and cawing their heads off. More afraid of me than I was of them. But they were huge! They filled the clearing with deafening caws, and the sounds of air being slapped by giant wings.

After the initial shock and fear, I started laughing. The crows were settling down at the tops of the tall trees around me. I laughed out loud at the crows and they cawed out loud down at me.

As I started back down the logging road, I saw Lenny and Richard running up towards me. Dad was following behind them. Richard was the first to see me, or at least the first to yell out to dad.

“We found him, Dad, we found him!”

But, Lennie was the first to reach me. As I started telling him about the crows, Lennie said to me, “Was it you that scared up all those crows, Donnie?”

“Yes, it was me!” I answered, “I almost stepped on one of them by mistake.” I added.

“As soon as we heard them cawing, I knew where you were and I ran all the way here, leading everyone to you! Didn't I, Dad?”

“Yes you did, son.” Dad said, rubbing Lennie's head. Then Dad picked me up and carried me on his shoulders, all the way back to camp. I think maybe that's the reason that later on, Dad always told Mom that he couldn't take care of three kids on a fishing trip.

Ever since then, I have always been influenced by Crows.



Scarlet Fever

Richard, Mickey and I all got very sick. We went to the hospital in an ambulance, and Dad travelled in the back of that ambulance with us.

I was expecting a horrendously dramatic ride through the streets of Montréal, with lights flashing and siren blasting. But it was not to be. The ambulance drove slowly and with order, stopping at every red light. The driver was chatting away with Dad as if nothing was the matter.

Dad felt Mickie's forehead, then asked Richard and I if everything was all right with us two. I didn't hesitate,

“Ask the driver to go faster, Dad! Ask him if the siren is broken or something. Please Daddy?” I said it just loud enough for the driver to hear me, but Dad asked him anyway.

“Say, do you think that you could turn the siren on, and maybe go through a few red lights? What do you think? Come on, eh, just for the kids?”

“I can't go through red lights unless it's a matter of life or death.” The driver said this loud enough so that we all could hear.

“Well then,” said Dad, “just put the siren on?” And the driver did. Only a few blasts, but then he stepped on the gas and the ambulance surged forward. I loved it! The driver slowed down right away.

“That's all,” he said, “I'm not allowed to drive dangerously unless it is an emergency, and this is not an emergency.”

Dad looked at me. Seeing my smile he thanked the driver, and the next thing I remember, we were all in the same hospital room. Mickey was in a crib, but the sides were kept down, so that he could get out without falling. Richard and I had two small beds that were more like cots.

There were other kids in our room, maybe six or seven, and they also had cots to sleep in. It was like a dormitory in an orphanage.

In the mornings we were all given a bowl of porridge, on trays and in our beds. One morning, one of the nurses put the side of Mickey's crib up, by mistake. One of the other kids called him a baby. Mickey got real mad and he stood up in his bed. He threw his porridge and the tray onto the floor.

Some of the kids started laughing, and one started crying. Then some nurses came running into the room. When they realised what had happened, one of them started yelling at Mickey. First Richard and then I threw our bowls of porridge and our trays onto the floor too.

We did this to draw the nurses attention away from Mickey. And it worked. One of the other nurses started laughing. Then the nurse who had yelled at Mick said, "Well, I guess they don't like hospital food."

She was looking at Richard when she said that, sort of like she was asking him what the problem was. Ritchie, being the boldest kid I have ever known, answered her unasked question.

"It's because we didn't want you yelling at our little brother Mickey."

Then the nurse said, "The next time anyone throws food on the floor, he will have to clean it up by himself." As she said this, she and the other nurse started cleaning up the mess we had made.

Later that day one of the other kids, a bigger one, shit in the sink. He just climbed up onto the counter and shat right there into it. All of us guys started laughing, and we couldn't stop. Mickey thought it was a wonderful joke, so he decided to get his share of the laughs. He got out of his crib, as the side was down. While he was trying to get up onto the counter top, to do his

business, a nurse came into the room. She caught him and at first blamed him for the mess in the sink.

As she was about to yell at him, she stopped and looked at Richard and me. I think she was afraid that we would make a *stink*, if she yelled at Mickey.

“It wasn't Mickey, it was one of the other kids!” Ritchie said, “Mickey can't even get up on the counter.”

The nurse said out loud, “Whoever did that in the sink,” but before she could finish almost everyone in the room pointed to the big kid, whom we all had seen doing it. The big kid didn't say anything at first, he just kept his head down. Then, when the nurse asked him why he had done it, he said that he didn't know where the outhouse was. Us guys knew then that he was from the country, without running water and no toilet in the house, and that the nurses hadn't shown him where the indoor toilets were, or how to use them. It was the nurses fault.

We became friends with this kid, until it was time to leave the hospital. Our scarlet fever was over.

Streetcar Stories

It's funny how some things slip your mind, while others are indelibly printed there. Like how I used to take a streetcar to school. I was in kindergarten then. I don't remember the school, the teachers or even one kid. All I remember is the streetcar rides, there and then back home again.

It was 1951, and I was a small boy with my forehead pressed against the cold window, just watching the world go by. Looking for signs that would let me know when my stop was next.

Five years old. We were still living in our first house then, the one I was born in. Or at least the one Mom and Dad took me home to, from the hospital.

My two older brothers were going to a school near home. But for some reason there was no room for kindergarten in that school, so I went to my own school and I had to take a streetcar alone to get there. I only went a half-day in the mornings, then at lunchtime I would take the streetcar back home again.

I will never forget the happy look on Mom's face, the big smile she gave me the first day when I got off of that streetcar by myself. She had the two babies, Mickey and Johnny, with her in a wagon and told me to lead the way home because tomorrow I would be on my own.

"You're a big boy Donnie, and you're smart too." she said. "How the heck did you know where to get off of that streetcar?" When Mom said this to me, she had a happy smile on her face. I was happy too, and answered her, with my own grin.

"Well Mom, I just saw you standing there with the guys in the wagon, and I knew I was here."

“But I won’t be here tomorrow,” said Mom. “I’ll be home, making your lunch and feeding the babies.”

I looked around and said to Mom, “I know this place Mom. There is where they’re building that new house, and right over there is where Lennie, Richie and I fought with the French kids. That time they broke the car window and tried to blame it on us. And look, there is the hill where we ride our wagons down to go home! Come on, follow me, let’s go home. I’m hungry.”



The next morning, Mom wanted Lennie and Richard to walk me to my streetcar stop, so the three of us set off together. Those two older brothers of mine made me feel important. They would have liked to get on that streetcar with me and “ride the rails”, as Lennie had put it.

“We wouldn’t even go to school, we’d get a transfer and ride the streetcars all over Montréal and be home in time for supper.”

“Yes!” said Richard, “Let’s do it!” He started to get excited. Then Lennie started laughing, when I said,

“But I got to be home for lunch.” The streetcar pulled up and stopped. I got on, with them waving at me and saying goodbye. Looking out the window I could see them walking away, talking to each other about having fun, and I wished I were going with them.

I soon realised that I could have my own fun travelling back and forth, riding the rails as a five-year-old in Montréal North. One day, there was a huge, round man who got caught in the back double doors of the streetcar. I had never heard swearing like that before, and I was sure that I would never hear it again. I was sitting in my usual seat, the long side seat, just past and opposite of the back door. I was probably day dreaming, when I heard an ungodly scream.

“You bastard, open this eff-en door!” the round man yelled out. Looking up I saw him, stuck between the accordion doors. I think he had tried to sneak onto the streetcar, using the back entrance. Those doors were digging into his rolling flesh and holding him in place. He was stuck, both inside and outside the streetcar at the same time. I started to laugh and I couldn’t stop laughing.

“You bastard!” he yelled again. “Bastard, bastard, you eff-en bastard! Open these eff-en doors!”

I laughed more as the people around me gasped. Someone yelled out, “He’s stuck in the eff-en doors!” I laughed more than ever.

“I know, just look at him!” Then the doors opened a bit and tried to close again two more times, each time squishing him more. The streetcar was in an uproar. People were laughing, gasping, swearing and yelling at the conductor to open the back doors.

When the doors finally stayed open, the big man shook himself all over. I could see him getting shorter and even more round, settling down to his normal size. After he got out, the streetcar doors closed, and everyone started laughing and looked at me, sharing in my laughter.

As the streetcar took off the huge man was left behind, still swearing and waving his fist at the conductor. Then a man leaned over to me and said, “That wasn’t funny, you know.”

“Oh yes it was!” I said, “Didn’t you see him shaking all over, like a bowl full of jello?” Then an old lady sitting beside me looked at me with tears in her eyes.

“It was the funniest thing I ever saw in my life” she said, and we both started laughing all over again.

When I got home I tried to tell Mom about the funny thing I had seen but she didn’t get it. She hoped the man wasn’t hurt. I told her he wasn’t hurt a bit.

“Just real mad, Mom, you should have heard him swearing at the poor conductor. Mom he was terrible, you should have heard him swearing!”

A couple of weeks later I was feeling poorly with an upset tummy. Mom said I could stay home but I wanted to go to school.

“It’s not that bad mom, I like going to school. If I get sicker I’ll just come home early.” Mom gave me a note for the teacher.

“Just in case,” she said, “if you feel sick and want to come home, give this note to your teacher.”

Everything was all right at school, but when I was waiting for my streetcar to go home at lunchtime, I started getting a cramp in my stomach. As soon as I sat down in the streetcar, the cramp got worse and I knew that I had to go to the bathroom.

There was one stop, about half way home, that always fascinated me. There were railway barriers there. The kind you see at real train-track crossings. They came down to block cars and people from being hit by trains.

I always thought that someone had made a mistake putting them at a streetcar stop, and then just left them there. It was a busy stop with a lot of people always getting off and on the streetcar. A lot of people laughing and talking, or sometimes being grumpy and complaining. An exciting, busy place.

At this stop the streetcar always became crowded, and today was no exception. As the streetcar filled up my cramps became quite severe. I was sweating and doubled over with the pain of it.

Clenching myself tightly together, I knew that I couldn't last. Maybe if I just lift up a bit I thought, maybe I'll just relieve the pressure. Maybe it will be a silent one and no one will know? As another cramp started I did it, I lifted one side of my butt up, *just a bit*. The result was an explosion in my pants. And it was so loud. I did it again as another cramp came, and my guts gargled. I moaned in pain and the woman sitting next to me jumped up and moved away from me. Everyone moved away. I heard someone say, “Hey, stop pushing will you!”

“I'm sorry,” someone else said, “but that kid just shit his pants.”

“Oh my God!” Someone else said, “What a stink!”

As my bum barked again, I could hear kids laughing. One of them couldn’t stop and he started farting too. Then everyone started laughing.

When the streetcar stopped, I was going to get off quickly and walk home. But everyone else did. As I sat there in my shit and my shame, they rushed to the doors. I could hear them laughing and saying things like, what a stink, and wow I wouldn’t want to be sitting in his pants.

Then I heard a man say, “Poor kid, that must have hurt.” I looked up and recognized him. He was the man who had told me that the round man who had been stuck in the streetcar doors wasn’t really a funny sight. As our eyes met I knew that he recognized me, he leaned closer to me and said, “See what I mean kid, it wasn’t funny at all was it?”

When I got home, I went right to my room and got some new underwear and pants. Then to the bathroom to wash and change. I put my pants in the washing but the underwear I put in a paper bag and hid in the back of my closet. When I went down stairs, Mom asked how my tummy was and was I all right at school. “Oh, everything’s all right Mom, I just had to go to the bathroom and then I felt great after that”. I wasn’t lying either. I really did feel great.

I went outside and spent the afternoon playing with Mickey, catching frogs in the swamp behind our house. A week later I took the paper bag out of the closet and threw it in the burning coal stove. I slept well that night knowing that none of my brothers would find that paper bag in the back of our closet, with my underwear in it, full of my shit.

But I slowly came to realise that riding the streetcars was a dangerous thing. I started to think that maybe everyone got their own turn of something bad happening to them. I started

watching for people who would unexpectedly trip. Or maybe a window would fall on someone's fingers.

One day, a heavy set woman was walking to the back of the streetcar, when the streetcar moved forward with a lurch. The woman seemed to almost fall, then she took a few quick steps forward. She was almost running and I thought she would crash into an old man sitting in the middle of the back seat. So did the man as he tried to move out of the way. But the woman caught hold of the standing post in front of me, and swung herself into the seat beside.

"Oh that was close!" She said, "That damn driver should be more careful." I agreed with her, although I didn't understand what the driver had to do with it.

"Yes," I said, "but you're lucky nobody was sitting beside me." She looked at me with a bit of a smile on her face.

"No," she said, "that man there in the back is the lucky one." The old man near the back of the streetcar nodded his head and smiled his thanks and understanding to the woman beside me. I started to think that there was more to life on the streetcar rails than I could ever imagine.

It was a big world I lived in, and just two days later when I least expected anything to happen, it did. I was sitting in my side seat daydreaming, and I could hear the man sitting next to me talking to someone.

"It didn't mean *a damn thing*" he was saying. "It was just a natural thing to do. *It didn't mean anything*. I don't know what you're so upset about. Look, I'm sorry, okay? I said I'm sorry, what more do you want from me? You stupid bitch."

I looked up, quite surprised and wondering what was happening. He was talking to the woman sitting beside him. She looked really upset, almost shocked. Everyone was quiet and in

slow motion she put her hand up to his forehead. I thought she was feeling if he had a fever. But no, she took hold of his hair, pulling him forward and then slamming his head backwards into the window. The window cracked like a star around his head, and blood trickled down the back of his neck. She pulled his head forward and again backwards into the window. This time the window bellowed outwards and the blood ran down his neck onto his chin, and poured onto his white shirt, as red as could be.

The woman stood up and yelled, "I don't want anything from you!" The streetcar stopped, and the woman ran off crying. Everyone started talking and yelling at the same time. I moved away from the bloodied man, as he started struggling to get up. The streetcar doors were opened and I just got off. I could see the woman running down the street and I hoped that she would get away. The streetcar didn't go any farther. I started walking home, looking back once, and I could see a lot of people getting off of the streetcar. After a while I heard a siren.

When I got home, I told Mom what had happened. She hugged me and said, "I don't like you taking that streetcar all by yourself. It won't be much longer until your school's almost ready."

"It's okay Mom, I really like taking the streetcar by myself". And I really did.

Waiting for Dad, and Richard's Confirmation

There is an image I have of myself, as a five year old waiting on a street corner in Montréal. Waiting for my father, who never showed up.

At this point in my life of course, I was a veteran streetcar rider. I had ridden one to and from school every morning for the last three months.

I waited and waited for Dad. I just knew that he would pick me up, because he said he would. So I just waited. I took to counting the streetcars. He'll be here before the next five streetcars pass.

After five streetcars came and went, I made it seven, giving him two more chances. After that, I decided to take the next streetcar home. Before it arrived a man dressed in overalls, sweeping the street, came over to where I was standing. He was sweeping a pile of dirt around the sewer opening near where I was standing.

"Is your name Donald Bowles?" he said. He never really looked at me, he just said it again. "You Donald Bowles?"

"Yes", I said, "I am Donald Bowles, who are you?" Now he looks at me right in the face.

"That doesn't matter," he said, "just go home kid. Your Father's not coming to get you. I don't know why, I just know that he is not coming to get you, so just go home."

As the street sweeper was walking away from me, I told him to go to hell. It was under my breath, but I told him anyway.

“Go to Hell” Then I waited for another five streetcars. This time I only counted the older cars, the ones with woven straw seats. They can be few and far between. After two of them had passed, I got on the next one, and only then did I realise that I didn’t have any money or a ticket.

“I don’t have any money” I said, in surprise and disbelief, looking at the driver. “My father was going to pick me up at lunch, so I didn’t need any money.” I think the driver had probably passed me on several occasions that afternoon.

“Don’t worry kid,” he said, “today you get a free ride and ten cents for your pocket.” On saying that he went to his money-changer and gave me a dime. “Take that,” he said, closing my fingers over the dime as he patted my hand, “and you don’t have to pay for this ride either, just sit right there and let me know when you want to get off.”



When I got home, there was a bit of a party going on. The occasion was my older brother Richard's confirmation. A great occasion, so a great celebration.

My father had his brothers and friends down for the party. They were drinking-up some beer. Richard was there, he was tired but you could tell he had a good day and he wasn't ready to stop yet. I wanted to talk to him and find out what had happened at confirmation. I wanted to prepare myself for next year, when I would make my own. But he was pretty wound up, and still on the high of it all.

I, on the other hand, was feeling kind of down and in great need of comfort. I went into the kitchen where Mom was preparing food, for the guests and family alike. She was truly pleased to see me. She hugged me without getting all kinds of cooking flour and gunk over me, and gave me a kiss.

"Your father and brothers got a ride home in a taxi," she said, "so they didn't take the streetcar and couldn't pick you up."

I supposed that the taxi driver couldn't, or wouldn't, stop for me. Then Mom said, "Your father was pretty worried about you. He phoned the Police and told them where you were waiting for him. He asked them to tell you to come home on the streetcar, because he couldn't pick you up."

"I didn't see any Police." I said. Then I remembered the sweeper. "There was a street sweeper," I said, "he knew my name and told me to go home."

"That was the Police." Mom said, "Dad phoned them." I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"Mom," I said, "do you mean to tell me that Dad called the Police on me?"

“Yes,” she said patiently, “he wanted them to tell you that he couldn’t pick you up. He was quite worried about you.”

“But Mom! What if the Police had taken me to jail?” I turned and walked out of the kitchen pretty fast, heading for the security of my room. As I passed the living room, Dad called out to me.

“Glad you’re home son, I was getting worried about you.” I scoffed at him, with my throat thickening and tears busting to get out of my eyes. I ran to my room thinking, if he was really worried about me he would have come and gotten me, and not called the Police on me.

What if I had been arrested? What if the Police had taken me away?



Mickey and I Get Lost

All not yet being said and done about streetcars, the following year I went to school with Lenny and Richard. This seemed more like really going to school. I was with the big kids now. This was grade one. This was my First Communion and Confirmation year. That streetcar stuff, that was kindergarten. Now though, Mickey was with us too. He *was* going to kindergarten with the big guys. They had finished building the new part of our school.

The Holy Family School. The four of us went off together. Lennie and Richard were taking us on the first day. Mom kept saying, “Are you sure you're going to be okay? Lenny, just bring Mickey to the office and make sure there's a kindergarten class. Richard, you show Donnie where grade one is. It's where you were last year.”

“I can take them both,” said Lenny.

“No,” said Mom, “Richard, take Donnie. Lenny, you take Mickey. Now if that's a problem, I can get the two babies (Johnnie and Billie), dressed up and go with you. If you really want me to.”

“No, it's okay Mom, I know where the office is.” Lenny assured her as he took Mickey by the hand. I looked at Richard, who took my hand as well. Then the four of us walked off to our school, together.

We hadn't been going to school for a month yet, when the grade one and the kindergarten class had to leave the school for a day. We were marched off together, two by twos, holding hands in a long line. There were other lineups of other classes, joining us. The Nuns, who were our teachers, had put Mickey and I together. I was to watch my brother and that was fine by us. It

made me feel important. Lenny and Richard must have felt that way when they had to take care of me.

It was a long walk. We went along a huge stone fence, which seemed to go on forever. Then we crossed the street and walked this way and then that way. We crossed other streets, and walked through parks. Then, we were there. A huge school, with buses, kids and traffic everywhere. Our teachers told us that we would be taking a bus back to our own school at the end of the day. We would not have to walk back.

“Thank God” the Nuns kept saying. We were given a number, written with a black marker on a card. Ours was number 3. That was the number on the bus that we would take back to school.

Up to this day I still don’t know what we were doing there. Mick and I sat together at a desk and wrote tests or something. Mickey was always as big as me or even bigger, so I think they thought he was in grade one also. We had a bit of trouble with the tests, so we didn’t bother to do them. We just sat there.

At the end of the day, Mickey and I were standing at the front of the school, where we had come in. Nobody had told us where to catch the number 3 bus. We didn’t know where to go. We wandered around some, then seeing a bunch of buses behind the school we started walking that way, right as a bus with a big Number 3 on it drove right past us.

“That’s our bus!” I yelled out.

Then Mickey yelled it out even louder, “That’s our bus!” There was no one around to hear our calls. We stood alone, at the front of the school. Everyone else had gone out the back doors and onto the buses. We had gone out the front door, the same way we had come in.

We stood there holding hands, as a few more buses left. We looked at each other, a little scared, and I squeezed Mickey's hand and told him that we could walk home. I knew the way, I lied. I felt sure of myself. I knew I could figure it out. At least, I hoped I could, and started to look for a direction to start off in.

Low and behold, I saw a sight that banished all of my fears and apprehensions. I knew where we were, and I knew what I had to do to get us home. There, just down the street from where we stood, was a railway crossing. Bells ringing, lights flashing and those black and white striped barriers holding back the traffic as streetcars went flying past.

It was my street car. The one I had to take home every day from kindergarten. This was the stop that had always so intrigued me. The stop by the factory, where the streetcar would fill up. As I remembered this, I also wondered if anyone in the line up would remember me, The Kid Who Had Shit His Pants. I told the streetcar driver that my brother and I had lost our money. He believed me, and let us go on for nothing.

Though he didn't give us a dime or anything.

Santa Clause Is Coming To Town

That year, our mother took all us guys to the Eaton's Department Store in downtown Montréal, to see the Santa Claus Parade and then to shop and actually visit Santa. It was an exciting time.

There were marching bands with banners, and girls twirling batons, throwing them high in the air and catching them when they came down. There were clowns with big noses that were really horns. When you squeezed them they would honk. The clowns were handing out candy canes to all the kids. Richard punched one of the clown's in the nose, as the clown was handing him a candy cane.

"Go blow your nose!" he yelled out, as he punched him in the horn. Mom started yelling at Richard for that, but the clown said it was okay. Then he leaned down to Richard.

"Never do that again," he whispered, "or else Santa won't bring you anything for Christmas. Nothing!"

Richard said he was sorry, as he grabbed the candy cane. Each of us had our pockets full of candy. Eventually, Santa came riding along in his sled, with reindeer, galloping ahead and pulling him. His elves threw more candy into the crowds. Once that was over, we watched Santa climbing up the side of the Eaton's Store building. He was using the fire escape ladder. He went all the way to the roof, then disappeared, out of sight. Like all the other kids around us, we wanted to know.

"Where did he go Mom? Where did he go?"

Our Mom was the first to answer. "Well, he's gone down the store's chimney of course!"



Not just us, but all the kids around us cheered at that. Then we pushed our way into the store to see him. Mom had Eaton's Money to spend, 100 dollars in five, two and one dollar bills. She said that we could each have one dollar, to buy christmas presents for each other. We could get stuff like bolo-bats, sling shots, hockey pucks and all sorts of good stuff for a dime.

Mom took Johnnie, who could walk real good at that time, and Billie, who was still in his carriage. Lenny and Richard stayed together. Mom said for Mickie and I to stay together and for Lenny to keep an eye on us.

I bought Lenny a screwdriver, Richard a hockey puck, Mickey a yo-yo, Johnnie a bolo-bat and Billie a baby rattle. We had a good time, shopping for each other. After we had bought our gifts, Lenny led us to the jewellery counter, where we put our change together and bought Mom a beautiful pearl necklace.

We had a good time up to then, but the best was yet to come. We took a toy train ride through Santa's Village. There were little workshops with Elves making all sorts of toys, and then another place where the Elf wives were wrapping the toys up and putting them in Santa's sled. Truly a magical wonderland.

At the end of the train ride there were other Elves, taking care of us. They put us in a line to see Santa Claus and tell him what we wanted for Christmas.

We had our picture taken with him. Then, on the way out of the village, we were each given the choice of a toy drum or a horn. All of us chose the drums. There was a strap, which went around our neck and under one of our arms. It held the drum in front of us, freeing up our hands to beat out a drum beat.

We started testing our drums right away. There were five of us, six if you counted Billie. Mom had put his drum in the carriage with him. She even put the drum sticks in his hands. As

Billie banged away the rest of us joined right in. We were laughing and some of us were dancing around when the store manager came running over.

“That's enough, that's enough!” he was saying. “Too much noise, it's too much *noise!* Keep it down! Quiet, please.” He kept saying this, and waving his hands in the air. Mom moved right in front of him, stopping him in his tracks.

“What's this?” Mom said, “First you give them all Christmas drums then you won't let them play with them?”

“It's just too noisy for inside the store Mame, please, let them wait until they get home.”

“No way will I let them beat on those drums in my house.” Mom said. “You gave them those drums, and now you're going to have to listen to them.”

She lined us up in a row. Herself in the lead, pushing the buggy with Billie in it, then came Johnny, followed by Mickey, myself, then Richard and Lenny taking up the rear. She marched her sons, drumming through the department store and out onto the street. We were all heroes, marching off to home. A satisfied, happy bunch of kids. With, I am sure, a tired and satisfied mother and protector.

At home the drums were put away to resurface in the early spring when we moved, for the first of many times.

Dad Sold The House

One day, Dad sold the house we lived in. It was his to sell, so he did it. He didn't consult or discuss this with Mom. All he said was, "We need the money, so I sold the house." Mom had been cleaning the cupboards under the kitchen sink when dad had told her this. She was on her hands and knees, scrubbing away.

"Don't bother cleaning under the cupboards, Marg," Dad said. "Come on, up you go. I just sold the house."

"What did you say?" Mom said, and when Dad repeated himself, Mom stood there in bewilderment. She said, "Where are we supposed to live then?"

I think something inside of Mom died with those words spoken by my Dad. Nothing any of us could see. We just started moving. A total upheaval, a blur of time, places, people, prairies and oceans. Over a period of four long years we found ourselves living on islands in both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Without Dad.

But always with our Mother saying, "Stay together. Watch out for each other. Older guys, take care of your younger brothers."

No matter where, and no matter what, we were always together at Christmas time. Until that Christmas time where we had no home to go to.

Christmas time

A time to steal a kiss and laugh.

A time to wish for snow.

A time to take a tree inside as if it were a flower.

Wishing I was by your side to steal a kiss and laugh.

Our first move was still in Montréal, down near where the old hockey arena was. Down near where the Botanical Gardens were. Near where my fathers parents lived. We moved to where the back stairs were rickety, and rope bridges led to our storage shed. Still a spooky place.

It was in a field near this house that us guys found The Elephant's Burial Ground.

The Christmas drums came out when us guys found a bunch of broken porcelain toilet bowls and pieces of sinks and bathtubs. We pretended that we had found the Elephants Burial Ground. The pieces of broken porcelain became the elephant's ivory tusks. We spent the afternoon marching through the streets of Montréal, some of us beating on the drums and some of us carrying the pieces of ivory, way up high, over our heads. Other kids in the neighbourhood joined us. It became a parade of our own making.

On other days we visited the Botanical Gardens, where we would have picnics. One day Lenny and Richard were trying to catch a goldfish in one of the ponds there. Lenny caught one, and sold it to a man for 25 cents. After that the race was on between us all, and we must have caught at least twenty goldfish that day. There were no more buyers though, and Mom made us put the fish back, but still it was one of the first of many fishing trips we would share together.

Then there was the time I almost burnt the house down. At least, I thought that it was burning down.

Mickey and I were home alone. For some reason, Mom had taken John and Billie out to a neighbours. I remember her saying, "Donald, you watch Mickey for a few minutes and I will be right back." As Mom was stepping out the door, I was getting ready to fry up an egg for my breakfast. It makes me wonder that at six years old, I was quite capable of making my own

breakfast. Nevertheless, I had put the egg carton on the back burner of the gas stove. Then, I lit the back burner by mistake. The egg carton caught fire. There was quite a huge flame, and I thought that for sure the house would burn to the ground.

I took Mickey by the hand, and led him carefully out the back door. The stairs were always rickety in these duplexes, and I was scared that Mickey and I might fall down them. So, I sat him down on the first stair. Then I sat myself down on the landing behind him. With Mickey sitting between my legs we went down the stairs one at a time, bumpity bump, all the way to the bottom. Once we had reached the yard I looked up to see if the flames were coming out of the doorway yet. All I saw was Mom, looking down at Mickey and me.

“What are you doing down there?” She wanted to know.

All I could say was, “You better get down here yourself, because the house is on fire!”

Mom sort of laughed and said, “It's okay Donnie, I put the fire out.” Mom came down the back stairs and gave us a hug.

“I'm glad that you got out of the house. And glad you took care of your brother.” Then she took us for a walk. We went down the back lane and around the block to our front door. I was quite surprised that our front door was around the block from our back door.

We did not live there very long though. At the end of the month, when the rent came due, we moved again. Our second move was to Mom's brother's house; Uncle Wilfred and his wife Aunt Margie. They had a two story, four tenant duplex, and we stayed in one of the basement apartments. We had two sets of bunk beds. Lenny and Richard got the tops. Mickey and I were in the bottom. Johnnie and the baby Billie slept on a mattress, on the floor of Mom's room. There wasn't much to do there, so we took to running around the house and up and down the stairways.

On rainy days, that is where we played. Jumping from one bed to the next, that and of course running up and down the stairs. Years later, Uncle Wilfred told me that we kids had, in a very short time, nearly wrecked his house. At the same time Mom told me that Uncle Wilfred had really helped us when we were in need.



The Hurt

This part is all about how kids cope, or don't cope, with change. The mechanisms that kick in when young boys have to become young men. When they are forced to provide, whether it be food or protection.

I am going to say that I was six years old at this time. My two older brothers, Lender and Richard, would have been seven and eight at that time. Mickey would have been five-year-old, with Johnnie just out of diapers and Billie, the baby.

I would soon turn seven, in the rocky mountains. We were on a road trip, without our father. Leaving the home that we were growing up in, and growing up in other places instead. Always with my Mother's refrain: *Stay together, watch out for each other. Older guys, take care of your younger brothers.*

There were six of us when we started out. Within a few years, Gerry would be born, the seventh son.

But I sort of jumped ahead of myself there. That summer, when I was still six years old, we moved and moved. Our third move was to my Mom's sisters, Aunty Joan's, in Laval West just a bit North West of Montréal. There, our Mother got a job on the beach in a small canteen, selling french fries and hot dogs.

One evening Lennie and Richie were planning to camp out in our front yard, on the beach. Mom insisted that they take me with them. At first they objected, then relented. They had no choice. I was delighted! Finally, I was allowed to go with them. Up to this time I had always

been left behind. Our father had taken his two oldest sons on a few fishing trips over the past years, and I had always been left at home with the babies. He always said that he could only look after two kids on a fishing trip after that time with the crows, and that I was just too young. They would go off and I would scream and cry my eyes out. But tonight would be different. Daddy wasn't here, and I would be going camping with Lennie and Richie. I was excited.

We set up our tent and made our sleeping bags ready for the night. When darkness came we talked for a while, then I fell asleep. Lennie and Richard had other plans. Plans they could not leave me out of. If I was to wake up and find that they were not in the tent, they knew that I would go into the house looking for them, and they would be caught. So! Instead they woke me up and took me with them.

We were going to rob the canteen. Today, at 67 years of age, I wonder for the first time, *where the hell did they get that idea?*

“Wake up Donnie, come on! It's time to go!” Lenny was shaking me gently, and Richard was there too. “Keep quiet, or you'll wake Mommy up. She's sleeping on the porch, so keep quiet!

“We're going to rob the store.” Richard's voice filtered through my waking mind. I was suddenly wide awake, and excited. I was with my two older brothers and we were camping out. We were on an adventure! We were going to rob a store.

Walking the short distance down the sandy road which separated the houses from the beach we were in silence, and all around us was dark. We walked right up to the front door of that little canteen, where Mommy worked. Lennie tried to open the door..

“Locked,” he said, “just like I thought.”

“Yeah,” said Richard, “let's go around to the back.” As we walked to the back of the store, Lennie explained to me how we were going to get into it.

It was determined that I, Donnie, being the smallest, would be boosted up onto the roof. No problem. I was one of the boys, and I would earn my keep.

“There's a trap door on the roof,” Lennie explained, “it's not too high at the back, and the trap door doesn't have a lock on it. Richie and I are going to boost you up there, and you're going to open the hatch. The door is right over the counter, Donnie, so you just lower yourself down through the hatch. Hold onto the sides of the trap door, and lower yourself down slowly to the top of the counter.”

“Okay.” I said. “Let's do it.”

Lennie and Richie were on each side of me. They bent down, each holding one of my feet, and I put my hands on the top of their heads to keep my balance. As they slowly stood up and lifted me, I wobbled and clutched a handful of each of their hair, holding on for dear life.

They both instantly, with quiet growls of pain, dropped to their knees. My feet back on the ground. I relinquish my grip on their hair.

“Don't you ever pull my hair like that again!” Lennie said.

“Yeah,” Richard said, “or we'll kill you. That really hurts.”

“But I was falling, I had nothing else to hold onto!”

“Okay, okay,” said Lennie, “put your hands on the wall. As we lift you, just walk up the wall with your hands. When you reach the top, grab onto the roof and pull yourself up on your belly.” This worked perfectly. When I reached the roof there was a small ledge, which I grabbed onto.

“Okay,” I heard Lennie say, “on three we will push you up.” We all counted together.

“One, two, three!”

They lifted and I pulled. In an instant, like a fish on dry land, I flopped my belly onto the roof.

“You okay Donnie?”

“Yes, I'm okay. What should I do now? Can I walk on this roof?”

“Just crawl over to the hatch and open it. Can you see it? It should be right in front of you. Now open it up.”

I lay still.

Richard's voice came up to me from the shadows below. “Donnie, just stand up! For God's sake, the roof's flat. Just walk over to the hatch and open it up. What are you, a bloody baby?” His words stung, as well as sprung me to action. I was on my feet instantly. The hatch was about five feet in front of me, and as I walked over to it I yelled down to Richard.

“I am not a baby!”

At that, both my big brothers' voices came up to me. “Shh, someone will hear you! You'll wake the dead!”

I grabbed the hatch with both my hands, and pulled up. The hatch came off the roof so easy that I fell backwards onto my bum. I sat there, hatch in hand.

“It wasn't even hooked on to the roof,” I exclaimed in real shock, “it just came off in my hands!”

“Just climb down and let us in! Come on Donnie, stop playing around!” Richard's voice whispered up again.

“Wait a moment,” said Lennie, “don’t fall in! Go in feet first, holding onto the top, and lower yourself down. If your feet don’t touch the counter, just let go. You will only be a couple of inches away from the countertop. Be careful.”

As I was lowering myself down, Lennie and Richie ran around to the front of the store. Looking through the window they saw me hanging inches away from the counter top. I heard Lennie say, “You’re there Donnie, just let go!” I did, and I was in the store, standing on the counter top. I got off of the counter and opened the front door to let them in. My two older brothers were ecstatic. Their faces were shining. They loved me. Lenny patted me on the back and Richard hugged me.

“You’re great Donnie, that was really brave of you.” Richie said as he hugged me again.

“Okay,” said Lennie, “let’s get some stuff and get out of here.”

We each took a bottle of Coke and a chocolate bar. We opened our drinks on the store’s opener, which was tied to the back of the counter. A few minutes later we were walking down the sandy beach road in the middle of the night, eating chocolate bars and drinking pop. We finished our pop in the tent, then crawled into our sleeping bags. In a few moments, I was fast asleep, happy as a pig rolling in a pile of mud.

In the morning when I awoke, there were no pop bottles or chocolate wrappers lying around. Lenny and Rich were stirring, just waking up. “It’s too bad we didn’t take more stuff” I said.

“What do you mean?” said Lennie.

“You know, more chocolate bars and pop, at the store last night.”

“You must have been dreaming,” said Richard, with a quick glance at Lennie.

“Yes,” said Lennie, not meeting his eyes, “dreaming. Go back to sleep. We'll go fishing later.”



The Bottles

We did go fishing a bit later that day. Mickey and Johnny came with us. Len and Richard had their own fishing rods, while the rest of us used tree branches with string and hooks tied to them. John had just turned three years old and needed help putting worms on his hook. At first, Lennie designated me to help John. The worms were kind of skinny, and kept breaking in pieces.

“Wiggly little buggers” I started calling them. As I was trying to bait Johnie’s hook, he was using my line. John caught the first fish on that line. It was a catfish with whiskers, and poison horns on its side and back fins. Lennie showed us how to take the hooks out of catfish without being pricked by their sharp, dangerous, pointed fins.

“You hold the catfish's belly in the palm of your hand, with the head up. Just let the horny fins, below the gill, sit on your thumb and first finger. You squeeze the fish, and when his mouth opens up, watching out for its teeth, unhook your hook. Then, throw the fish into the bucket.”

Lennie took over baiting Johnie’s hooks, while Mickie and I struggled with ours. Richard became the expert at unhooking catfish, helping us all. Within a few hours, and a lot of fun, we had a bucket of catfish, still full of their guts.

At home Mom put out a small table, with a bucket of water and a sharp knife that only Lennie was allowed to use. Lennie cut the fish heads off and then split their bellies open. Then Richard pulled out their guts. He used the back of his thumb nail to scrape the thick blood off of their backbones. I would wash them in the bucket of water and Mickey and Johnnie would put them into a large clean bowl. Mom had put on a big pot of potatoes and another of carrots. She rolled the clean catfish in flour and fried them up in margarin. That was when I fell in love with mashed potatoes and catfish supper.

Us guys used to walk along the side of the roads near home, looking for empty pop bottles. We could get two cents for each bottle, from the man who owned the canteen on the beach where Mom worked. A week or two after my so-called dream, I was walking down the other side of the ditch, beside a field of small trees and shrubs. Something in a pile of tangled branches caught my eyes, so I went over to the branches to investigate.

“Holy Jesus, I struck it rich!” I said out loud, as I rushed in to get at least six cases of empty pop bottles. “They’re even in cases!” I soon realised though, that I could not carry all of them. I decided that I should run home for a wagon, to haul them to the store.

I don't know where everyone else was. All I knew was that I had to act fast before someone else found my bottles. I rushed home and then back to the bottles, pulling the biggest wagon that we had. I loaded all the bottles onto the wagon. There were six cases of six bottles each, and two big bottles. The big ones were worth 5 cents each. I didn't know how much money I would get, but I did know that I was rich. I was feeling pretty good when I walked into that store, pulling that wagon full of empty bottles.

“Where did you get those?” The booming voice came from the man behind the counter. Undaunted, I yelled back at him with a big smile on my face.

“Over there in the field, on the other side of the ditch, under a pile of bushes!” The man seemed angry, like he didn't know what to do.

“Well,” He said loudly, “I'm only giving you a cent for each of them.” I thought about that for a few seconds.

“That's okay.” I shrugged. I unloaded the bottles onto the counter top and the man gave me 38 cents. I left the store feeling quite good, but not as rich as I had felt going in with all of those bottles.

A couple of days after I had found them, Mom came home from working at the canteen.

“Donald,” she said, “where did you find all those bottles?”

“What bottles?” I answered.

“My boss at the canteen told me that you brought in a bunch of empty pop bottles for a refund. So where did you get them?”

“Oh! Those bottles. I found them on the other side of the ditch. They were all together in the bushes by the forest. I still have the money Mom, do you want it?” I put my hand into my pocket and pulled out my fortune, the 38 red cents. Mom put her hand out, so I handed her the money. She looked at it, and then back at me.

“Is that all he gave you?” she asked.

“Yes, he only gave me a cent for each bottle.” I complained.

“Well,” said mom, “Someone stole all of those bottles off of him and I felt sorry for him. I gave him back the money he paid you, but he charged me two cents a bottle and a nickel for the two big ones. That cheap bugger.”

“Then he fired me, saying that he couldn't afford to keep me on because of his loss.”

“Wow,” I said to mom, “he's not only a cheap bugger, he's a thief too!” A few moments later, as mom was leaving the room, she stopped and turned towards me and asked point blank.

“Donald, did you, Lennie and Richard steal all of those bottles of pop from that canteen, the night you camped out?”

“No Mom, we didn't steal all of that pop from the store.” After she left the room, I remembered my dream about robbing the store with my two older brothers. But, that was only 3 bottles of pops and 3 chocolate bars.

Now that Mom wasn't working at the canteen any more, she tried to keep us busy doing stuff around the house. “To keep you out of trouble” is what she said. There were a lot of us, and we could make quite a mess, given the opportunity. One cloudy, windy day, she told us to go and catch some fish for supper, then hurry back home.

“I want you to clean up the yard before it starts to rain.”

“What kind of fish do you want, what's your favourite fish Mom?” Lennie said. He sounded just like Dad. Full of confidence and bravado. Mom smiled and answered without hesitation.

“Get me a few big perch. And get Donald some catfish while you're at it.” Rubbing my head, Mom said, “You love catfish, don't you Donnie?”

“Yeah, I love catfish!” I hollered out with a smiling, beaming face. Then, like an eruption from all around came the voices of all my brothers, as they moved in on me and mom.

“I love catfish too, Mom!”

“Me too mom, me too!” It became a huge group of smiling happy faces. Little Billie was jumping up and down, uttering his first words.

“Me too, mamma!” We all started laughing together, hugging baby Billie and dancing around.

“Billie talked, Billie talked!” Mom picked Billie up, smiling into his face.

“You said Mamma!” Mommy beamed at him. “You said Mamma!”

The house was full of magic energy as we gathered our fishing rods and poles. We dug worms from the field, and then down to the water we went. We travelled to our favourite spot, an old abandoned wharf where there was room for everyone to fish. Lennie and Richard cast their lines way out, looking for a big perch. The rest of us just fished off of the side of the dock. We started catching some small perch and a few catfish. Lennie made us throw the small perch back in.

“We're going to catch a big perch for Mom!” he said.

“You can keep the catfish if you like, but all small perch go back. I'm going to catch a big perch!” And he did too. Right after he said that, he put his rod down on the dock to help Johnnie put a worm on his hook. Lennie's rod leaped, and luckily he had his foot on the rod's handle. We all started yelling at the same time.

“You got one Lennie, you got a big perch!”

Lennie dropped John's worm into the water and grabbed his fishing rod to bring the big fish in. I noticed that a huge catfish darted out from under the wharf then, and grabbed the worm that Lennie had dropped so that his fish would not get away.

As Lennie was reeling in his fish, I tried to get my line in, to where I had seen the catfish grab Johnnie's lost worm. My hook got stuck on a buried log, and when I pulled hard my line broke. I had lost my hook.

Meanwhile, we could all see Lennie's perch now. It was the biggest perch that any of us had ever seen. It kept swimming sideways, and it looked like it would break Lennie's rod. But that was not to be.

When it was on top of the water Lennie reached in, and, grabbing the fish by the head, he lifted it onto the dock. The fish was barely even hooked, just in the corner of its mouth. It looked

as if it could have gotten off at any time. Instead of taking the hook out of the fish's mouth, Lennie twisted it a bit then stuck it into the thick part of its cheek. That fish was not going to get away at all. We all watched as Lennie took the fish to the shore and cut its head off, splitting its belly.



“Let me take it's guts out!” Richard chimed in. Lennie passed it to him and he cleaned it out, and then passed it on to me. It felt heavy and thick, even with its head off and its guts out. As I was about to put it into the bucket of water, I saw Mickey's hands reaching for the fish. I passed it along to him and he, smiling, gently placed it in the bucket of water, wiggling it as if it was swimming. John, not to be outdone, reached into the bucket and took the fish out. He took a good look at the big perch.

“Mommy is going to love eating you!” he said, as we all laughed. Then John put the fish back into the bucket, and looked over at Lennie.

“What about my worm? I want to catch that big catfish Donnie and I saw!” They all looked right at me.

“I know where one is!” I said. “There's a really big catfish under the wharf, right where we were fishing!”

“How do you know that?” Richard asked, looking at me.

“I saw it!” I replied. “When Lenny dropped Johnnie's worm into the water, when he was catching the perch. I saw a really big catfish come out from under the dock and grab the worm.” On mass, my brothers grabbed their fishing poles and walked back out onto the dock.

“What about my worm?” Johnnie said. “Lennie, you didn't finish putting my worm on yet, I want to catch Donnie's catfish!”

“Wait a minute you guys, let's give Johnny the first try.” Lennie said, putting a new worm on John's hook. Reluctantly, the guys held back. Richard threw his line out, to where Lennie had caught the big perch. Mickey tried to do the same thing but his hook got stuck on something behind him. As Mickey grunted then pulled to free his hook the rest of us turned to see what he had hooked.

“Stop Mickey! Don't pull!” We were all yelling at the same time. But to our horror, Mickey pulled and pulled again. Richard reached up and held Mickey's pole from being pulled a fourth time. There were a few kids that had gathered around us when Lenny had caught the big perch. And Mickey had hooked a small girl in the eye.

Every time he pulled on his line, the girl's eye lid would pull, way out. Her eye looked like it could fall right out of her head at any time. Mickey finally turned to see what was happening behind him. He dropped his rod and his eyes filled with tears. Looking at the little girl, his hook hanging from her eye lid, Mickey walked towards her.

“I'm sorry, I'm so sorry! Are you all right? Please be all right!”

Lennie was already at the girl's side, unhooking the hook from her lid. “It's okay everyone! It's not in her eye, it's just in the skin. Stay still little girl, you're going to be alright!”

Lenny's soothing voice calmed us all down as he gently freed the girl's eye lid from the nasty hook. There were two boys with the girl, I think they were her brothers. They never said a word, they just turned away and left, each of them holding one of the girls hands. Mickey was a little unnerved by the whole affair.

He kept saying, “I didn't even know they were there! I thought I was hooked on one of the dock's boards!” Lennie kept telling him not to worry about it.

“The girl's eye is okay, so let's get back to fishing. Just remember to always look behind you before you cast out.” So we all settled down and watched as Johnnie dropped his hook, with a big worm on it, right beside the doc where I had seen the big catfish. At first nothing happened, then just when we had all lost interest and everyone was looking at me as if I was a big liar, wham! That catfish grabbed Johnnie's hook and dragged it back under the dock. John's rod leaped from his hands, hitting the water with a splash.

“Shit! Oh shit, my rod! I lost my fishing rod!” Richard was right on it. Lying on his belly on the dock, he instantly reached into the water, way down, and grabbed the rod before it too went under the dock. He handed it back to Johnnie.

“Here,” he said, “this time, hang onto it. Hold it tight.” John did hold onto it, he grabbed the rod and heaved the fish right onto the dock.

The fish started jumping all over the place. It had unhooked itself and was desperately trying to get back to where it had come from, in the water under the dock. We were all going crazy. Every time the fish would get close to the edge of the dock one of us would kick it back. Then it stopped moving for a second and Lennie grabbed it, piercing the palm of his hand on the fish's back fin. Lennie didn't care, that fish was in the fish bucket swimming frantically in circles before any of us could take another breath. We all started cheering, jumping up and down and patting each other on the backs. Johnnie was so proud.

“I caught Donnie's catfish!” he kept yelling, “I caught Donnie's catfish and I'm going to eat it!” This brought on another round of laughter. This time I seemed to be the brunt of it. I did not like being laughed at. All I could think of was that I didn't have a hook on my line. I had lost it when I had first seen the catfish, when Lennie had dropped Johnnie's worm into the water. When he had caught the big perch. I was in trouble and I let everyone know.

“I got no hook!” I yelled out. “I lost my hook. Lennie, Richie, I need a hook!” Holding my bare line out to them, everyone looked at me. They all had the same expression on their faces. They were sorry for me, *that's too bad*. Shrugging their shoulders, they were all turning away from me. They were starting to fish again.

“There are no more hooks.” Lennie said, as he threw his line out into the water.

“Go look in Uncle Bert's tackle box,” said Richie.

“No,” Lennie said, “I took the last one yesterday, so there's no more hooks left.” Mickey and Johnnie, both younger than me, stood with their backs turned and their lines in the water. They were quiet, pretending that they didn't know what was going on. They were scared that I was going to take one of their hooks.

“Donnie”, said Richard, who was still looking at me, “why don't you use that safety pin that's holding up your pants?”

“Can I?” I exclaimed, “will it work?”

“That's a good idea!” exclaimed Lennie, “Let me see that pin.” The safety pin was keeping the top of my pants held together, as I had lost the button. The zipper was still working. There was no danger of my pants falling down, so I took the pin out and handed it to Lennie. He straightened it out then bent it to form a hook. As I was trying to tie it onto my line Richard became impatient with the way I was doing it and he took over.

“Watch and learn, Donnie!” he said, as he grabbed the hook-safety-pin off of me. Mickey and John were right in there now too. We were all interested in seeing how this was going to work out. Lennie caught another big perch, just as Richard finished tying my hook on and everybody abandoned me to my own devices.

So how do you get a worm to stay on a safety pin? It's not easy. Every time I would put the worm on the pin-hook, the worm would just crawl or wiggle up and off the safety pin, for there was no barb to hold the worm on. As I struggled with this dilemma, I was in between Lennie and Richie, and they both had their line out to where Lennie had caught the big perch. They watched me and the worm with amusement.

“Stick the pin through its side a few times.” Lennie said.

“Yes,” said Richard, “stick it through the side, it won't be able to crawl off then.”

As I was trying this, the worm slipped out of my hands and, wiggling, down it went to the bottom of the water.

“What are you doing Donnie? Feeding the fish?” As Richard said this we all saw another bigger catfish dart out from under the wharf and grab the wiggling worm. My two older brothers gasped in awe and began reeling their lines in. Realising that they were after my fish, I grabbed another fatter worm and stuck the pin through its middle, gently lowering the pin into the water.

The other two guys stopped reeling in their lines, and Mickey and Johnnie even came over to have a look. The worm wiggled as it was going down then landed on the bottom of the water. Then it really tried to get off of the pin. It wiggled like a bucking bull, then the catfish was there! Sucking back the worm, pin and all.

“Pick him up,” whispered Lennie, “just take him out of the water, ‘cause he’ll slip off of the hook pretty easily.”

As we all took a collective breath, I lifted my line. The hook-pin held, and I lifted that fish right up onto the dock. As soon as he landed he realised that something was wrong. He started flapping, a real fish out of water. The pin, with the worm still on it, flew out of the fish's mouth.

There were five of us there and we had him surrounded. As the other guys held him down with their feet, I reached down, sliding my hands under him. I held his belly, letting his sharp horns sit on my thumb and first finger. I squished him as tight as I could and with my brothers around me I walked him to the bucket.

“We better go home,” Mickey said, “Mom will be getting mad at us soon.”

“Oh yeah,” said Lennie “We have to clean up the yard before it starts to rain.” We gathered up our stuff and headed home, a happy bunch of kids.

When we got home we dived right into cleaning up the yard. Mom gave me a rake and told me to rake up around the porch.

“Do a good job!” she said, as she left me to get the other guys working. I was lost in my thoughts of fishing, and the fish yet to be cleaned. I was raking like a mad man, when I hit something like glass. I raked at it and raked again. It was a bottle with the cap still on, a big bottle of pop. I got on my knees, digging it out of the sand with my hands, and I pulled it out. Then I saw another one. I grabbed it in my other hand. This was fantastic. I was amazed. I was holding two big bottles of pop.

Richard was by my side in an instant. “Donnie, Donnie,” he whispered, as he gently pushed my hands and the pop back into the sand. “We stole these.” I must have looked pretty stunned. I didn’t know what he was talking about, and I’m sure that my mouth was agape. “The night we robbed the store, Lennie and I went back when you fell asleep. We went back and robbed some more stuff. We hid these big bottles of pop here. We buried them, hid them away.” As Richard spoke these words, the truth slowly seeped in. I opened my hands slowly, releasing my grip on the bottles of pop with understanding.

“We really did rob the store. It wasn't a dream.”

The Bagel Man

When we lived in Laval West, right on the beach with Mom and Auntie Joan, there was a bagel man. He would show up at a local park where we sometimes played. He would open up the back of his truck and sell bagels, buns and breads. Everyone would come running, and there would be a long line up. People would be talking and laughing, and kids would be running everywhere. You would give the man a nickel and he would give you a bagel.

Now Mickey, John, Billie and I were in the park playing when the bagel man pulled up his truck, with the big bagels painted all over it. He blew his horn several times, opened the doors to his truck and started selling his wares. Everyone would start yelling and running at the same time. Mickey and I were the first in line.

Now, John and Billie, they were just babies. They were way at the back of the line up somewhere. Johnny had to take care of Billie, so we knew they were okay. Mickey and I got two bagels each. We were the first back at the swings, kicking our legs and eating bagels.

All of a sudden, we heard Johnny screaming blue murder, running towards us. Billie was right behind him, his little legs running a hundred miles an hour, with the bagel man in fast pursuit.

“Hey! You no pay, you no pay!” was all he was yelling. Each of the kids had two bagels, but Mickey and I knew that they had only enough money to buy one bagel each. I guess they had seen us with two bagels each, and wouldn’t accept less for themselves.

They ran right to me, knowing it was my job to take care of them. I got off of the swing and they gathered behind me. “Quick!” I said, “Put your bagels in your pockets.” But it was too late, since the bagel man was standing right in front of us.

“Them kids, no pay. So you pay.” He kept saying, “You, pay” pointing his knobby fat finger at me.

“Didn’t you guys pay the bagel man for your bagels?” I said, looking at the two little guys.

“We paid him!” said John with such venom in his voice that even I cringed. Then Billie, peeking out from behind me, started yelling.

“We paid the bagel man! Bagel man's a liar. Bagel man's a liar!”

Looking at the bagel man, I thought his face was going to explode. His cheeks were puffed up and his eyes were bulging out. There were quite a few people gathered around us by now. I was really getting scared, so I offered the bagel man the bagel that I had clenched in my hand,

“Here,” I said, “Take this and leave us alone.”

The bagel man did explode then. Spit came out of his mouth as he slapped the bagel out of my hand. The gasp that went up from the crowd around us quickly turned to laughter as Billie, scampering between Johnny and myself, grabbed the bagel from the sand and took the biggest bite out of it he could.

The bagel man looked stunned, gawking at Billie in disbelief. Someone in the crowd offered the bagel man a nickel. Then someone tossed a nickel at his feet. And when Billie grabbed the nickel from the sand, the bagel man went nuts.

Screaming and yelling, he started waving his hands in the air. I thought he was going to kill us, when suddenly out of the clear blue sky came Mickey. He had been ever so slowly

picking up speed on his swing, behind the bagel man. Just as the bagel man was about to kill us, Mickey kicked out his feet, catching him on the shoulder and spinning him around.

The bagel man didn't know what or who had hit him. He staggered backwards in disbelief, tripping over the edge of a kiddies swimming pool and landing on his back in a foot of water. His head went right under the water and he came up spitting and yelling in bagel talk.

Everybody was laughing and chattering. Mickey took Johnny by the hand as I took Billy's, and the four of us quickly walked away, eating our bagels.

Mickey floods my mind. He always knew what to do and when to do it. He passed away on August the 3rd, 2009, at the age of 62.



When Jeffrey and Tod, Mickey's two sons, took me to a football game in Toronto, it was just like the fun I used to have with Mickey. I wish his daughter, Dawn, had been there also.

Mickey had a way with friends, he just made them. I would always hang around with Mickey and his pals because Mickey was my best friend too, for many years.

As we grew older, Mickey once made beer in a big plastic garbage pail. It was really something. When it was finished we bottled it in quart bottles.

One time Mike invited a friend to spend a long weekend with us. We all got into Mickey's beer, and as the night became deep and the early morning threatened, I suggested we go out to the front yard and pretend-fight. I don't know how it all started, but before long, I was after Mickey's friend. I think I was throwing kicks at him. Then Richard came home from wherever he was and started holding me back. He was holding my two arms back, from behind me. Trying to settle me down as Mickey's friend was walking toward me.

His hands out in front of him saying, "It's all right Donnie, I'm all right, everything is okay." But I thought that he was coming to get me. With Richard holding me up and back, it was only natural for me to lift both my legs and kick the poor kid in the stomach. Down he went. That was when Mickey really started yelling at me. As Richard pulled me backwards and sat me down on the ground, Mom's voice boomed out from her upstairs bedroom window.

"That's enough you guys! Donald, you get in this house right now! The rest of you pull yourselves together, right now, and take care of Mickey's friend! And I mean right now!"

Richard pointed me towards the front door, then gave me a gentle shove. As I walked towards the door, it opened. I looked over my shoulder and saw Mickey and Richard helping Mickey's friend to his feet.

Mom was standing by the open door. She sent me down stairs to the bedroom that Mickie, Johnnie and I shared. When I woke the next day, Mickey and his friend were gone. Mom had driven them to the bus stop and they had gone to Drummondville, where Mickey's friend's parents lived.

I felt the fool, and just very sad. I also realised that Mickey really knew how to make good beer.



Rain Story

As we were getting ready to move on, leaving Auntie Joan's house in Laval West, we were cleaning up the front yard. It was a dark cloudy day. We were all together, and Mom was saying, "We better get a move on before that rain starts up again."

That was when lightning struck and thunder roared. It was right beside us. Billy jumped right out of his diaper. His little legs were running a hundred miles an hour before he hit the ground. When he did hit the ground he had traction. He ran so fast, towards the house, that he left his smoking diaper behind him. The rest of us erupted with shrieks and laughter as the rain hit us in torrents, and we ran behind him, loving life.

In later years, Billie worked with me at Penthouse Studios in Montréal. We worked in the photo darkrooms. We had a lot of free time, sometimes an hour or two. Or even a day or two. We would spend this time cleaning up the darkroom sinks and trays, mixing new developing chemicals and things like that. One day, while I was cleaning out the trays, Billie snuck up on me and snapped a wet hand towel at my bum.

"Snap!" Oh frig, did that hurt! I leaped in the air. Billie laughed until I snapped back, using the towel I had been using to wipe out wet sinks. I got him on the bare arm. Then the game was on. We played for hours. Over the months that followed, we had a lot of fun, snapping wet towels at each other.

"Snap!"

"Oh fuck, you bastard!" and the war would be on. It was a blast, and that's Billie, my brother. He always was a blast to be with.



Billie passed away on March the 11th, 2011. He was only 57 years old. Leaving behind his much loved wife Anne Haws, and their two awesome daughters, Carrie and Janet. We fish with them now.

We were adrift. After dad sold the house, we just drifted. From moving to the house with the rickety stairs, we next lived at Uncle Wilfred's house for a short while. We spent the rest of the summer in Laval West, with Aunt Joan. She had a cottage on the beach where Lender, Richard and I had robbed the store, and fished to our heart's content.

And from there, we ran. Mom took us to a place where we lived in a shack, beside the railway tracks. Aylmer, Québec, near the Ontario border. There, something dreadful happened to our mother. I did not know about this until much later in life when Mom told me.

Us guys would hang around the house till mom had enough, then she would send us out to play.

“Lennie, Richie,” she would call out, “ take Donnie and Mickey out to play.” Sometimes she would say, “Take Johnnie too. I'm going to lie down with Billie.” Off we would go, walking down to the beach or through the ditches. Sometimes we would walk down the train tracks, doing whatever we felt like doing.

One day we caught two snakes. We hit them with sticks until they were dead. Someone came up with the idea of putting them on the train tracks when we heard a distant whistle blowing. We thought that was a good plan.

We stretched the dead snakes out on the tracks, then hid in the ditch beside them. After the train had passed, we were surprised to see that one of the snakes had been full of babies. They were scattered, flattened all on and around the tracks. Some of them were half out of their mothers mouth. Others were just lying on the ground. All dead.

For the most part, we were sorry for what we had done to them. Yet we were fascinated and bewildered as to what had happened, too.

One day a man came to our door, asking to be fed. He was hungry and had not eaten in a couple of days. This was not unusual in the early fifties. Mom made him breakfast, which he ate. Then unknown to us, he showed Mom a gun and told her to get rid of us kids or he would.

Mom told Lennie and Richard to take us all down to the river and stay there until it started to get dark. "Take Billie too," she said, "and Donald, you watch Billie. Don't come back till it starts to get dark."

As we walked down to the river, we met a bunch of French kids. There were about as many of them and about the same ages as we were, even the baby. We were walking towards each other. As we approached, there was a lot of tension in the air. We didn't know if we were going to fight or not. We were all thinking the same thing, are we going to fight or be friendly.

We decided we were all friendly, nodding our heads and smiling, saying hello, bonjour, bonjour, as we passed each other on that lonely dirt road.

Years later, when mom was in her seventies, she told me about the gun. She told me that the man had shown her a gun and told her to get rid of all the kids or he would.

"That's why I sent you all away that day" she said. I asked her what had happened after we had left. Mom was a bit surprised at my question. She shrugged her shoulders and said. "He just had his way with me. That's all."

A short time after that incident, we were up and away, heading for Vancouver. Someone had put an ad in the newspaper. He was travelling to Vancouver and was looking for someone to share the expenses and driving with. It was a long-shot, but Mom answered the ad. She had some money left from working at the canteen and a *How hard could it be to drive a car anyway* attitude.

We left Québec, six brothers, our mother, and some guy named Scottie driving. I was six years old when we left Montréal and seven when we arrived in Lulu Island, just off of Vancouver, B. C. I had my seventh birthday there, in the Rocky Mountains.

And I'll never forget that day. My two older brothers were fishing off a wooden bridge into a small stream. It was my birthday, September 7th, 1953, and I was crying and whining. *Mommy this and Mommy that and Mommy they wont let me fish, etc.*

I guess Mom had enough. "For God's sake Lennie, please give him the rod and shut the baby up."

Now, Lennie is only two years older than me. That would have made him nine and Richard was eight. I had just turned seven and I had three younger brothers. Mickey, Johnnie and Billie.

This was the first time I didn't mind being called a baby.

Lennie, always being helpful and caring of our Mother, handed me his fishing rod. I no sooner had that fishing rod in my hands, than that dark black, twenty pound test line started peeling off that reel with a sizzle sound, and I'll never forget the buzzing that the reel made as the line pulled out and when there was no more line, the pull of the rod. I held on and that rod bent and then the high ping sound that the string made when it broke. Then, there was silence. But it was beautiful, and everyone was looking at me.

"What was that?" I said out loud, Lennie looking at me with what I assumed was admiration in his eyes.

"That was a big fish." he said.

"Wow!" I said, "Thanks Lennie, that was really something. Here's your rod back, I'm sorry about the line."

“That’s okay, Donnie.” he said, “Happy Birthday!” What a brother, eh? I can say that now, but then I just didn't understand.

First there was Ontario and the Great Lakes, then the prairie provinces to go through. I remember waking up one morning in the back seat of the car. Mom looked over her shoulder at me and said, “Geez Donnie, while you were sleeping a big crow smashed right into the windshield of our car. It was the biggest crow I have ever seen.”

“I believe it was a raven, not a crow.” Scottie's voice came from the driver's seat.

“Anyway, it was a big black bird and it covered the whole windshield, we couldn’t see a thing and then it rolled right over the roof of the car and landed on the road behind us.” Mom said. “And I was driving!”

I was amazed. “Where is it?” was all I said.

“Oh,” Mom said, “we didn’t stop to pick it up, we just kept on driving.” I think she could see the disappointment in my face so she quickly held up a rabbit. “We got this though, I hit it with the car. We stopped to pick it up and that's when Scottie took over driving. We're going to eat it.”

“Wow, who's going to clean it?” was all I could say. We did eat that rabbit, in a stew. But I couldn’t find the rabbit for all the water and the carrots. It would have been nice just to bite into that rabbit's leg, then drink the water.

Anyway, it really doesn’t matter because we all got the shits and bellyaches soon after we ate that Rabbit Stew.

Years later, I was about 16 or 17 years old. We were living in Highland Gardens, St. Hubert, Québec. Lennie, who had just come home from New Brunswick where he had been fishing for years, shot a rabbit. He shot it right in front of our house. There were some woods

there and according to him, holding up the one he had shot, there were many more. The woods were full of them. “There are hundreds of them, hundreds of them!”

All I wanted to do after that was to shoot a rabbit, and eat it. I borrowed Lennie's gun and went hunting.

I became a hunter. I shot rabbits. I skinned them, and I kept the skins. I soaked the rabbit in salt water for three days, then I would cook them in the oven. I and anyone else who wanted would eat them. Tough, stringy meat, yet so delicious.

One day Mom said, “Donald, give me some of those rabbits, I'm going to show you how to make a real rabbit stew.”

Mom's Rabbit Stew

If fresh, dress the rabbit, then soak in salt water for three days.

Then boil the rabbit for 15 minutes.

Rinse and de-bone.

Cut meat into chunks, roll in flour, then fry and set aside.

Boil - Bones with a few onions and some celery stalks for a few hours.

Then - Discard bones, bones, celery and onions.

Add - Salt, pepper, thyme, garlic, a crushed bay leaf, carrots, potatoes, celery and whatever vegetables you like. All diced.

When vegetables are ready, add the meat and fried onions to the pot, Thicken with flour and serve piping hot, with bread and butter.

The day after we all got sick from the rabbit, as we were driving through the Canadian Prairies, we saw hundreds of rabbits. They were everywhere. There was not a lot of traffic in those days, yet you could not see a stretch of road that wasn't littered with dead rabbits, all run down by cars.

We stopped for gas that afternoon. It was an old gas station, in the middle of a never ending field. On the side of the gas station there were animal pens, and I went over to them to see. One of the garage men came over with me. I asked him what the animals were.

“Foxes” was his answer. There were about ten or more foxes in two pens. They were running along the edge of the pen we were standing in front of. They were quite excited.

“What do you feed them?” I asked the man.

“Rabbits,” the man answered. “There are hundreds of them, just look around.”

I thought about this for a while then I asked the man, “Why don't you just let them foxes out? Then they could eat all the rabbits they wanted.” The man looked at me, nodding his head and smiling.

“That may not be such a bad idea at all,” he said.

Fire

Then we were all back in the car, driving on.

That night there was a horrendous fire. Eighteen houses burned down, all at the same time. We were driving along at night, and most of us were asleep. I was sitting in the back seat with four of my brothers, when I opened my eyes. The sky was aglow, as if the sun was setting in the middle of the night.

“What’s that Mom, what’s that shining?” I said.

“It’s a big fire, son. There’s something burning up. A real big fire.” All the heads in the back seat popped up.

“Wow” said Richie. Then out of the silence that followed, Micky’s voice echoed the thought we were all thinking.

“Are we going to drive right through the fire, Mom?”

“Yes!” said Richard, “We’re going to drive right through that fire and come right out the other side!” I could see his face glowing just like the sky. His sense of adventure was contagious.

I knew, although I was scared, that we were having fun. An adventure of our own, and things were always happening all around us. Now we were going to drive right through a fire.

“We’re not going to drive through any fire!” Mom yelled out. “We’re just going up the road a bit, to see what’s going on. It’s probably a house fire. I hope everyone is okay.”

“I think it’s a bush fire!” said Lennie, “And I think it’s running along, burning up houses and everything that’s in its way.”

“We’re not in its way!” said Mickey and Mom, both at the same time.

“Right Mom,” said Mickey.

“Right Mickey” said Mom, “We're just driving up to see if we can get past it. If not, then we will have to wait it out.”

“Or we'll drive right through it, right down the middle of the road!” came Scottie's voice from behind the steering wheel. We all just leaned on the seats and on each other, looking out the front window. Looking at a glow that grew brighter and more fearsome.

Then we were there. It *was* a big fire. Not just long but high too, real high. Whole houses were burning down.

A man with a lantern was leaning in our car window. “We are conscripting every able bodied man to fight this fire”. The man was saying this to Scotty, through the open window.

“You are obliged, sir, to give a hand. You and any other able bodied males in this vehicle must, by the law of this land, help to fight this fire. Do you understand?”

“Well yes, of course I'll help” Scottie was saying, “And there's Lender and Richard there in the back. Now Donnie might be a bit young,” he said. “You decide, I guess.”

“Donnie's just a baby!” Mom yelled out, “They're all just babies. Lennie's the oldest and he's just nine years old. You,” Mom said, “you guys are men. You go fight the fire. My kids are staying here with me. *All of them.*”

I don't know what the man saw when he raised his lantern to shine on our already glowing faces. We *were* a bunch of kids. Some excited, some scared, and some that didn't have a clue.

He looked at mom and said, “Yes mam,” and to Scottie he said “Thanks anyways. I guess you're needed here, more than fighting that fire. Just drive right through and have a safe trip, just stay to the right side of the road.”

We drove right through that fire, right down our side of the street. Just like Richie said we would.

The fire was on the left side of us. There was a large arched entrance to a housing project of some kind, all engulfed in flames. A site to behold.

Somewhere along the way we stopped to pick green beans. “We need gas money and here is a way to make some.” I heard Scotty saying, as we pulled off the road and down a long driveway.

Lennie and the Cod Fish Wars

Why was Lennie like he was? That was a hard question, posed to me by his daughter Laura, after his death. Lennie died on February the 14, 2011.

Before I can answer that question, I have to know what I am like, and why I am like I am. Lennie and I shared many life changing experiences together. Lennie was a very caring person. As a kid, he took responsibility well. He took care of me and his other brothers, as well as he could. He was second in command. I guess Mom relied on him quite a bit on this trip.

At 14, he left home. He was hanging around with a bad crowd, stealing cars and getting into trouble. Our mother arranged for him to stay with her sister, Aunty Joan. He went back to New Brunswick. Back to Miscue Island. He became a fisherman, working on fishing boats with Uncle Bert's family. As time passed he moved to Nova Scotia, where he lived and fished out of Lunenburg.

When the Captain of Lennie's boat took sick, he sent Lennie out as Captain in his stead. The first mate on the boat was jealous of Lender, feeling that he should have been made captain instead of Lennie. Lennie had trouble with him, right from the start.

This was the time of the large trawlers, overfishing the cod stocks as well as other species of fish. Local trawlers worked closely with the fish packaging plants. Many smaller plants were closing down and fishermen did not have many options when it came to whom to sell their fish to.

Smaller boats were being shut out by the larger ones. Or working for the large plants without any real benefits to themselves. Fishermen, like the fish stocks themselves, were being exploited. Time spent at sea was growing longer. The boats had to go out further and catches were dwindling.

On Lennie's second trip out as Captain, instead of following the other boats, he decided to hug the coast a bit. He headed towards some high bluffs, where he had once seen large waves crashing against the cliff faces.

On the second day out, as they approached the bluffs, the crew could see the cod fish in the ocean. They were overjoyed, as thousands of cod were swarming around their boat.

Lennie finally believed the old fishermen from Moscow, who used to talk about catching cod fish just by lowering a bucket over the side of the boat. Later that night, after their nets were laid, Lennie tried it with success. Then each man on board took a turn, laughing with joy as cod fish swam into their buckets.

They laboured, jigging for cod. Within a week of leaving harbour, they had filled their boat and were heading back to home port, with seagulls following in hoards. The first mate wanted Lender to radio their position into the fish plant. Their boat would be awarded a small share of all fish caught by the trawlers on their first trip out, just for radioing in their location. Lennie told him not to be stupid. There was enough Cod there to support four or five families for years, if they could just keep the location secret.

"We could all do well here for years," Lennie said, "instead of just getting by from day to day." They all agreed to keep the location to themselves. They arrived in port unexpectedly, almost two weeks before they were anticipated.

Everyone came out to see what had happened. People were worried at first, then elated, when they saw the scope of the catch. Lennie and the crew could do nothing but brag and laugh, telling how they had caught fish with a bucket.

All that the fish plant executives wanted to know was, "Where the hell did you catch all those fish so fast?"

Lennie just pointed out to sea, saying, “Out there, in the middle.”

They took a couple of days off, then headed back out to get another load. They arrived at what they now called The Bluffs late the next day. After putting their nets out for the night and the sharing of rum, stories and food, they turned in. Late that night, Lennie went into the radio room for something. He found the first mate talking on the hand radio set.

When he saw Len, the mate stopped right away. When Len asked him who he had been talking to, the mate said that he was trying to reach his wife but was unsuccessful, and he would try again in the morning. After the mate had left the radio room though, Lennie noticed a piece of paper with their coordinance written on it. Lennie tore up the paper, resolving to keep a close eye on his first mate.

In the wee hours of the morning, the crew was awakened by the sound of a large trawler bearing down on them. The trawler had its nets out, dragging the ocean floor. Fishing in the dark of night. By daylight, there were three large trawlers fishing The Bluffs, and three more on the horizon, moving in.

These were big fishing boats, not too concerned with the safety of the smaller craft. There was nothing Lennie could do, save draw anchor and get out of the way. As they pulled their nets in, they discovered that their nets had somehow been cut in the night. As they hauled them in, the fish poured back out into the ocean.

Next trip out, the Captain was back, with Lennie as first mate. The old first mate was Captain of one of the company's smaller boats, and everyone was pissed off. Not too long after that, in the middle of a dark night, the boat was slammed into by a large trawler.

The boat splintered. There were five men on board.

Lennie and two others were holding onto a large piece of floating debris in the freezing waters. Two others were missing. The two men with Lennie eventually just let go, giving themselves up to the ocean. In the early morning Lennie was rescued, alone.

Lennie came home then, home now being in Saint Hubert, Québec. The south shore of Montréal. He would often have nightmares there. I would sometimes hear him yelling in his sleep.

As the years slipped by us, Lennie, Richard, Mickey and I all met the girls we would marry. All from a little hamlet called Brookline.



Lennie met Susie Laurie, whose real name was Alberta Laurie. We just called her Susie. Lennie became a milkman in the town of Fort Chambly, Québec, on the Richelieu River. There, Susie had a cute little baby boy, Mom's first grandchild. They named him Lender Bowles, after his father and his grandfather.

Eventually, Lennie and Susie took their baby and moved to Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. They bought an old farmhouse and had another baby, Laura Bowles. A real charmer.

Lennie drank alcohol a lot. Years ago when we were visiting his old farmhouse in Nova Scotia, I got up early in the morning and surprised him. He had the freezer door opened and was having a drink of rum, straight from the bottle. Head back and gulping. He offered me the bottle and I declined.

I have drank beer first thing in the morning, and I have smoked pot on waking, more times then I would like to remember. With the beer it was to continue the party. The pot was a different thing, I wanted to come alive. I wanted the burst of energy that came with it. Without that, I felt dead. Lifeless and alone. I couldn't get the day started.

There is a melancholy in me, a gap between unhappiness and happiness. There is an effect in marijuana that, for me anyway, bridges that gap. It bridges, but never builds the bridge. Even today that gap is there. If I do not use pot, I can build fragile bridges, ones which eventually break down. When it is in need of repair, it's so easy to take the easy way out, the only way I know.



What was my brother Lennie's reality? The real life he lived in? What can I say, when I would rather smoke dope than face real life and change myself.

God, give me the strength to accept the things I cannot change.

The courage to change the things I can

And the wisdom to know the difference.

(something I heard in an AA meeting.)



Lennie was a very open person, trusting in life and in his fellow man. I think that he had more than his share of betrayals. Betrayals by his family and friends, starting off with our father.

Back to when I was six, about to turn seven. Lennie was nine years old, and Richard was in the middle, just turning eight. Mickey, Johnnie and Billie were there too. Our mother took us away to Vancouver, to Lulu Island. She left because of our father's betrayals to her.

We were all there, all except Dad. To me it felt like our father had left us, not the other way around. That was his betrayal to us. He let us down. He left us vulnerable, and how very vulnerable we were. On that trip and in the ensuing years, many things happened, things that would no doubt make us whom we would become.

So we were somewhere on the prairies, and we had stopped to pick green beans. I guess we had become migrant farm workers for a few days. It seems that we didn't have enough money to reach our destination, and we needed gas for the car. We needed a place to sleep, maybe even needed a shower or a bath.

I remember driving down the driveway to where the wooden shacks were, where we would stay. There was a gate and a gatehouse, where someone took our names and told us which shack we would be staying in. While this was happening, a long wagon being pulled by two horses came from behind the sheds. It was full of people with straw hats on their heads and burlap bags full of beans in their hands.

As we pulled up to our cabin, which we shared with two other families who couldn't speak more than a few words of English, there were all kinds of things happening around us. Fires were burning in the yard. Food was being cooked in big pots, on stilts over the fires. There were a few old tin bathtubs being filled with water, and people were washing themselves in them. We were given food and put to bed, with darkness all around us.

In the morning, as the sky lightened up, we were woken and fed again. Then there was The Boss, telling us which wagon to get on, and who would pick beans and which kids would

stay behind in a small daycare facility. The Boss told mom that the younger ones would stay in a hall with the other kids. He then told Mom that I was too old to stay with the babies, yet too small to pick beans. It seemed I would have to stay in a different cabin, with some older kids who would be cleaning the stables.

“No way!” Mom yelled out, “Donald is staying with Mickey and they are going to watch Johnnie and Billie. Or else he is going to pick beans with us.”

At this, the boss suddenly changed his mind. I would be allowed to stay with the younger children. Mom thought about this, but then refused. There was no way I would be left behind. She just didn’t feel right about it.

It was finally decided that I would pick beans with Lennie. Mom told Lennie that he was to really watch over me. The green beans were so plentiful, row after row of tall plants, climbing bean poles. They were full of long green beans, cluster after cluster. Beans behind every leaf, to be discovered and then picked.

I was delighted, I reached in and grabbed a handful, 5 or 6 beans in my small hand all at once. I pulled, and pulled again. The beans were attached to the bean stocks. I used two hands and pulled harder, and the beans came away with the leaves, then the whole plants, all wrapped around each other and pulling at the poles, which were stuck in the ground for the plants to climb. As I pulled again, Lennie was by my side stopping me.

“No, no Donnie, don't pull. Stop! Just snap them off one at a time. Break them off, where they are attached to the stocks, like this.” He showed me how to break them off without pulling the whole bean pole down. I caught on and we settled in to pick, with the intent of filling up our first burlap bag. We picked for about an hour or so. Lennie and I were all alone amongst the tall bean plants. We were doing quite well, once I got the knack of it.

On that hot sunny day, between the tall rows of plants that were shading us from the sun and a gentle breeze blowing, we slipped into a trance of sorts. All was well with our world. Then a noise, a rustling of the plants in the row next to ours. Then some hands appeared, parting the row of beans, and a face! The Boss's face, fat and greasy with sweat. In my mind over the years he has become known as, *the greasy fat bastard*.

"You, come with me," he said. Eyeing me down.

"No!" said Lennie, "No, he has to stay with me."

"He's okay," said the boss, "he can stay here then, pick beans. But you," he said, pointing at Lennie, "you come with me. He'll be find, waiting for you. Your mother said it's okay. So you come with me." Putting his hand on Lennie's shoulder, the boss led him away. Looking back at me, he said, "You pick beans, and wait here for your brother."

I sat amongst the bean plants and waited, lost in the sounds of the wind lazily blowing through the leaves. It seemed like forever.

And then it's like I awoke, and there we were all together in some kind of shed. Everyone was weighing their bags of beans, seeing how many they had picked. Lennie was here, and I realized our bag was only a quarter full. The Boss was yelling at our mother.

"See, I told you!" looking at me, "He cannot pick beans! Tomorrow he stays with the other kids. Tomorrow he will stay with me." Then the boss pointed at Lennie, saying, "And this one, he can't pick beans and watch the other one all day. Look at their bag, almost empty. No beans!"

At that point Lennie started yelling at the fat greasy bastard. "That's because you took me away to clean the horses!" Lennie said. Then Lennie looked at Mom and said, "He said you told him that it was ok for me to clean out the stables. Donnie and I could have filled that bag and

another one too, if he had left us alone. He said that you said it was okay for Donnie to pick alone, while I went with him to the stables.”

The Boss threw our quarter bag of beans against the wall. “You lie! You finish this bag tomorrow, and you!” pointing at me, “You stay with the kids tomorrow. Now, move on, next! Come on, next!” he said as he grabbed the bag from the next person in line.

In the middle of the night, Mom woke us all up. “We're leaving. Keep quiet now, everyone in the car.”

And so it was that we left like thieves in the night, with a burlap bag a quarter full of green beans and a half dozen empty burlap bags. So now I know why, in all my working life, I never got along with my bosses.

The Rocky Mountains

Driving through the Rocky Mountains was so different from driving through the prairie provinces. In the Rockies, you couldn't see, for the trees, rocks and hills, for the rivers and the cliffs. In the prairies you could see everywhere, everything, and it was all empty spaces. Both places fascinated me.

We drove off the main road, down a winding dirt road which led to a fishing camp. I think that Scottie, our driver, knew the people that lived there. We went into a strongly built wood cabin, where we would spend the night. Once inside the cabin, Richard pointed back to the top of the door we had just come through. There was a mantle over the door and on it, a large mountain lion, its teeth bared in a snarl. It looked ready to pounce. Lenny spoke right away.

"It's stuffed!" He said, "It's dead."

"Are you sure it's dead?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm sure. Look, you can even see where it was sewn up. It's stuffed." I looked and I believed, but I would not stay in the cabin alone with it. This was relatively early in the day. One of the men at the lodge took Lennie and Richard in a canoe, out fishing. They went across the lake from where we were. The rest of us looked at them through a pair of binoculars. They were really far out, but when you were looking through the binoculars, you could tell who was who. It was very neat.

The rest of us fished from the dock, waiting and watching. When those guys finally got back, we had fish and potatoes for supper. We ate in one of the bigger cabins. After that we went to bed in our cabin with the big cat watching over us.

When Mom put a big board across the door brackets, I asked her why. She said it was to keep the bears out

“What bears?” Mickey wanted to know. “Do bears live here, is this the bears house?”

“No, No,” said Mom, “They live in the forest. It's just in case they smell the fish. They might try to get in, but they won't be able to open the door with that board there. It's called, *bearing the door*.”

That's great, I thought to myself, a mountain lion inside the door and bears trying to knock the door down, from the outside. Then Lenny spoke up.

“Don't worry you guys, if a bear gets in this here cabin, then that there Mountain Lion will jump right on its back, killing it without a fight! That's why it's over the door.”

Somehow I found that very reassuring, and had no more fear. We slept. In the morning when I awoke, the door was opened a bit, and Richie and Mom were nowhere to be seen. I got up and went out. The sun was just coming up and the lake was full of swirling mist rising to meet it.

Richard and Mom were on the wharf. Richard was fishing, and Mom had her arm over his shoulder. They were talking, and then Mom gave him a big hug and a kiss. She looked towards me, then came running up the hill smiling. “Let's wake the other guys up,” she said, “so that we won't be late for breakfast.”

We each had three pieces of bacon and one egg, along with a glass of milk and a great big piece of bread with a lot of butter on it. Then we piled into the car and we were off.

Many years later, while talking to Richard about all of this, he told me that he had been quite angry with Mom for taking us away from our father. He told me that he had been real mean to her, and had been giving her a real hard time. When they were talking on the wharf that

morning, he and Mom had made peace. He told her that he was sorry, and that he would try to understand and be nicer to her.

Richard

See, Richard loved his Daddy. Later on, when Dad was up North working on the DEW Line, Richard lied about his age and got a job up there too, just to be close to him. I remember when he came home, he had all the money he had made up there spread out on his bed. He called me into his room to show me. He had gone to the bank, cashing his cheque and asking for small bills. I don't know how much he had but it covered his bed. There were ones and twos, fives and tens, twenties and fifties and even a few hundred dollar bills there. He eventually gave half of it to Mommy, and he spent the rest.

Pacific Ocean

I will never forget the first time that I saw the Pacific Ocean. We were driving over mountains and through valleys, then back and over another mountain. It seemed endless. Then just like that, it ended.

We got to the end of a mountainous hill, and there before us was the Pacific Ocean. Just like that we were driving into a fishing village, with the harbour below us. Boats were both coming into and going out of harbour. There was a lot happening on the docks.

The sun was shining on white seagulls as they flew down the sides of reddish, sandstone cliffs to meet the smashing surf below, which in turn was eating away at the base of the very cliff itself. I fell in love with the ocean.

I think we crossed a causeway or a bridge, then we were on Lulu Island. We travelled on dirt roads over flat farm lands.

Somehow we were staying in the top story of an old house. To reach our front door we had to go way up a narrow staircase that ran up the side of the house. There was a landing half way up, and then another one at the top where our door opened into our kitchen. Then there were other rooms for sleeping, and that was it. There was no bathroom in the house and the kitchen sink had a hand pump to bring the water up to the house. It took a lot of pumping.

We left our stuff upstairs, then Scottie took Mom, Lenny and Richard somewhere. There was an older girl who lived downstairs with her parents. She was to watch us younger kids while Mom was away. We were outside the house, and I started asking the girl about the ocean.

“Where is the ocean from here?” I wanted to know, “Can we walk to it?” I was persistent.

“Oh, not too far,” she answered. “it's a bit of a walk, too far for those little legs to walk.” she said, looking at Billie.

"I'll carry Billie", I said "he's not that heavy."

"It's a bit far," said the girl, "and the day's moving on. The tide's out anyways, so there's nothing to see but mud."

"Please, please, I just want to see the ocean again!"

"But the tide is out!" she said again.

"I don't even know what the tide is! I want to see what it's like when the tide's out."

To my surprise and joy, she finally said "Okay". As she swept Billie up in her arms and started down the dirt road, she said "We'll have to hurry though, it gets dark early this time of year." Mickey and I took John by the hand and off we went as fast as we all could go. To the sea.

Eventually, we came to a bridge. The tide was indeed out, and all along the river banks was wet clay. In the middle of where the water should have been was just a trickle, flowing to and filling up the sea.

We walked on the clay shoreline. There were crevasses and cracks everywhere, puddles of water gathering wherever they could. But for the most part, the ocean was simply gone.

"We had better get back now." The girl said, as she cradled Billie. "Your mom will be home soon." Off we all went, down the dirt road towards our new home and the end of another, so far perfect day.

As we walked along the empty street kicking up dust, the girl was telling us stories about things I can't remember. A Police car drove towards us and stopped, and the Policeman knew the girl's name. He told her that her father was looking for her and that she had better get us kids home right away.

"Their mother's worried about them!" is what he said to her, looking at us guys. The Police turned the car around and left us there, in a cloud of dust.

“If everyone is so worried, why didn’t the Police just drive us home?” I asked the girl.

“Just hurry.” The girl started walking real fast as she said that. Carrying Billie, she made Mickey and I hold Johnny's hands as we almost ran all the way home.

It really was not very far, and as soon as we were in sight of the house, Mom was coming to meet us. There were a few people who stayed on the road in front of the house who were talking to each other while watching us get closer.

“Where have you been?” Mom wanted to know. I could tell that she had been scared.

“We were all right Mon, we had a wonderful time! Everything was okay. We saw the tide waters. It was beautiful!”

The girl couldn’t seem to stop herself, she kept saying, “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, they just wanted to see what the tide was like when it was out. They begged me to take them. I’m so sorry. I couldn’t say no. Please, I’m so sorry.”

Then Mom looked at the girl and everything changed. Mom was saying that everything was okay. Mom was talking to the girl, saying, “Don’t worry, It’s really ok. I just didn’t know where the kids were. I was scared, I thought I’d lost them.”

The girl just kept on, “I’m so sorry.” And then the girl's father was there, with his gruff voice.

“Where have you been, Mary-Lou? where have you been? You were supposed to be watching these here children. You scared their mother half to death!”

The girl, Mary-Lou, was looking at her father. “I’m so sorry Pa. Daddy please, I’m sorry.” Then Mom was talking to the girl's father.

“It’s all right, she was with the children. They had a good time, everything’s all right. I shouldn’t have made such a fuss.”

That's when the man said to Mom, "You take care of yours, and I'll take care of mine." Then he grabbed Marie-Lou by the arm and dragged her away, with the girl pleading and begging him not to take her. But he did.

As Mom helped us up the narrow staircase, we could hear the girl getting beat by her father, and crying. Mom put us all to bed, then stayed with us. I told Mom that the girl was really nice to us. I told her how I had begged her to take us to see the ocean.

"She didn't want to take us Mom, but I kept begging her until she did. It was my fault, not hers. She was just being nice." Mom hugged me, she had silent tears in her eyes.

"No Donald," she said, "it wasn't your fault. It was mine. I got worried when I got home and you were all gone. I called the Police to help find you."

"Then it was the Police's fault Mom, they should have driven us home then, and everything would have been all right!"

I don't think we stayed at that house for more than a few days. But I do know that we started school the very next day. The school year had already begun, and we were a few weeks late. It was a strange school house. All of the classes were in the same room, and there was only one teacher.

When we arrived for our first day, there were four of us: Lennie, Richard, myself and Mickie. There were a bunch of other kids, both boys and girls, in the same classroom. They were all hanging their jackets up in a long room at the back of the class. The teacher, a woman, was standing at the head of the class.

“Go ahead boys, hang up your jackets” she said. The other kids made room for us, pointing out empty hooks on the wall that we could use. It was very quiet and a bit scary. No one spoke to us, they just pointed to the hooks. Then we all made our way to our seats.

Mickey didn't have a jacket on, so he had taken off his shirt and hung it up instead. He walked to his assigned seat with no shirt on, bare naked to the waist. All of the kids started laughing at him, and so did us guys. Richard led Mickey back to his shirt and helped him put it on. It was now a very fun time. Mickey always was very adept at breaking the ice. We fit right in and enjoyed our first days of school, thanks to Mickey I think.

Then came our first and only Halloween there. There were deep ditches along the side of the roads, and to cross these ditches or even to go up to someone's house, we had to walk over wooden planks with water rushing below us. At first we walked these planks with caution. But it wasn't long before we would run them, with abandonment. There was a big kid named Billie Campbell, and I think that Lennie found him a bit intimidating. Lennie, with Richard's help, would try to put this big kid in his place.

Mickey and I were told to stay on our side of a big ditch. Lennie and Richard would go ahead, to taunt the big kid. Lennie told us to wait and be ready to run, just in case. They were going to bug Billie Campbell, the big kid. They would sing to him. “Campbell’s soup makes me puke, down my leg, and in my boot!” All of my life I have been singing that song.

That night, there was magic in the air. I could hear those guys singing in the distance. Campbell’s soup makes me puke, down my leg, and in my boots! There was running and yelling. Then they were back with Mickie and me.

“Come on you guys, we’ve got them on the run!”

Mickey and I ran over the ditches, yelling that song at the top of our voices. Led by Lennie and Richie, we drove Billie Campbell out of town. We were The Kids from Montréal.

Then there was the thorny ivy growing all over the walls of the small church, sprinkled with red berries. Real holly, according to Mom, who said it only grows in British Columbia. Christmas was fast approaching. In our new, one room schoolhouse, excitement was rampant. It was all about exams, Christmas plays, and crafts.

Mostly for me it was the crafts. I had a picture of Santa Claus and was glueing cotton onto it, for his beard and eyebrows. I drew out and coloured a Santa hat from thicker cardboard, again glueing cotton to form the band around the head and a cotton ball for the top. I glued the hat onto the head and then glued the whole thing together onto a stiffer piece of board.

The teacher was ecstatic, she loved it. She made me show it to the whole class. All of a sudden everyone was glueing and pasting cotton and making Santa hats, and looking at my masterpiece.

After the Christmas play, we were all outside with Mom. That was when she pointed out the bright green leaves with bright red berries, her lovely holly, growing all over the church. “It only grows in British Columbia.”

Then she told us all that we would be moving back to Montréal. Then, maybe to Ottawa.

Train Stories

Scared, ashamed or even stupid, I do not know what my mother was feeling when she took her six sons and once again fled. This time from Lulu Island, BC, back to where she had started. What I do know is that she was not defeated.

How could she be? Her challenge was to get her six son's, ranging in age from 2 to 9, to Ottawa. Once there, her husband, our Father, would meet us with winter boots and warm coats.

We were a ragged bunch, having left Montréal by car a short yet so long four months before. Now we were destitute, with no place to go but back. Back to the life she had fled. She would return under her own terms. Although, I am sure, her terms were as yet undefined, even unto herself.

It was a tough trip for Mom. She didn't have enough money to pay the train fare home. We lied, Mickey and I had to pass as twins. To do this, I had to take two years off of my age. Mickey had to take one off of his. That made us five year old twins, and we travelled for free. The two younger guys, Johnny and Bill, travelled for free anyway. And Lender and Richard were half price.

We left the Pacific coast on a sunny December day, with warmth spilling out of the sky. For the most part we were wearing hand-me-down clothes. When we would arrive in Ottawa more than a week later, there would be three feet of snow on the ground.

That week on the train was so full of life's experiences that it filled me up, even to this day. As the train chugged its way out of Vancouver, the conductors came through the cars, collecting tickets. There was a bit of a commotion when it was our turn. First of all, the conductors didn't believe that Mickey and I were twins. He started talking to me.

"You're a pretty smart fellow, aren't you?" he said.

“Well yes,” I agreed with him. “Yes, I’m pretty smart,” I said, looking to my mother for direction. She stepped right in.

“Yes,” she said, “that Donald’s got enough brains for the whole family.” As Mom said this, she rubbed the top of my head. Then she picked Mickey up, saying “But Mickey here, will always be his bigger brother.”

The conductor’s face broke into a big grin. “First born then, was he?” he said.

“That’s right,” Mom replied. But another conductor, standing just behind him, was not to be undone. Pushing his way through, he put a hand on each of my shoulders, straightening me up in my seat. Then one of his hands was under my chin holding my face up to his.

“I don’t believe you’re only five years old.” he said. Waving his big finger in my face, I thought he was going to hit me on the forehead with it. Richard must have thought the same, for he stepped forward, with every intent I believe of hitting the conductor and freeing me from his grip.

My eyes betrayed Richard, for when I looked towards him, the conductor turned right toward him. His big finger was now pointing at Richard. “And how old are you?” he said.

“I’m eight!” spat Richard, and he really did spit too, because as the words came out of his mouth so did a spray of spit. The conductor was taken aback for a few seconds, but only a few.

He quickly turned to me, still holding my chin and waving his finger. All I could see was his big dirty fingernail. This time I was sure he was going to hit me. His fingernail was so big and dirty, it would surely cut me. I would get an infection. My forehead would get puss all over it, and I would die of infection.

“If he’s eight, then you’re seven!” the conductor continued. This time his fingernail did touch my forehead.

“Yes!” I yelled out, “Yes, I’m seven, and I’m just a little kid!” I looked at Mom, holding back my tears because I knew I had betrayed her. My mother was looking at the conductor with his dirty fingers. She looked real mad.

“He’s just a baby, you bastard!” was what she said to the conductor. “They’re all just babies and my husband, their Father, will pay the extra fare when we get to Ottawa.” Lennie stepped between Mom and the conductor right then.

“Yeah!” he said, looking right at the conductor, “Our father will take care of you, when we get to Ottawa.”

I looked at the Conductors, and the other people who had gathered around. Silent tears were running down my face as my mother pulled me and all her children to her. Together we were strong.

“Now leave us alone!” my Mother said, and they all did. Later as it started to get dark, the first Conductor, who had been more friendly to us earlier, brought us some sandwiches and milk. “Here,” he said, “these were left over in the kitchen and we’ll see you all in the dining-room car for breakfast in the morning. Don’t worry,” he said to Mom, “the kids and you gotta eat. We’ll just put it all on the bill and let your husband take care of it.” A little later on someone else brought us some pillows and blankets.

Wish that I could hug my Mom

And get a hug right back

And see the twinkle in her eye

And hear the mischief in her laugh.

Breakfast was great on the train and we ate like kings, but Mickey got sick right away. He didn't even get to eat. He had a fever and soon couldn't even get up. Mom stayed with him while the rest of us went to eat.

The conductor brought Mickey some soup and Mom some eggs and bacon, with toast and coffee. Oh how mom loved coffee. She ate the bacon and eggs, drank the coffee and saved the toast for us. But the conductor wanted to put Mickey off of the train. They wanted him and Mom to get off at the next stop.

An ambulance would meet them at the station, to take them to the hospital. The rest of us would stay on the train and go on to Ottawa, where Dad would be waiting for us.

"No way," I heard mom say. "No bloody way are you going to separate me from any of my kids." Boy, was she mad. The Conductors took a step back and all of us guys rushed in. We got around and in front of Mickey and behind Mom. We knew who was taking care of us.

"If one of us has to get off this train then we're all getting off, and then we're all going in the ambulance! And we're all going to stay in the hospital together. We are all staying together and that's that."

One of the Conductors stepped forward, his hands stretched forward like he was begging mom.

"Ma'am," he said, "you can't all stay in the hospital. There's just not enough room." Then he looked around us, at Mickey. "We're worried about that there young fellow is all. We want to do the right thing for everyone involved."

Mom smiled at that, and when she spoke she looked so sure of herself. “Then bring a Doctor on the train.” She said, “Telegraph them up ahead to have a doctor waiting when we pull into the next station. I know you can, because my father is an engineer, and two of my brother’s are conductors. They work for the CNR, out of Montréal in Québec. They’re always telegraphing up ahead for mail or special passengers, or whatever they want!”

“Ya,” said Lennie, “the CNR!”

“That’s a good idea Mom,” said Richard, as the rest of us guys just nodded our heads in agreement. Us older guys knew this was true.

Even the Conductors thought it was a good idea, and the mean one looked right at me and said, “Anything the CNR can do, The Canadian Pacific can do better.” Then he looked at Mom and said, “We’ll have a doctor on the train at the next station Ma’am. You keep your boy comfortable, while we make a bed for him in the sleeper car.” Then they all turned around and left us alone.

Mom looked at Mickey, then she looked at the rest of us and burst into tears. Nine year old Lennie was by her side in a flash, his arms around her and his soothing voice comforting, telling Mom everything was going to be alright. This made Mom start to laugh a bit, and she kissed Lennie on the cheek. She started hugging us all, and we all started laughing and hugging each other.

We followed Mom’s gaze as she looked down at Mickey. Her hand went to his forehead and as she gently stroked his hair back his feverish eyes opened. He gave a sort-of smile, and said, “I’m glad everything’s going to be okay now Mom.”

We all started talking at the same time, telling each other that everything was fine. The conductors came back to see what all the ruckus was about. They took one look at us and broke into such big smiles that I'm sure they hurt their faces.

About an hour later, after Mom had carried Mickey to a nicely made bed in the sleeper car, the train came to a stop. There weren't any smiles on the conductor's faces this time though, as they led the Doctor to where Mickey was laying. They introduced the doctor to Mom, and then pointed towards Mickey.

As the doctor's hand felt Mike's forehead, the conductor's voice rang out.

"All right, the rest of you kids, back to your seats in the other car!" When Mom looked at the conductor, he quickly added, "The Doctor needs room to breathe here."

"Hold on," said the doctor, "I want to have a quick look at each of them."

Now the conductors backed away from us, thinking, I guess, that we might all have something contagious like scarlet fever, and that maybe their whole train would be quarantined. Turned into a hospital.

The Doctor opened his black medicine bag, and took out a mirror and a handful of big, round lollipops. All of our eyes lit up. He shone reflected light off of the mirror and into our mouth's, as he held our tongues down with a flat stick. Every one of us gagged and almost puked in turn, while the others laughed. He gave us each a lollipop after our examinations, then sent us to the connecting car to wait.

We knew the situation was serious, despite the candy in our mouths. This kept us very quiet, except of course for the sound of those round lollipops being slurped and then crunched between our teeth. Towards the end of our feast we started looking at each other, dribbling lollipop juice down our chins. We all started laughing at the same time, pointing at each other.

Other people riding in our car also started laughing. They were laughing at us, laughing at ourselves. That made us laugh all the more. Then the conductor came in. "What's going on here?" he yelled, and then everybody shut up.

Before too long, the doctor walked in saying that everything was fine. "That boy just needs some rest, and to get home as soon as possible. He can get better care here on this train from his mother and brothers than he would in a strange hospital."

Everyone in our car started cheering and clapping hands. The Doctor put his hands up, to stop everyone and then said, "He does need some peace and quiet though."

People were silent after that, but we knew they were happy. Everyone was smiling and patting each other, and us, on the backs. Then when mom came into the car, everyone's smile doubled. Even the grumpy conductor looked like a happy man. Mom was like that. Every time she came into the room you either got scared or happy. This time everyone was happy and I knew everything was really all right.

Again, the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains struck me as the train moved on. I could only wonder at the strength of the towering bridges we crossed over. The amazing cliff faces on one side of us, and a sharp canyon on the other side. Then to go through a tunnel, carving through those deep, dark mountains. It was like a toy train set and we were tiny toy people, riding in it.

As the train moved on from stop to stop, people changed. The conductor would come through the car calling the name of the next station, and people would filter around. It was just like the riders on the streetcars in Montréal.

At one of the many stations, a woman got on and sat on the seat facing me. We smiled at each other, and I continued to look out the window until I heard some paper tearing. The women

had taken out a roll of candy. I could not help myself from staring, and as she peeled back more paper revealing the top candy, wrapped in its own paper, I gawked.

She tilted the pack towards me, offering me up the candy. I reached for it, taking the whole package and pulling. She held onto the roll and pulled back. I pulled again, and she pulled back. Our eyes met and she said, "Just take one!" I did. I ate it feeling a bit greedy, but wishing I had more. Then when I realised there would be no more candy forthcoming, I changed seats.

Later on, the conductor came through the car, calling out, "Crooks Station, next stop! Crooks Station, passengers for Crooks Station please move up to car number four! Passengers will disembark from car number 4 please!" His voice faded out as he moved on to the next car. I was surprised when the woman who had given me the candy got up and started taking down her luggage.

A crook, I thought, I would never have guessed that she was a crook.

Another time, travelling through the prairie grasses, the train slowed down quite quickly and blew its whistle. We moved ahead at a slow speed. I had already moved up to the first car, right behind the engine. I peered out of the window to see what was going on.

I first noticed smoke, and then saw three campfires in the midst of several beautiful, huge teepees. There was a group of First Nations peoples sitting, or standing around the fires. There were horses being held by some of them. The horses seemed to be quite skittish, afraid of the puffing train.

I was mesmerised! It was so surprising to see them, right here in the middle of nowhere. Then, two Indigenous boys about my age came riding on horses, right up to my window.

They whooped and hollered, then started shooting pretend arrows at me. I shot back with my pretend gun. I ducked down to avoid an arrow. Then, when I looked up again, the boys were

gone and the train had picked up speed. I realised that I was somewhere, that this place did have a name. I just didn't know it.

I sat there with my forehead pressed against the train's window, bewildered and amazed at the same time. Then all I could do was stare out of that window at the vast expanse of small shrub bushes, spread out as far as the eyes could see. I thought that maybe I might see some rabbits or foxes.

That, or maybe on the next afternoon, Mom asked me to go find Lender and Richard.

"Tell them that it will soon be time for supper. The last time I saw them, they were going that way." she said, pointing to the back of the train.

So off I went, glad to have something to do. Car by car, I went through the train, searching for my brothers. I went right to the end. When I opened that last door, I was hit with a blast of violin music, and of dancing and laughing. I entered a world of swirling, brightly coloured dresses. Ladies, dancing in the isles. People clapping their hands together, people singing. It was like a beautiful circus. I could do nothing but laugh out loud with the group of people, all having fun together.

Lennie and Richie were sitting right at the back of the car, high up on boxes. Sitting with the violin players and the others. The happiest two guys I have ever seen. When they saw me, they called me over. People let me pass as I waded through them, laughing and talking in a language I did not understand. Rubbing my hair as they guided me forward, with pats on my back.

Lennie and Richard were drinking something from cups. When the man with the jug offered me a cup, Lennie stopped him. He said to me, "It's wine Donnie, and you're too young to drink wine."

As the music started up, the people started dancing again and the party continued. I sat there with Lennie and Richie, in yet another new, wonderful world.

Eventually the conductor came into the car, and told us to get back to our Mom. "Your mother is looking for you" was what he said. Once we got back Lennie and Richie fell asleep, even before they got to eat.

I spent time with Mickey, who was feeling a lot better by this time. I told him all about the boys outside on their horses, and about the party at the end of the train, with our mother and Johnny listening in fascination. Billie meanwhile was fast asleep between Lennie and Richard.

Late one night a few days later, I awoke to hear Mom and Dad talking. Our Dad! We had arrived in Ottawa. He had brought us warm clothes, and we would be going on ahead to Montréal.

Uncle Wilfred, Mom's brother, would pick us up at the train station. He would be taking us to our Grandparents, in Richmond. We would spend the Christmas holidays there, while Dad was trying to get us a place to live in Ottawa. Then, at last, we would all be together again.

I heard Mom tell Dad that I, Donald, had really missed him. "Wake him up and kiss him goodnight" Mom said.

"No," said Dad, "Let him sleep." Then he left, and my little heart broke.

My pride was too big. I pretended to sleep. It's too bad that I didn't jump up and hug him as soon as I heard his voice. I am sure that our short relationship would have changed for the better. But we were not really going home, and things would never be as they were before.

Dad got off the train in Ottawa, and we moved on to Richmond Québec, to Mom's parents. Lennie and I stayed at Uncle Maynards in Danville, while Richard and Mickie stayed

with Uncle Harry, who lived right next door to Mom's parents. Mom, Johnnie and Billie stayed with her parents.

Uncle Maynerd and Aunt Dorthy, Mom's sister, lived on a farm, and there was no end to the things we could do. We had spent most of the day before Christmas tobogganing with our cousins and some of their friends. Our cheeks felt like they were on fire, and we were very happy to be there.

Just before supptime, Aunty Dorthy sent Lenny and I to a neighbours house to get a pitcher of milk. I thought it funny, bringing our own jug to be filled with milk instead of the milkman delivering it to us. As we knocked on the door of the old house, we heard a cow mooing. It sounded like there was a cow in the house. Lenny and I looked at each other in disbelief, then Lenny shrugged and knocked again. Again we heard a cow moo, this time louder.

"Do you think the cows are in the house?" I asked.

"It sure sounds like it," Lenny said, as the door slowly opened. There before us stood an old man, with hay hanging out of his mouth. He was chewing it.

"Moooo," he said, "what do you want?"

"Milk," said Lenny, "We want a jug of cow's milk." Lenny held out the empty jug and the old man took it.

As he shut the door, we heard him moo again. Lenny and I were mystified. We looked at each other and shrugged. We heard the old man laughing as he opened the door again, handing the jug full of milk back to Lennie. Then he said, "Don't spill it, 'cause there's no mooore where that come from, no mooore." Then he shut the door.

As we walked down the road to Aunt Dorothy's house I asked Lenny, "Do you think that old man is half cow?"

“No, I think that maybe he keeps the cows in the house to keep the milk warm in the winter. That way it wont freeze.” he added, trying to make sense of what we had just seen and heard. It sort of made sense to me. We walked the rest of the way in silence. Then Lenny moo-ed, and I laughed. As we entered the farmhouse Aunt Dorothy took the milk from Lenny. She asked us what we thought of the old man.

“I thought he was half cow!” I said, “He eats hay and Mooes!”. Uncle Maynard laughed and rubbed my head. As he and Aunt Dorothy snuggled up, Lenny jumped right in with his thoughts.

“I think he keeps the cows in the house during the winter, for warmth.”

“I think you're more right than Donald is.” said Uncle Maynard, as he scuffed Lennie's hair in admiration and Aunt Dorothy poured us each a glass of still-warm milk.

Another thing that happened that Christmas week was that on Christmas Eve, we saw Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer's nose, shining brightly.

Lenny and I were upstairs, in the bedroom we were using as ours. I was already in the bed, Lennie was looking out of the window.

“Holly crow,” Lenny whispered, “I see Rudolph's nose shining. Hurry up Donnie! Come and see this!” I was out of bed in an instant, beside Lennyand peering out of the window.

“Where? *Where* is he?? I pleaded.

“Right there, beside the barn! Look right beside the old tractor, and there he was. A red tractor light, reflecting the red nose of Rudolph the rednosed reindeer.”

Ma, our grandmother, made meat pies at Christmas time. Tourtiere, is what she called them, French Canadian meat pies.

I have an image in my mind of my Grandmother. She looks a little like Madam Pluff, from the Pluff Family. An English language television show about a French-Canadian family. A strong woman, with a brood of children around her, us guys. Her sleeves rolled up, rolling pin in hand. She was tackling the production of her Christmas Pies.

“Always give one to a French person,” Ma would say. “If you can't give a whole pie or even a small one, just give them a piece, and don't forget to thank them, tell them why, you're giving them the Tourtiere. Thank them, for their families adopting Irish children who were orphaned during the potato famine transportation.”

Ottawa

I don't remember moving to Ottawa, we were just there. We lived in a large brick duplex, and it was owned by a family named the Kaufmen's. They lived on the other side of the duplex. There was the mother and father with three dark haired daughters, and the eldest two were about my age.

One day the two girls took me across the street where their friends lived. All together, there were four girls and me. One of the girls cut a hole out of a towel and placed the towel over my face, leaving my lips exposed through the hole, and they took turns kissing me. All I had to do was to guess which one was doing the kissing. I was doing pretty good, guessing the first two kissers; The Kaufmen sisters. The next girl was a really good kisser. She kissed me for a long time and had soft moving lips. When she was finished, the towel was removed and I in my haste, instantly, chose the prettiest girl there.

“Wrong!” I was informed, “It was her.” All fingers pointing to the least attractive girl.

“Blah!” I yelled out, wiping my lips with the back of my hand. That was the end of the game. The girls sent me home.

Later when I was telling Lennie and Richard about that, they told me that I was stupid.

“You should have just said, ‘that was a lovely kiss’. Then you should have put the towel back over your face.” Later I heard that my two older brothers were playing spin-the-bottle with those four girls.

Mickey and I made our first communion together, in Ottawa. It somehow had passed me by in Montréal when I was in grade one, and I was now in grade two. I was also in grade 2 when we lived on Lulu Island, BC. The year before.

We were walking to school at lunch time, dressed up in our first communion suits, ribbon-badges and all. As we walked past the Protestant school, a big kid came running up to the school fence that separated us.

“Look at the twins!” he yelled out, and then again, only louder. “Look at the twins!”

First I felt ashamed, and then angry as other kids came up to the fence, crowding each other just to have a look at us. I took two big steps up to the fence and yelled out in my anger.

“We are not twins, we are making our first communion! Don't you know the difference?” Most of the kids just shrugged and turned away, mumbling to themselves and each other. But the big kid had his face pressed against the fence. He was holding onto the fence with both hands, peering hard at me, his nose sticking out through one of the metal square holes. He looked straight at me and kept saying it.

“Twins, twins twinsss!” I knew that I would hurt my hand, but I didn't care. I punched that nose and fence real hard.

The kid was so surprised. His nose, I could tell, was hurt really badly, and his eyes were watering. At first his hands were holding his nose. Then he grabbed the fence and started shaking it, swearing his head off as his nose bled like hell. I turned around, took Mickey's hand and walked away, protected from his fury by his own Protestant school's fence.

Despite the violence beforehand, the First Communion went great. Afterwards, we took the streetcar to Dad's work. He worked making fur coats for a Company named “Chapman's Furriers”. Everyone there started giving Mickie and I money. Some gave us quarters while others gave 50 cent pieces. It was quite a day.

Pictures were taken with co-employees. I will never forget the big buxom blond woman, with her tight sweater and a skirt that, I'm sure, she would have trouble squirming out of if it was so tight. I thought she was a fur coat model. She was falling all over us, trying to get at Daddy.

When we were ready to leave, Dad was flagging down a taxi. An old man walking down the street stopped and gave Mickey and I each a silver dollar. It was great! A day to remember. At home there was a party with cake, and family and friends.



It was at our school in Ottawa that I got my ears nearly pulled clean off my head by my teacher, who incidentally was a Nun. I was talking to someone in class and the teacher saw me. She yelled at me and told me to get out in the hall and wait for her there. I waited for a while before she finally came out. When she did, she told me to be quiet, then commenced to pull both of my ears at the same time away from my head as hard as she could. It really hurt, she wouldn't stop. So, I called her a bitch. She let my ears go then, for only a second, then brought both her hands back together, slapping both of my ears at the same time. It was a terrible experience which I will never forget.

Also, it was in Ottawa on Halloween that Mickie and I won first prize for our costumes. Mom had made us each into foxes. She used the burlap bags that she had taken from the green-bean picking farm, on the way to BC. Lennie and Richard also won prizes for their costumes. They were The Pirates from Lulu Island.

All of the classes were paraded through the school, to all the other classes. Everywhere I would go, kids would point me out in admiration. Until the very last class we visited, that is. There, a kid pointed at me and said, in a loud voice, "Oh! I already saw that fox costume."

At first I was mortified, but then I thought about Mickey. He had to go through all the classes that I had already gone through, wearing the same costume as I had on. It's too bad that the teachers hadn't put us together. We would have been The Foxes from the Prairie.

Today, I find it amazing that Mom was able to hold onto those burlap bags over all of that long journey. She took them over the Rocky Mountains to BC, then by train to Montréal, and finally made us guys the best Halloween costumes in Ottawa with them. There we won prizes, wearing the stolen bean bags in their new forms.

Mom would often take us to the Rideau Canal in downtown Ottawa, to see the Parliament buildings. Once, she even took us to the museum.

We would also meet our Dad, and have picnics in the parks that ran all along the sides of the canal.

I don't know how long we lived in Ottawa, I think it may have been two winters. Gerry Bowles was born there, The Seventh Son. It was quite normal, having a new baby around the house. Things went on as they always did. Life was quiet, but it was good.

Then, wham, bam, thank you mam, we were moving back to Montréal. But, because Lennie and I were the only ones with a chance of passing our school year, we stayed behind in Ottawa. We stayed with Mom's brother, my Uncle Jimmy, and his wife Aunt Millie. The rest of the guys moved back to Montréal, living with different aunts and uncles until Mom and Dad found us all an apartment.

One day, Len and I went fishing in the canal. Lenny had a big black bicycle with a basket on the front, to carry all the stuff. He sat on the seat and peddled, while I rode on the cross bar. Off we went through downtown Ottawa, stopping at all the red lights and obeying the rules of the road. The front basket held some fishing line, hooks, sinkers and worms. All Lennie's stuff, plus two sandwiches.

We stopped in a park that Mom had taken us to a few times, to meet Dad and have a picnic with him, when Dad's work had been making the fur coats. Lennie set two lines up for us, putting a hook and sinker on a piece of line each.

"Here," he said, handing me my line. "Put your own worm on while I fix my line up." I put my worm on the hook, wrapping the end of my line around my hand. I was ready, so I dropped my line into the water and waited. Waited for the tug that would mean I had a fish.

We waited together, talking about nothing, eating our sandwiches and soaking up the sunlight. After about half an hour of this, Lennie decided that we should move down the canal a bit. Down to where a big tree shaded the water. He told me to fish in the shadow of this tree.

I lowered my line into the darkest part, leaning it against the canal wall. Right away, just like we always say, wham! A big bass hit it. My line straightened out, tightening hard around my wrist. I pulled that fish upwards, splashing towards the top of the water. Then Lennie lent a hand. Together we hauled that black fishing line up, hand over hand and before that big bass knew what was happening. He found himself going nuts and flipping all over the place on dry land. We got him and I held him down on the ground while Lennie slit its throat.

A short time later, we packed up our gear. With the fish in the basket and me on the side bar, Lennie peddled us onward, bound for Uncle Jimmy's house.

Every once in a while I would hold the bass up to show the people as they were walking down the streets or driving in their cars, especially at red lights. They really loved it. When we passed in front of the parliament buildings, there was a Policeman directing traffic. He stopped us at the traffic intersection to allow a large group of people to cross the street. I reached for the fish, but before I could hold it up, I heard Lennie's voice whispering, "Don't pick up the fish Donnie. Leave it in the basket, I think bass are out of season. Don't let the policeman see."

I think that I looked a bit scared, so Lennie just smiled at me and said, "Don't worry Donnie, just wave to him as we pass. Give him a big smile." It bothered me a bit that at the busiest street in downtown Ottawa, I couldn't lift up that fish and show him off to everyone.

A similar thing happened years later, when baby Gerry's daughter Abigail caught a big salmon of her own. We were all adults then, married with children of our own. We had all met up in Nova Scotia for a fishing trip.

At that time, Lennie, Billie and Gerry all lived in Nova Scotia. Richard came over from P.E.I., and Johnnie, Mickey and I all came up from Ontario. We were fishing at a place we called “Mommie’s Pond” in Dayspring, Nova Scotia. Mom lived across the road from a pond on the Lahave River, when she and her second husband, Ernie Wright, had first moved to Nova Scotia.

Abigail wanted to fish with her Uncle Lennie, “Just because” as she so aptly put it. “Uncle Lennie is the best fisherman and knows the best spots”. She parked herself down beside him. Len was a bit startled by Abigail's sudden appearance. He let it be known that he felt intruded on.

“Now Abby, I just got all my stuff set up here, so don't you go and knock everything over.” After a short pause, Abigail moved in a bit closer to Lennie and tossed her line over his. Lennie started in again. “We are on a hill here Abby, top of the hill. Not a lot of space at the top of the hill.” Then he noticed Abigail’s line over his, but before Lennie had a chance to say anything, Gerry spoke up.

“Abigail”, he said, “You cast your hook right over your Uncle Lennie's fishing line.” Abigail's response was instant.

“That's because his line was in my spot!” she said.

“You're going to have to move Abby, Lennie was here first. Go find your own spot.” Her Dad told her. That's when I chimed in.

“Come on Abby, come with me. I'll show you a good spot just down a bit, by that old tree laying in the water.” Abigail looked at me, then at her father, a bit sceptical.

“It's okay Abby, Donnie's a good fisherman too. Not as good as Uncle Lennie, but he'll take good care of you. He knows where the fish live.”

After she untangled her and Lennie's line, I led the way. “I was fishing here a while ago,” I told Abby, “and I caught a few fish! But there was a really big one that kept eating my worm and then getting away.” I explained, as we approached the old dead tree laying in the water. “Just toss your line right out there, as close to the end of that tree as you can.” I said. She did as I said, and *wham*, a big salmon hit it.

Abby hit back and then hauled that salmon, flapping wildly, across the top of Mommie's Pond and onto dry land. I held him down, and we got him. I realised that it was a salmon, and probably out of season. “We might have to let it go.” I said.

“I am not letting it go!” said Abigail, “At least not until my Dad sees it.”

“Okay.” I said, “Let's get it down to him, and we'll let him decide.” A cloak of secrecy surrounded us as we showed the fish to Gerry.

“That's out of season Donnie.” was what he said.

“Yeah, but I know. It's not my fish anyways, it's Abigail's!”

Then Gerry says, “Aha, and Abigail's a minor, right? So I'm the guy that has to make the decision? Right.”

“Right”, said Abigail.

“Well,” said Gerry, looking right at her, “what do you think we should do Abigail?”

“Well, I would like to keep it Dad, but it's up to you.” That's when I jumped in,

“So we're going to keep it then, right Ger?” as I patted him on the back. As Gerry was giving in a bit, I took the fish and put it in the back of Billie's van. My intent was to take it to Billie's house and cook it up. Yet somehow, when we finally did arrive at Billie's, the fish was

gone. Someone else had scooped it up from me. Although how I came to own it in the first place, I'll never know.

Back To Montréal

When Lennie and I finally made it back to Montréal, we joined the other guys. Here we were together again, the seven brothers with our mother and father, living at 1640 Crevia Street in apartment number 1, in Ville Saint-Laurent, Montréal, Québec. Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation was our landlord, and rent was \$64 a month.

Our street consisted of about thirty apartment buildings, each with forty eight three-bedroom apartments. There was a good mix of French and English families. Except for the occasional fight which was usually between older kids or adults, we all got along pretty well. Each building had its own backyard, shared by those forty eight different families.

Each apartment had its own clothesline. They were attached to each of six telephone poles which ran along the back lane that connected our back yard with all the other backyards on our side of the street.

Anyone who had a car, parked it and worked on it in the backyard. Most people didn't have cars though, so there was a lot of room for us kids to play. There was even a big field, where two of the apartments had burned down before we had moved there. The rubble had been removed, leaving a couple of big holes which made quite a marvellous, swampy area to play in.

It was here for the first time that I had heard real swearing. Swearing just for the sake of swearing. And it was Richard who did the swearing. He and another kid were showing me how to catch pollywogs in the muddy water, when Richard yelled out, "Look at the size of that fucking pollywog!"

I was shocked! I sucked in my breath and let it out slowly. Richard looked at me with a question written all over his face. *Are you a big kid yet, or are you still a baby?* I was still a baby, and therefore all I could say was,

“I’m telling mommy!”

“Well, go ahead then!” he said. “You’re nothing but a bloody baby anyway.”

“Oh!” again I sucked in my breath, and again I let it out slowly. Richard looked at me with disgust written all over his face.

“Get the fuck out of here” he said to me. “Go on, you eff-en baby, beat it.” I got up and ran, calling Mommy for almost three long seconds. Then, I stopped and turned around.

“Why the fuck, why the fuck should I get out of here?” I yelled back at him. “I’m having lots of eff-en fun, building those eff-en dams. Besides, you said that we were going to save the whole damn neighbourhood from a big flood!” Richard just laughed and laughed. Smiling, we walked towards me and he put his arm around my shoulders.

“Ok brother, let’s go save the goddamn neighbourhood.” he said.

Still smiling, I said to him, “Where was that eff-en big pollywog you saw?” Richie and I had a wonderful time that afternoon.

But, as spring afternoons do, this one was fast disappearing. Mom had sent Mickey out to get us home. We saw him waving us in from the very edge of our backyard, at the beginning of our first muddy hole. We were a couple of hungry, dirty little kids when Richard and I came in for supper. Mom took one look at us, a big smile on her face and a laugh in her voice.

“And what have you guys been up to all day? Just look at you!” I didn’t need more prompting than that. I felt pride swelling in my chest.

“We been building fucking dams all day Mom, and we saved the whole goddamned neighbourhood too. Mommy! You should have seen the fucking big pollywog Richie found!” That was when Richard smacked me in the back of the head.

“Don't swear in the house,” he said to me.

“Don't swear like that anywhere!” Mom said, “Or I'll slap your face! In fact, both of you wash up and go to bed without any supper!”

One time, us guys played football in a muddy field. When we got home, we were so full of mud that Mom made us strip down to our underwear in the backyard. Then she hosed us all down from the gallery high above. It wasn't long before every kid in the yard was running under the water hose, and the backyard was on fire with a party.

Another time, Dad sent Mickey and I to the corner store, to buy 40 popsicles. They were 5 cents each back then. He gave one to every kid in the yard, and again the yard was just on fire with a party.

I don't remember how long Dad was with us there on Crevia Street. It seemed to me that only a short time passed, and then he was gone. He got a job as a chef working on the DEW Line, way up North in the lands now known as Nunavut.

Before I was born, during the second World War, Dad was in the Navy. He was stationed in Saint-Hyacinthe, Québec. That was where Lennie and Richie were born. Dad was a trained Navy chef on one of the ships.

When Richard was born, Dad's ship was scheduled to leave for Europe. He was sent ashore to be with Mom, and someone else was sent in his place. When the ship was in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence River, it was struck by a German torpedo, and Dad's replacement, along with

other kitchen staff and men all the aboard, were killed. I guess, in a way, Richard saved Dad's life, along with all of his, as-yet unborn brothers.

I was nine years old when Dad went to work in the Arctic. Up to where the Inuit peoples live.

Dear Mom, I miss you.

I miss the Dad I never knew.

I imagine that, over the years

You have missed him too.



I remember the life after that, Mom. Our little corner of the backyard, where you always seemed to be the hub. You knew our neighbours, they came to you when they needed help with something. Or just to talk about their lives, over a cup of coffee. Lots of laughter, sometimes a

few tears. The highs and lows of the neighbourhood were passed around our back gallery. It was nice.

I remember one afternoon. You, your friend Loraine Kinkade, and the French women Eddie who lived next door, were having a party. A party of three. You each had a big bottle of beer, and were having a good time, laughing and sharing stories, and talking about your kids. That evening, when Eddie's husband came home from work, he forbade Eddie to associate with you and your friends ever again.

Then there was Blackie Deshna, who lived across from us. You and a bunch of other women used to help her out. She would occasionally have some kind of a seizure, and she knew when one was coming on. If it was imminent, she would ask for help. You Mom, and other neighbours, would hold her down as she thrashed about. One of you would have to hold a stick in her mouth, so she wouldn't bite her own tongue off.

During those years, Dad would come home for a couple of weeks twice a year. Usually it would be in the summer, and maybe at Christmas time. Mostly, the summer times would be fun. It was a time to see his family, and more likely to go fishing. On one of his summer holidays he invited all of his family to our house for a Chinese dinner. He was the Chef, while Lennie and Richie were the waiters, and Mickie and I were the dishwashers.

It was a marvellous feast. Two of Dad's brothers came, with their wives and children. Also, his sister Aunty Marie, with her husband, our Uncle Charlie. Then there was Aunty Madeline with our cousin Ralph. When you add up all of us kids and our parents, there was quite a big party.

All of us kids ate first. The whole bunch of us sat at the kitchen table as well as around two card tables. First there were finger sized egg rolls. They were fantastic, and we each had two

of these. They were followed by a big plate of Chinese Food. As we ate, we began to hum. We hummed as a group, like a happy church choir. We hummed with the occasional *yum*.

Our parents, the adults, gathered at the kitchen door. They started laughing at us, humming as we ate.

“Listen to them kids humming! They're really shovelling it in, aren't they?” came the voice of one of our uncles. We all looked up with grins on our faces. Then the adults started coming right into the kitchen, talking about how good the food must be. Wanting a taste.

Us kids put our elbows on the table. We leaned over our plates, protectively. We ate faster. Then Mom's voice chimed out. “That's enough you guys. Get back to the parlour and wait your turn. There's plenty more to go around!”

As the adults departed back to the parlour with the promise of another beer or drink, us kids relaxed a bit and resumed humming. It wasn't long before our plates were empty and our bellies very full.

Us older guys started right in, with Lennie and Richard cleaning up and Mickey and I doing the dishes. While Dad cooked some more sauces and whatever else was needed, Mom kept everything moving and within 20 minutes, the adults were sitting around the table, being served by the two waiters; Lennie and Richard. As the adults ate, they too started humming! They hummed a beautiful melody, and us guys and our cousins all ran to the kitchen in delight, all saying the same thing. “You're humming too!” The adults lifted their heads, smiling and laughing with us.

“It's really good, Lender!” said one of my uncles, as they all raised their glasses and we cheered Daddy, the Chef. Then it was Dad speaking up, thanking everyone for coming over, and for the help us guys were giving him. Then he said,

“All right you guys, back to the parlour. Go watch the TV, because Disneyland will be starting in 5 minutes!”

Another time when Dad was home for a few weeks in the summer, we took him to Terrebonne, to go fishing. Our neighbour, Blackie Deshna's partner Renee Brown, used to take us guys camping with Blackie and her three daughters, and it was he who had first taken us to Terrebonne.



We would drive off of Montréal Island, over the back river. Passing Saint-Vincent-De-Paul Penitentiary, where we would often see the prisoners working on the sides of the roads. Then would cross another river, and then into the town of Terrebonne. A short ride down by the river, and we would then enter the camp grounds.

Later us guys would make that trip on our own. Tying tents and fishing gear onto the bikes, we would be off for a few days. It became one of our favourite places, away from home.

This time, Renee Brown took us guys and Dad there for a day's fishing. That was when I caught Mickey's big pike. Dad, Renee and us guys were all fishing off of an old dam which fed water into a large pond. This, in turn, fed a swimming area.

I had just lost my hook, a big 5 inch Red Devil, and I returned to the car to get another one. After getting the hook, I was just starting off to head back to the dam when I met Mickey walking towards me. Very excited.

"Big Pike!" he shouted, holding his hands and arms out as far as they could go. "Big Pike! Huge! Donnie, it was huge!"

"Where? What happened? Did you catch it?" The questions flew out of my mouth. Mickey should have seen what was coming, but he didn't.

"Right behind the old outhouse!" he said.

Now, that outhouse was a scary place. I remember once looking down the hole and seeing a large snake slithering through the foul stuff below. It was quite a shock, and I never used that outhouse again.

"I was standing right behind the outhouse!" Mickey continued. "I cast right out to those lily pads, you know the ones straight out? As soon as the hook touched the water, this big pike grabbed it! Fighting and splashing, you never saw anything like it! I reeled it right in and when I got it to the shore," Mickey stopped to take a gulping breath of air, and then continued. "You know that hill you have to stand on out there? I tried to drag him out of the water and up that hill. He broke my line and slid back into the water and swam away!"

"What hook were you using?" I asked.

"A big Red Devil." he said.

"Like this?" I held up my line.

“Yes!” he said, and then he finally caught on. “Hey, don’t you catch my fish!” he said, “I’m just going back to the car to get a new hook. I’ll be right back! Don’t you catch my fish!”

“Don’t worry” I said, “He won’t be biting anything again for a little while.”

“Just don’t fish there!” Mickey said, “Don’t fish behind the old out house!”

A minute later, I stood on the rise of land and cast my line out. Mickey had run back to the car for a new hook, and I had run in the opposite direction. My hook landed about an inch from the lily pads, and instantly, the water exploded.

I swear to God, that fish jumped so far out of the water that I thought it was going to fly away. I reeled it in as fast as I could, with that fish flailing and skipping and turning somersaults all over the water, until I pulled it to shore. I grabbed my line and tried to haul him up over the bank. My line broke, and to my horror, the big pike fell back into the water. It lay there for one second, which was all I needed.

I landed in the water with my knees on each side of the fish's body, and my two hands under its gills. I leaned back, throwing that fish over my head onto dry land. In a flash, I was out of the water and back up the bank after it. My left hand was holding the fish, pinning it to the ground. When the fish made an attempt to struggle, my right hand smashed into its head. I punched it four or five times. Then that fish stopped struggling.

I looked up, and saw Mickey looking down at me. The look on his face sent fear through my body. It was very obvious that Mickey wanted to kill me right there, on the spot. I looked down at the fish, and for the first time I noticed that the fish had both Mickey's and my hooks, hanging from the side of its mouth. I reached for the hooks, taking the bottom one out. As I rose up, I passed Mickey's hook back to him.

“Here”, I said, “I got your hook back for you.” The look on Mickey's face never changed.

“I thought you said that pike would not be biting anything for a while, Donnie.” He said. Then he took his hook and just turned around and walked away. I truly felt ashamed.

There were good times and there were bad times, and as we grew, things changed.

Now, Mom was a very attractive woman. She was alone, and busy, I'm sure, with seven sons. And, I am sure, just as lonely as we were without our Dad there with us. We had moved to many homes, in far away places. We were not the same people. And we had all been separated from each other for a short time when we had left Ottawa. Each of us guys stayed with different Uncles and Aunts.

Lennie and I had of course stayed in Ottawa. Richard stayed with Uncle Nelson, and he of all of us I think had the toughest times. He just wanted to be with Daddy. Someone would have stayed with Aunty Dorothy, maybe Mickey and Johnnie. The younger guys, Billy and Gerry, stayed with Mom at her parents house, I suppose. So when Lennie and I moved from Ottawa to Ville Saint-Laurent, the rest of the guys were already there, already together and living on Crevia Street.

And everyone had changed. Things were very different, we really went our separate ways on that street. There were just too many things to do. Too many people to fight with. The city of Montréal was laid out before us, and we were in our little corner of it. Already veterans of street cars and travel, we ran wild.

But Mom had enough. She got sick, and she went into the hospital. And so we, us kids that is, went to Miscou Island, in New Brunswick. We went to live with our Aunty Joan, yet again. Only this time she didn't live in Laval West, where we had robbed the store. She lived on

this Island in the Atlantic Ocean. Miscou Island, in the gulf of the St. Lawrence River, in The Gaspé.

So, let me tell you about our trip down there. There were 11 of us, and we just piled into Uncle Bert's car, along with 'that big, damned dog.'

Well, in the end we left that dog on the side of the highway. Abandoned it, you know what I mean. We dumped it. Opened the car door and let the dog out for a pee, then we just drove away. This has to do with values, and the values held at that time by my Auntie Joan, who used to babysit us when we lived in our first house. She explained it to me years later, when I asked her about that dog.

"Well Jesus Christ, Donald, would you rather your Uncle Bert had dumped off a couple of you kids? Here we are, me, Bert, our baby Terry, you seven boys, and Richard's friend, whatever his name was. That's two adults, nine kids and that *big, damned dog*. The dog weighed as much as any three of you kids tied together. It was foaming at the mouth, and drooling all over everybody! The babies were crying, you were whining, and Lennie and Richard were bickering. Then that stupid dog drooled all over the back of Bert's neck."

All of a sudden, Bert had that car over to the side of the road, cursing and swearing. He got out of the car yelling, "Don't let any of the kids out!" Then he let the dog out for a pee. Bert got back into the car. He shut the door, then he just drove away. We were all looking at the dog having a pee. The dog looked back at us as we were driving away.

"Hey, wait for me!" he seemed to be saying. "Hey, you forgot me!" Running behind us, just dribbling pee.

“Hey Bert, you forgot the dog?” we all started yelling together, “The Dog! You forgot the Dog!” Uncle Bert was driving that car about a hundred miles an hour by this time. He turned his head towards us and shouted.

“Does anybody else want to have a pee? I'll let you out.” We all shut up. So much for values, eh? Different ones at different times.

Shortly after we lost that dog, Aunt Joan started hollering, “Bert, look at that, will you, just look? You guys, all of you look!”

“What, what?” we all started yelling, “Look at what, where?”

“There!” said Lennie, “Look!” We all looked to where he was pointing, and we saw them, a bride and groom, still dressed up in their wedding clothes. They were standing on the side of the road with two suitcases, hitchhiking. She was still in her beautiful, white, shining wedding dress. He was dressed, to the hilt in black, wearing his wedding suit

“Oh Bert!” said Aunt Joan, “I wish we could give them a ride!”

“For God’s sake, Joan,” Bert yelled out, “there’s no room!” Hearing this and knowing Uncle Bert was wrong, I shouted out.

“Yes there is Bert, they can have the dog's place!”

“Oh, Tabernac!” roared Uncle Bert, but then he started laughing and blowing the car horn. We all started waving and cheering as we drove past that beautiful couple. We passed them two more times that day, as we drove through the Gaspee. The second time we saw them, we all started yelling together,

“Look, look! Another bride and groom, look!”

“Holy shit,” said Auntie Joan, “Bert, it’s another bride and groom. There’s two of them!”

“No no,” Uncle Bert explained, “they're the same ones, I saw them pass us a while back, too. Someone gave them a lift almost right away.”

“Well!” said Aunt Joan, “you should have told me!” She gave Bert a shove, as we all cheered and waved with Uncle Bert pounded on the horn again. Auntie Joan made Uncle Bert promise *to tell her* if they passed us again.

“You know I love that sort of stuff honey.” she said, snuggling into her husband.

“Oh honey,” he said, “The car was so quiet. I didn’t want the kids to get going again.”

“Honey!” said Gerry. “I love honey!” Gerry was only three years old then, but he could talk real well.

Billy, a few years older than Gerry, yelled “I like honey sandwiches!”

“I’m hungry too!” Johnny joined in. Mickey and I just looked at each other, raised our eyebrows and smiled.

“I like ketchup.” Billy started in again. At that, Richard yelled out, almost as loud as Uncle Bert.

“I hate Ketchup! It looks like blood.”

“We better feed them before they eat my car!” Uncle Bert said, as he pulled over to the side of the road. We all thought that was pretty funny, and some of us started taking pretend bites out of the back seat of the car.

We had a picnic in a field, by the side of the road. It was fun, even without the dog to play with; We had each other. We saw the bride and groom again later that day, getting out of a red sports car in front of a fancy motel.

TV IN EVERY ROOM, read a big sign on the Motel roof.

As we passed them again, Uncle Bert blew the car horn again we all started waving and cheering. The Bride turned and gave us the biggest smile we had ever seen. She was shining.

“Oh!” sighed, Auntie Joan, “Aren’t they beautiful!” She snuggled up to Bert again and for a while we all felt her love and contentment. It was contagious.

As the car drove off, we all simply retreated into our own thoughts and reveries. With daylight fading and darkness approaching, Aunt Joan started talking about the ferryboat ride. It would carry the car and us over part of the Atlantic Ocean.

“Can the fairy boat fly?” Billie asked, “Do the fairies have wings?” Uncle Bert laughed, as Aunt Joan explained that the ferryboat was a big raft that was pulled by a tug boat.

“Actually,” Aunt Joan said, “the tug boat is the raft itself. It just pulls a long cable back and forth, from the mainland to Miscou Island! It takes people and their cars across the channel.” We would drive our car right unto the ferryboat and the cable would pull us over the ocean, safely to Miscou Island.

Now, I had been on a raft before, and I knew they were pretty, let's say, *unstable* . The more weight you put on them, the lower they sink. The car we were driving in was pretty heavy and, even without our extra weight, would probably sink a raft. I was scared.

“Have you ever been on it before?” I asked.

“Sure”, said Aunty Joan, “And Uncle Bert’s been on it at least a hundred times. He lived on the island all of his life, and every time he came to see me, he had to take that ferryboat across and then back again!” Okay I thought, the raft won’t sink, but for sure the water would come up to the tires. I was still scared.

I wanted to be asleep when we crossed over to that Island. But try as I might, real sleep would not come. I dozed off at the doors of dreamland, but real sleep evaded me. From the shadows inside the car, voices still reached me.

“There it is, there's the ferryboat!” I heard Aunt Joan say. Then, the rustling of my brothers.

“Where?” someone said.

“Right there!” I heard Lennie saying, “That big raft in the water!” I cringed in fear from within my pretend sleep.

“What’s that big rope?” someone asked.

“That’s the cable that pulls us across the ocean!” Aunty Joan said. “It’s hooked up to a big pulley on the other side. The cable runs through the pulleys, and it's attached at both ends of the ferryboat. When they start up the ferry boat's motor, it just pulls the cable into it and then we move forward to the other side.

“How does it get back?” someone wanted to know.

“It just pulls it backward.” I heard uncle Bert say.

“Just like a clothesline!” yelled Richard. Oh my God! we're going to cross the ocean on a clothesline! Sinking deeper into my seat, I prayed.

Please God, just let me fall asleep. Suddenly, I heard and felt the bumpy bump of the tires as the car drove off of the raft. It seems that my prayers were answered. I either fell asleep or passed out, because the next thing I knew, we were on the other side. We had crossed the ocean on a raft, pulled by a close-line. And we survived.

As we made our way off the ferryboat, a worker who knew Bert shined his flashlight into the car. “Hey Bert, comment ça va?” he said. “Where's the dog?”

Walking Across Miscou Island

I can't help but wonder what Uncle Bert's family and friends thought, as he moved his wife with nine 9 kids, only one of them his, into his mother's house.

Now, Bert's Mother had two houses. In one, she lived with her family. The other she rented out, or lent it to whoever needed it. And this time we needed it. Again, there were all of us guys, our cousin Terry, and Richard's friend Gary.

Garry didn't last too long though. Lennie and him were having a problem. I remember Gary telling Lennie to F-off, and then Lennie literally flying down a flight of stairs and landing on top of Gary. With a mighty bump they hit the floor. The rest of us guys cleared out of the way. The next thing I remember was that Gary would rather walk all the way back to Montréal then stay with us guys.

Aunty Joan called our Mother, and told her that she was sending Gary home by train. I heard Aunt Joan on the phone saying to Mom. "They're going to kill each other. Gary has to get out of here."

After Gary left, things settled down and we were all able to relax a bit. Then, we started having fun.

One day we grabbed a few fishing rods and walked down to the ferry dock. It wasn't too far, we walked for 30 or 40 minutes and then were there. We explored the area, fishing a bit, but mostly just looking around. The ferry boat was on the other side, on the Shippagan Island edge, which was attached to the mainland by a causeway. We could actually see it on the horizon.

There were a lot of big eels swimming around under the dock. Lennie told me that if I ever hooked onto one of those eels, I had better hold onto my fishing rod really tight.

“Those eels are so strong, they could probably pull you right in that water!” is what he said. Sometimes we would walk in the opposite direction. The walk was a little farther than the one to the ferry dock, but it was to the open sea. There, the whole shoreline was a beach, with big waves crashing and giant sand-dunes. We swam and played our days away.

One day, the water was calm. There were a lot of jellyfish floating around in the still, salty water. Richard was out amongst them, calling to us, “You guys! Come on out! Don't worry about the jellyfish, they can't hurt you. Come on out, the water's real warm!”

As Mickie and I walked towards him, Richie put his hand under a large jellyfish's belly, and picked it out of the water. The fish's tentacle's hung loosely down both sides of his hand like a veil. Richard started screaming and trying to shake the slimy thing off of himself. “Don't touch them!” he now screamed out. “Don't touch them, they have stingers!”

With Richard shaking his hand and slapping the water, we all ran to the shore. Richie's hand and arm were covered all over with little red welts for at least an hour. After that, we avoided the jellyfish like the plague.

On windy days we played in the sand dunes, or in the forest behind Aunty Joan's house. That was where I got knee effusion, or water-on-the-knee. We had no toilets, only the out-house which was in the backyard. If someone had to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, they would use a piss-pot. Somehow it became Mickie's and my job too empty these piss-pots of shit every morning. Not fun at all.

At first, I would dig a hole in the ground and Mickie would dump the shit into the hole. Mickie puked up right away though. I laughed, but then got a whiff of it. We both puked our guts out.

The next day we tried changing jobs. The only difference that made though, was that I got to puke-up first. Anyways, we did this for a few days, then we refused to do that job anymore. That was when Aunty Joan told us that we should have been dumping the shit into the out-house hole. Not in little holes all over the fields.

“One of you guys will probably trip in one of those holes and break a leg or something!” is what Aunty Joan said. Later it was determined that whoever shit in the pots would have to empty them in the morning. Miraculously, the pots were never used for shit again.

It was a few days later that I was running through the field, and I did indeed trip in one of the holes that Mickie and I had dug. I fell and hit my knee on a rock or something, and my knee swelled up to twice its size. *Water on the knee.*

My knee got bandaged up and I was told to stay off of it for a few days. Not much chance of that happening though, there was just too much fun to be had. The knee would have to get better on its own, which it did. A few days later, off I went again, tripping myself in the same hole and banging my same knee. This time the knee swelled up twice as big as it had the first time, more water on that knee. Later in the day Uncle Burt's Mother and a bunch of other women came over to the house to look at my knee.

They set me down in a chair and then they put another chair up for my foot. Under my knee, they put a big bucket to catch the cold water they would be pouring over my injury. Then, to my horror, one of the women lay a big butcher knife on the chair where my foot was resting.

“What's that for?” I asked.

“That's to cut a hole in your knee Donald, to let the water out, and bring the swelling down.”

That was when I almost shit my pants. Aunty Joan, seeing the look on my face, quickly added, “That is, *unless* the cold water we are going to pour over it doesn’t bring the swelling down all by itself. That's what usually happens.”

Some of the women standing around me started laughing a bit. Then one of the women started pouring cup after cup full of ice-cold water over my knee. To my relief, the swelling did go down, almost right away! I was bandaged up and told not to go anywhere near those holes again, “Those horrible holes that Mickey and you dug up to bury the shit.” At that the women couldn't stop laughing.

Now, Uncle Bert's mother and a bunch of his brothers and sisters lived down the dirt road from where we were staying. In fact, there was only one road on the whole island, and it ran from the ferry dock on one side to the ocean on the other side.

Aunty Joan's mother-in-law had a one room store. There were benches all along the two sides, and a counter at the far end, leaving lots of standing space in and around the front door. This was a gathering place. Aunty Joan would be behind the counter, selling treats to anyone who would come in for a chat, with whoever was there.



I remember one night she made hot dogs. She fried up the buns, just like Mom did for us at home. Everyone loved them. Word got out, and the next night the place was packed. Aunty Joan was running out of hot dogs, so she started cutting them in half and had a half price sale.

On one hot summer night, the treats were little bricks of ice-cream. Again, people loved them. Who wouldn't?

One day, when no one else was around, I decided to grab a fishing rod and walk down to the ferry dock to see if I could catch one of those big eels, the ones that were supposed to be such tough guys. I walked down there with intent. I was imagining the look on the other guys faces when I would show up with one of those big eels.

When I finally reached the ferry dock, there was nobody around. The ferryboat had just departed for the mainland, so I had a couple of hours to fish to my heart's contentment. The tide was out, and there was a lot of space under the dock.

I could sit on one of those huge beams which held the dock up. You could walk from beam to beam underneath. There were hundreds and hundreds of starfish clinging to the rocks that supported the beams, and a lot of oysters clinging to seaweed, which moved in and out at the mercy of the waves. The eels were there too, a lot of big ones, swimming around everything.

I sat on a huge flat beam, just above the water level. I wrapped my legs around a smaller round supporting beam, so that I could not be pulled into the water when and if I hooked onto a large eel. Lennie's warning words sounded in my head.

"Hold on tight! Those eels are really strong, they could pull you right in!"

I lowered my hook with a real fat worm on it, right in front of a bunch of big eels. Right away an eel grabbed it.

The eel was about three or four feet long. It pulled really hard, but nothing like I had expected. I had no trouble pulling it out of the water. Right away though, it started wiggling and twisting like mad. It was tangling my fishing line. I lifted my rod higher and grabbed the eel by the neck, just below its gills. I squeezed its neck as hard as I could, to take the hook out of its mouth.

Right away, the eel wrapped around my wrist and lower arm. It started to pull its head backwards out of my hand. I couldn't stop it! It was as strong as hell, and it was going to drag my own hook right through my hand, hooking me! It was going to pull me right into the water, into the cold ocean water!

I screamed, and let go of its neck. I shook my hand and arm like a freak, screaming all the time. The eel did let me go, it unwound itself and fell into the water, swimming around with my hook still in its mouth. I grabbed my rod and held it, shaking.

For a moment, I thought that I would have to break my line. What to do? I thought for a while. Then I let some line out, as I climbed back up onto the dock. Once there, I reeled the eel up to the top of the dock. I swung my rod in a large arch over my head, and I brought that eel down with a mighty whack against the dock.

The eel wiggled like crazy. I reeled my line in as far as I could. Holding the eel off of the ground, shaking the rod every time, the eel tried to wrap itself around the tip of the rod. I walked off of the dock to the largest rock I could find, and then commenced to beat that eel to death against it. Swinging my rod, with the eel on the end of it, smacking it until it could move no more.

Walking home, I imagined the looks of amazement on the guys faces when they would see me, and the huge eel that I had caught. All by myself.

They were all there; Lennie, Richie, Mickie, Johnnie, Billie and Gerry and Terry, even Aunty Joan. They were standing in the middle of the road. Mickey's voice reached me first.

“There he is, there's Donnie!” Then aunty Joan's voice boomed out.

“Where the hell have you been? We've been looking for you for an hour!” Richard's voice was next.

“We almost called the Police on you!”

They were all running towards me, happy to see me. I just stood there, in the middle of the road, holding up my fishing rod with the big eel hanging limply in the air. I was a bit sorry that he was so dead. It would have been nice to see him squiggling in the air.

Lennie was the first to reach me. “You caught an eel! Donnie caught a big eel!” he yelled out.

Everyone was around me. They all wanted to know, where I had caught it? How did I catch it? Why didn’t I wait for them? The questions kept flying at me. Lennie was holding the fishing line, looking at the eel.

“Did it put up a good fight?” He wanted to know.

“It grabbed me by my wrist and tried to pull me into the ocean!” I answered, holding up my left hand to show them the dried slime, which had run almost down to my elbow. My skin was hardened with the muck, just like the starch Mom used to iron Dad's white shirts with.

I continued with my story, telling them how I had gone under the ferry dock. How I had wrapped my legs around a beam so the eel would not be able to pull me in the water. I went on, telling about when I had tried to take the fish hook out of its mouth, the eel had grabbed me by the arm and tried to pull me into the ocean.

“Sounds like a big fish story to me!” Aunty Joan's voice boomed out of the silence around me. I looked right at her and held up my slime starched arm, for all to see. The murmurs of assent went up around me. Aunty Joan laughed then, and said out loud for all to hear. “Yes, I guess that's proof enough for me!” Again the murmurs and the nods of approval from my brothers.

“What happened next Donnie?” Johnnie wanted to know.

“I shook him off of my wrist! I dragged him up onto the dock, where I smashed him against the boards of the dock. He was still fighting, so I dragged him to the shore and I beat him to death against the big rocks!”

As I said this last bit, I swung my rod in a circle and slammed the eel onto the dirt road. *Whack* went the eel, and the guys stepped back. Then they cheered for me, patting me on the back as we walked towards the house.

Aunty Joan forbade us to ever, *ever* go to the ferry dock again. She explained to us that the dock was a very dangerous place. There is a lot of machinery and cables around there, and they could start up at any time. All of the controls operating the motors were on the ferry boat. It was a dangerous place for anyone to be playing or fishing. It was out of bounds.

“Okay, Okay.” I promised, “I’ll never go there again”. We all promised to never go anywhere alone, and to always bring at least one other person with us. To let someone else know where we were going.

A few days later, early in the morning, Lennie woke me up. “I know where a raft is. Do you want to go fishing?” I heard him whispering as he gently shook my arm. “Donnie, wake up, Let’s go fishing!” My eyes popped open.

“Where? Where are we going?”

“Sshh!” whispered Lennie, with his finger pressed against his lips. “Be quiet, don’t wake anyone else up!” I was out of bed in a flash.

We took our clothes and got dressed downstairs. Lennie had already made us some lunch, for later. He put it in a knapsack, along with some fishing gear, consisting of a couple of lines and two cod jigs.

Then we were off, walking down the dirt road towards the ocean with sleep still in my eyes. It was just starting to get light outside, on what I imagined could be a very quiet day. It was a peaceful time, a beautiful morning.

“Oh no!” I exclaimed, as Auntie Joan’s warning came charging into my mind. “We forgot to tell someone where we were going!” It was important, and I repeated it to myself. “We didn’t tell anyone where we were going.”

“Richard knows, Richie knows where we are going! He was supposed to come with me. I think he was afraid of going on the raft. That’s why I got you to come with me” was Lennie’s reply. He opened up the knapsack and handed me a sandwich. And so there we were, walking down the dirt road towards the ocean, chomping on sandwiches and watching the sun rise.

I don’t remember how Lennie got the raft, I just remember being on it. I was sitting on a crate that was nailed onto the raft floor. Lennie was pushing us out with a large pole, and we had both taken off our shoes and socks, leaving them on the shore so as not to get them wet. Water would occasionally flow over the raft, washing our bare feet. Lennie also had a crate to sit on, though mostly he poled us along the shore line.

Sometimes the bottom of the ocean would disappear, only to reappear a short time later. Lennie would pole us out until we could not see the bottom. Then he would sit on his crate as we drifted towards the shore, slowly dragging our cod-jiggers along behind us. It was beautiful out there, watching the ocean floor appear and then fade out again, looking for cod fish.

Eventually, the wind changed. The water started splashing against the crates, and Lennie stopped poling us out. Instead he headed for shore. We landed surprisingly close to where we had left our shoes.

It shocked me because I thought we must have travelled so very far along the coast. But no, here we were, just down the shore a few yards from where we had started out. Lennie tied the raft to a piece of an old abandoned wharf that lay where we found it.

And then, we played. Two Marooned Sailors, washed ashore from a shipwreck. Digging caves in the sand dunes for shelter. As the tide receded, our raft became landlocked. Sitting high and dry on a sandy shore, we had had a fabulous day regardless.

When we got home, there was hell to pay, as well as a new list of things that we weren't allowed to do. It seems that when Aunt Joan finally asked where Lennie and I were, Richard told her that we had gone fishing for cod. On a raft, alone together, in the Atlantic Ocean. It wasn't long before any boats that were in harbour were setting sail to look for us. Two English kids from Montréal, on a raft.

Later, Lennie was told about the tides. He learned that if the tides had been going out, we would have been lost at sea, for real. But this time Lennie shrugged, and told them that he knows the tides.

"As soon as they changed, I headed right for shore. Even before they turned, I felt the wind and knew the tide was changing. I *know the tides*." he said again.

Now, this is a story that I forgot to tell. It's about the first time we went fishing in the ocean. If you remember, I was so afraid when we crossed over to the Island on the ferry boat. I think that I put myself in a trance, or passed out. Maybe I just fell asleep.

But this time, I had more control over the situation. Uncle Bert got hold of his father's dory. A dory is a large row boat, the kind of a boat that fishermen would take off of their fishing boats, to go out a bit and jig for cod. They aren't big lifeboats, they're big rowboats. He was taking us all out to raid some lobster traps and a cod line.

We were down at the ocean, at the end of the island. He had the dory there, and I refused to go out in the boat with them.

“I'm not going in that boat!” I said, looking at Uncle Bert.

“Yes, you are,” said Bert, “we are all going out there, and we're going to get some lobster and a big cod fish. Then we're going to light a fire and cook them on the beach.”

“I'll clean the fish when you get back. And I'll gather firewood while you're gone, but I'm not going out in the boat with you. There's too many of us and I'm scared” was my reply.

“What do you mean, what's there to be scared of? Even the babies aren't scared!” he started yelling, “Look at Gerry and Terry, look at the rest of the guys! Is anybody else scared? What's to be scared of?” He and everyone else was looking at me.

“There's too many of us! I'm not going” I said. “I'll stay here and play on the beach. You guys go, and I will watch from shore”.

“It's okay with me,” said Uncle Bert, “You can stay here by yourself for all I care, the rest of us are going!” I watched as all the guys were loaded into the boat. And then, I helped push the boat out.

“Don't go swimming alone!” Bert yelled out to me, as he rowed away. I watched the boat become a dot on the horizon. Then I went back off, to play in the sand dunes.

Sand dunes are amazing spaces to be in. You have to be quite careful. There are grasses that can stick to your ankles and legs. They stick to you and when you pull off of them, they cut you bad.

There were a lot of small flowers growing everywhere, and all kinds of things to be found, including old ship wrecks. Things like parts of old boats. A lot of scurrying spiders and old sea shells.

After a while, I took to digging in the side of the dunes. I dug out small caves, pretending I had been washed ashore and needed a place to live, and shelter from the hot sun. But eventually I got bored.

I stood at the edge of the water and scanned the horizon. I saw nothing but the empty sea. I decided I would climb on top of the highest sand dune, to see as far as I could. I stood there, my hands shading my eyes as I gazed out to sea, and I saw them! A dot on the ocean. But when I took my hands away from my eyes, I saw something that terrified me.

A thousand tiny, red flying ants were walking and buzzing all over and around me.

I screamed! I freaked out. I started hitting myself, swinging my arms and hands all over the place, trying to kill them before they could start to bite or sting me. I went freaking and running, screaming and swinging, all the way to the ocean! I jumped right in, my head plunging under the salty water. I was still rubbing my skin when I came up for air.

There were no more flying ants around me. They were gone. As I realised that not one of them had bitten or even stung me, I started to feel stupid. I was glad the guys had not seen me, running and screaming as I waved my arms in the air and slapped myself. I must have really looked stupid.

I went back to my sand dune caves, my solitary fort, and waited them out.

I must have fallen asleep though, because I awoke to the sounds of them calling my name. They had caught two lobsters and a big cod fish. After Bert got a fire going, he handed me the cod fish and a knife.

“Here,” he said, “go clean the fish.” Then he pulled it back into himself. “Wait!” he yelled out. “I have to take a picture for your mother, or your Aunt Joan will kill me!” After he took the picture of us, I cut the fish belly open and pulled out a handful of its guts.

Next, Lenny took over. He cut open the fish's food sack, revealing a few smaller fish and gross stuff that the cod had eaten before we had caught him. Now we're going to eat *him!*"

We had a lot of fun after that. I showed the guys my caves, and a few pieces of old boats that I had found. Of course, we ate the fish.

I never mentioned the flying ants though. That secret I kept to myself, until now.

Getting back to us guys though, walking across the island. After Lennie and I had our adventure on the raft at sea, we were not allowed to go anywhere alone. That is to say that Lennie, Richard, Donnie, Mickey, and Johnnie, all had to stay together.

One day, we were all in the forest behind Auntie Joan's house. We were climbing up tall, skinny trees, and bending them over until we could catch hold of another tree, changing trees without touching the ground. Someone said, probably Richard, "We could cross the whole Island like this, without touching the ground!"

With that, we were off. We didn't get very far until we were all back on solid ground, but the idea had been planted. We were off through the backwoods, through the fields and the swamps, looking for the ocean.

We walked on trails, then when there were none we blazed our way through swamps and the fields of cutting grasses. We busted through a forest of small bushes and then, there it was.

The ocean.

Between us and the sea, there was a large quagmire. A long gully, full of black slimy seaweed, like quick sand. As we stood there looking at it, Richard walked ahead.

"I'm going through!" he yelled out. "I'm going first. To see if it's okay."

He walked right in, right into the quagmire. Down the hill that we were all standing on, and into the quagmire. First up to his knees, then to his hips. One more step and it was up to his neck. The next step brought it down to his chest. We all took in a breath, as he staggered to the shore line. Seaweed hanging from his shoulders and pockets, he looked at us and yelled out.

“It's too deep for the little guys! You'll all have to walk around.” Lennie, called him a stupid bugger, then led us all around the quagmire to the open ocean.

Richard, wore his coat of seaweed as long as he could. I think though, that the seaweed started stinging him, spurring him on into the water. Pulling it off and rubbing his skin with the salty liquid, he heaved a sigh of relief. We all ran into the water, jumping in and splashing or floating around.

The day was moving on as we started our long journey home. We marched, like we marched that Christmas when we got those drums. Only this time, Lennie was in the lead, with Mickey behind him and then Johnnie and me following. Richard took up the rear. We were taking care of each other, being brothers. Looking out for each other, like Mom had always told us.

Walking down a long path through some low bushes, we picked up our pace a bit. We wanted to be home by supper time.

Suddenly, Johnnie yelled out in pain! He fell to the ground. He was lying there holding onto his shin, just below the knee, as we all gathered around. Lennie moved Johnnie's hands away, and we all saw the wooden peg sticking right out of his shin bone. It was as big as a finger, sticking right in.

Lennie put his hands on the peg. Looking right at Johnnie, Lenny said, “I'm going to pull it out!” Richard steadied Johnnie's leg as Lennie, with one even tug, pulled that peg right out. We all

exhaled a sigh of relief, and thankfully there wasn't much blood. Lenny gave Johnnie a piggy back ride, all the way home.

Johnnie was okay, and we were all happy to be back at Aunt Joan's house, for whatever feast we ate that night for supper.

Then there was a party, it was a wedding. One of Uncle Bert's brothers or sisters was getting married. There were 21 children in his family, and Uncle Bert was the oldest of them. I think that there were six sets of twins right there, so that's 12 kids right there. There were still 9 more to be counted. That's a lot of children.

When Aunt Joan went to visit Bert's family for the first time, it was to meet the youngest who had recently been born, a brand new baby girl. She weighed under two pounds. She, the baby, was wrapped in a blanket and layed down on the oven door, to keep warm. The child survived, but she had 20 brothers and sisters to contend with.

Anyways, there was a wedding party, and everyone on the island was invited. They built a big dance floor beside the house. Everyone who could play music did, using whatever they had. There were violins, guitars, accordions and all kinds of things. Even old spoons and pots and pans were coming out. Everyone else just danced, and sang the night away. I fell asleep to the sound of music and laughter.

And that night, there was a fight. Richard told Mickey and I all about it in the morning. It seems that everyone cleared off of the dance floor. Then they made the two guys, who wanted to fight each other anyway, fight like they were in a boxing ring. One of the guys was so mad that he took his own shirt off and ripped it to pieces. Then, yelling and screaming at each other, they smashed together in the middle of the ring. Falling down, they rolled over a few times, and they

rolled right off of the dance floor to the ground 3 feet below. That was the end of the fight. The party was over.

A few days later, we were on our way back to Montréal. Back to our apartment, in Ville Saint-Laurent. Back to Crevia Street, where we would, for the most part, grow up. Changing from a bunch of kids to a bunch of teenagers.

We drifted apart, developing friendships with our peers.

Went to school. We went to school, and we failed.



Every time we had changed provinces, we were held back a year. Us older guys were always at least two years older than our classmates were. We had travelled the width of our country; that vast, diversified land, Canada.

We had, all in one way or another, been very hurt. There was no way we were going to be pushed around by any sonofabitch who thought they knew how to train us.

Lennie, Richard and I went to St. Raphael School. The younger guys went to a different school, closer to home. And right away, Lennie, Richard and I started having trouble. We were being sent to the principal's office on a regular basis, because we didn't quite *fit in*.

Lennie was a stubborn, and prideful person. When he came head to head with the school system and staff members that were holding him back, he got a job at the local butcher shop instead. He delivered beer and groceries to local customers.

He drove a big, black bicycle, like the one he had in Ottawa, with a huge basket on the front of it. One day, delivering two large cases of beer, Lennie spotted Mr. Murphy, our school principal, crossing the street in front of the school. After a moment's thought on it, Lennie ploughed right into him.

He knocked him down, the bike on top, with a few broken beer bottles dripping from the cases. Lennie picked the bicycle up, and re-secured the beer. Then he started singing a song as he drove on.

Murphy is a jerk!

Murphy is a jerk!

Mussolini bit his weenie

Now it doesn't squirt!

Lennie lost his job at the butcher store for that. So he was soon working at Ruby Foods, A high class Chinese food restaurant, located not far from where we lived.

But, Lennie fell in with a bad crowd. Really, they were just kids like him though, and everyone had a plan of some sort to make money. A bunch of kids without a lot, and with nothing to do.

Mom was quite worried about him. She got in touch with our Aunt Joan, who was still living on Miscou Island. Lennie was shipped off to Miscou again, but this time he was on his own. He didn't have us. At the age of 14 Lennie was on his own, and was a fisherman, fishing in the Atlantic Ocean.

Richard though, he was another kettle of fish. He stayed in school a little longer than his older brother.

Once Lennie lost his job at the butcher's store, Richard got it. Always the talkative one, always laughing and looking for a good time, it was when he was delivering beer he was in his element. Meeting as many people as he could, and certainly getting into trouble.

Lennie was into 'hardware'. Stealing cars and trucks, stuff like that. Whereas Richard was into 'software', getting into people's heads. Richard *was* the bad crowd, all by himself. Anyone wanting to hang around a bad crowd would automatically hang around with him. And it is because Richie needed his father.



Mom lied about his age, and Dad had gotten him that job on the DEW Line with him. Finally at that point, Richard was where he wanted and needed to be, with his father.

As for me, I can only relate a few stories to describe what this time was like.

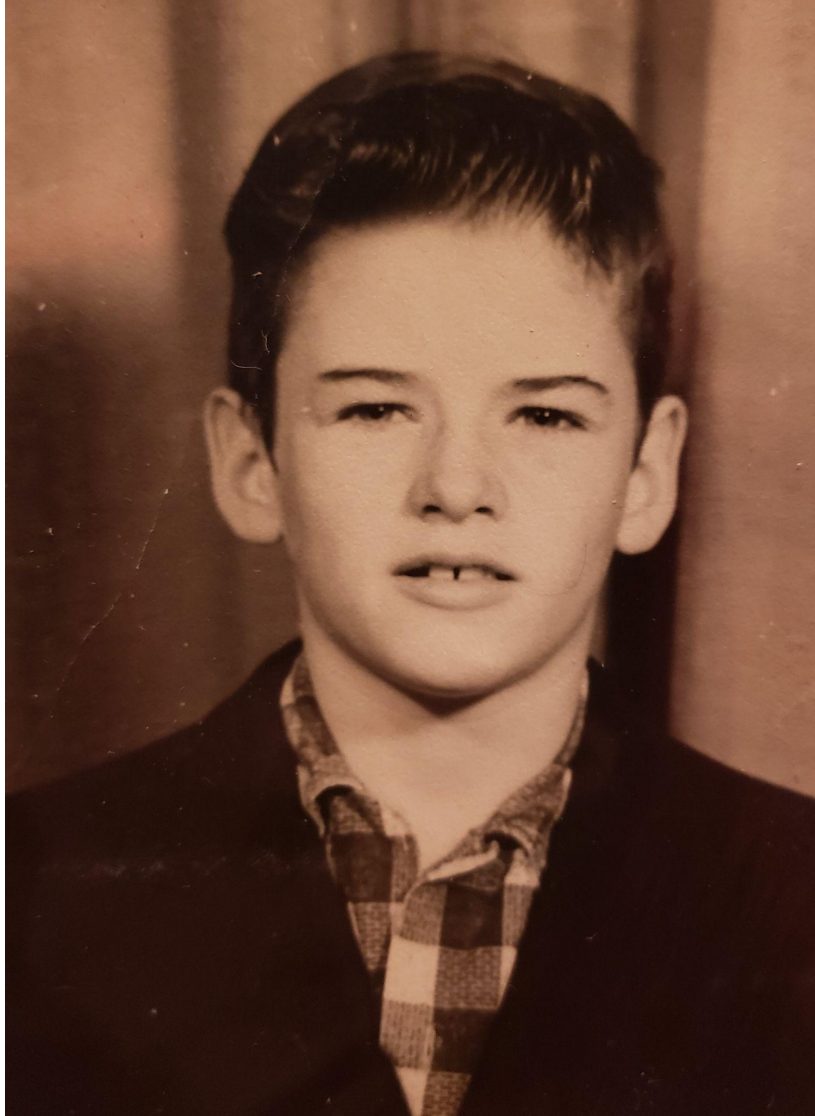
One day, I was sent home from school by the principal for not combing my hair. That's right, a kid in, grade three for messy hair. I was so pissed off with them.

In grade three most of the kids are 8 years old. But I would have just turned 11, and I *did* comb my hair. It was just unruly.

I had a teacher throw a handful of books at me once, hitting me on the back while I was heading out the door of his classroom, on the way to the principal's office. Another time a nun grabbed both of my ears again, with a sense of fury. One time during the recess break, a friend of mine showed me a handgun that he had. It was in a brown paper bag. There were also some bullets there, and he told me that the gun was loaded. He wanted to know if I wanted to go out into the field and shoot the gun, after school.

“Just to try it.” He told me.

I told him that I didn't think that was a good idea, and that he should bring the gun home and just leave it there. After that, that kid, who's name was Tommie, stopped hanging around with me. He went his own way, which was too bad because he was a good person. On the wrong road, with ammunition.



Another teacher, this one in grade five, kept slapping me in the face. Eventually, I finally told Mom about it. About Mrs. Richardson, slapping me whenever she felt like it. Mom was just furious. Our Aunty Joan was also staying with us at that time.

So, Mom and her sister Joan went down to that school. Very politely, Mom told my teacher that if she ever so much as lifted her hand to me again, Mom would beat the crap out of her. Then Aunty Joan got into it, by adding “And I would just love to help her, so you had *just*

better take care when it comes to Donald Bowles, because he's our *inside man*, and he's reporting to us.”

Mom and Aunt Joan also went to see the school principal, Mr. Murphy. They discovered that he was someone that they themselves had gone to school with, years before. Mom and her brothers had beaten him up when they were kids. Mom determined that Mr. Murphy was trying to get even with her by being mean to her kids, so she threatened him with another good beating.

“If you think for one minute that you can get back at me by picking on my kids, you're sadly mistaken!” Mom really let him have it.

“I beat the crap out of you years ago! I can still do it, and if I need any help, my brothers are just a phone call away.” Shortly after that, I was transferred to another school.

I started hanging around much more with just Mickie, my old twin. Luckily, he was a laid back person. Like Richard, he could make friends easily. I, on the other hand, was more like Lennie. Quiet and brooding.

Johnnie had a friend named Ramon Sanderson, and Billie was friends with Raymond's younger brother. One day, little freckled-faced Billie came running up to me, followed by a bunch of other kids. Johnnie and Raymond Sanderson were amongst them. Billie was really worked up.

“Donnie, there's a big kid beating us up! Come on and help us, you can beat him up for us!”

I looked at Johnnie. “What about you?” I asked him. Johnnie shrugged.

“He's a really big kid” was John's answer.

“Okay,” I said, “let's go.” We walked across the street to the other back alley.

“There he is!” said Billie, pointing towards a real tall kid. He was at least a head taller than me, but I didn't hesitate. I took off at full speed.

The kid was walking away from us, so he didn't see me coming. He didn't have a chance. I was on his back with my legs around his neck, driving him to the ground.

Nobody said a word to me, they all just looked on. In truth, I'm sure they all felt sorry for that guy on the ground, even Billie.

When the guy finally looked at me, I told him never to pick on my brothers again. I turned around and walked away with the gang of kids following me. It was very ant-climatic for us all.

My brothers had wanted a fight that we could all enjoy, but I gave them a quick massacre. And I felt sorry, as we all did, for the French kid I had assaulted.

But there was always a bunch of kids hanging around on Crevia street. Mostly just waiting around, but it always meant the possibility of a fight.

And just like Lennie and Richard, Mom fell into a bad crowd. That is to say that she met people who were like her, adrift. Somewhere, I wrote that Mom was a magnet in our neighbourhood. One of her friends, Loraine Kinkade, lived down the street with her three daughters.

Loraine, unlike Mom, had an extended family living nearby. She had a sister named Glen and a brother, Tom, who lived just down the street. They would get together on occasions. Mom went with Loraine a few times to different parties. She eventually started going out with Loraine's Brother. He was a nice enough person, and was her boyfriend for a while. Mom started going

over there to hang out with Glen. At other times, Glen would come over to our house for coffee or beer, whichever was going around.

Glen had a daughter, Linda, who kept telling everyone that she was my cousin. It seemed that her mother had told her that my mother was her aunt. She called my Mom *Aunty Marg*. One day, as Linda was introducing me to some of her girlfriends on the street, I told her that I was not her cousin. Linda was quite surprised by this revelation. She never talked to me again, or even acknowledged my presence. What a fool I was. If I had kept my mouth shut, she would have kept on introducing me to her girlfriends.

There was another woman living in our apartment block, and her name was also Linda. She lived with her two young children and her sister Lee, who was my age, as well as her elderly father.

One night, Lee and I were babysitting her sister's two young girls. Lee kept turning out the lights. We would smooch a bit, which I figured was a pretty wonderful experience. One that I was still too young to fully appreciate. For a short time, we were fast friends. Then she disappeared from the neighbourhood.

I asked mom where she had gone. Mom told me that the old man, her father, had gotten sick. When he was in the hospital dying, Lee had gone to see him, and he had told Lee that he was not actually her father, but her grandfather. Linda, Lee's supposed sister, was her mother.

Lee then had moved away with one of her Aunts.

There was also the girl who lived next door, Joslin Moran, whom I grew to like very much. We spent a few nice times together. She was French and I was English. It all started with her running past me one morning, walking to our respective schools. She stopped a short

distance ahead of me, and I ran past her. I stopped and waited, and eventually we walked together, holding hands.

One afternoon, a group of women dropped in for an informal gathering of friends. Eddie, Joslin's mother, came over for coffee and company. Her husband came home early from work, and was quite upset with her. He had forbidden her to hang out with my mother and her friends. He dragged her home next door, giving her shit all the way.

Glen, who was there, decided to go next door, and give him a piece of her mind. Mom tried to stop her, but Glen wouldn't be stopped. Eventually, Eddie's husband punched Glen in the face, and sent her back to our house with a bloody nose.

Joslin and her family moved away shortly after that. Then within the year, I heard that Joslin had taken ill and had died. The way Mom explained it was that Joslin just got sick. She went into the hospital, and was dead within the week.

As I said, Lennie and Richard had gotten in with bad crowds, and Mom had sent them away. Mickey and I, heck even Johnnie and Billie or little baby Gerry, were heading in the same direction.

I am sure that Mom saw the dangers there, and decided that we had to move to a less volatile area. The next time Dad came home on leave from the Arctic, he and Mom bought a house in the country. Dad went back to work on the DEW Line, while Mom and us kids moved to St. Hubert, on the south shore of Montréal Island. A small place, called Highland Gardens.

Us guys would walk up a dirt road about one and a half kilometres, to catch a school bus every morning, and then just walk back in the evening. It wasn't long before we discovered the small hamlet of Brookline, about three kilometres from home. It was there that Lennie, Richard, Mickey and I would eventually find our future wives.

Within a month, Ernest Wright, the real estate agent who had sold Mom and Dad our new house, showed up at our front door. He wanted to know if everything was all right with the house.

“Any problems?” is

what he said to Mom. “Anything I can help you out with?”

He and Mom ended up with two children of their own. They *each* had seven other children. My sister Donna and brother Robert have each other, and a whole fourteen half brothers and sisters.

Donna and Bobby grew up with us guys. They were Little Babies, and we were almost grown up. Mom finally got a daughter, while we got a sister! And finally another baby brother. It didn't happen that fast, but within a few years, I was their babysitter. But more happened before then.

Life Moves On

And it really does, it moves on. Lennie was a fisherman in Nova Scotia, and Richard was living and working as a salesman in Montréal. Meanwhile, Mickey was in the same class as I was, and Johnnie would soon join us. It was either in grade seven or eight, and somehow the three of us were in the same miserable class.

Our teacher was a man named Mr. Tommie. He was actually a very good teacher. The only problem that I can really see, is that he had us three Bowles boys in his class.

One day, early in the school year, for some reason he started picking on Mickey. Of all us guys, Mickey was the most gentle. That is to say that he never wanted to hurt anyone, he was friendly. He made a lot of friends, and he kept them. Well, Mr. Tommie started yelling at Mickey. He told Mick to get out in the hallway and to wait for him there. At that, I called out to him, at first in a deep voice.

“Hey, Teach!” Then, I said it again, because I wasn’t sure if he had heard me.

“*HEY, TEACH!*” I said it in a loud, angry voice. The class froze. All eyes were upon me. “What are you picking on my brother for?” Mr. Tommie exploded.

“*GET OUT of my classroom!* Get out in the hallway with your brother, I’ll deal with you *later!*” That was when Johnnie piped up.

“Hey, Teach! You might as well send me too, they’re my brothers!” The whole class took an audible moan, followed by Mr Tommie’s scream of outrage.

“*Get Out, out the three of you. Is there any more of you?*”

“No, just the three of us, in this here class,” Johnnie said, “although we are seven brothers.”

“Out in the hall!”, yelled Mr Tommie, as John was closing the door behind the three of us.

It wasn't long before Mr. Tommie came through the door.

“All right you guys, let's get out to the school yard, right now.” As he led the way, I thought that he was going to make us run around the school yard, about a 100 times or something. But no, Mr. Tommie wanted to fight.

“Come on, who's first?” he said, putting his dukes up. “Come on”, he said again, “I'll take all three of you on at the same time”. I was pretty stunned.

“We aren't going to fight with you,” I said, “I just don't want you picking on my brother Mickey for no real reason. Mickey's a nice person!”

Mr. Tommie looked at Mickey and Johnnie, and asked them straight out, “How about you guys, do you want to fight with me?”

“No, no, we don't want to fight with you,” both guys tumbled over each other to get their answers out first. “we don't want to fight”.

“Well then,” said Mr Tommie, “I guess we don't have a real problem here. Let's just go back to class, and we'll all start over.” Saying that, Mr Tommie turned around and walked back into the school and then, the class. We just followed him in and took our respective seats. Not another word was said about the incident.

There was a different fight with another teacher, on the school bus going home one night. I was sitting in the back of the bus, right in the middle, looking up the aisle. There were girls sitting on each side of me, and they were giggling and squashing into me! I was enjoying it, and trying to be as cool as I could be. I gave one of the girls a little hug, just a little smooch, and we

were both laughing. Then our French teacher was standing in front of me. He was the school monitor on the bus, I guess.

“You, get up!” He was yelling at me, putting his hands on my shoulders. “Move up to the front of the bus!”

“No! Get your hands off of me!” I shook my shoulders, freeing myself from his loose grip. I was both surprised and shocked. Then he put his hands under my arms, and this time he tried to lift me up.

I instantly wrapped my feet and legs around the bar under my seat, the bar that was holding the seat firmly to the floor of the bus. The teacher could not move me. Seeing what was happening, he really yelled at me and then he tugged. As he was heaving, Mickey was in the aisle behind him. Mickey struck out, punching him right in the back of the head. I shot up, being pulled by the arms, and instantly punching him in the shoulder.

The teacher stopped then. He put his hands up, one towards each of us, palms facing out in a stop sign. “Stop! Please boys, stop!” he yelled out.

“I’ll go to the front, you stay here.” At that, he moved to the front of the bus, squeezing past Mickey. We took to our seats and the bus went deadly silent, save for whispering kids.

When we got home, we told Mom what had happened. Mom was quite upset. She made us each tell her exactly what had happened. She also asked Johnnie what had happened. Johnnie told Mom that it was all so fast, he didn’t even have time to help. I remember seeing John standing up, just as the teacher was holding his hands up to stop us. Mom said that she would take us to school the next morning.

And so we arrived. Mom led the way to the Sister Superiors office. She, the principal, was waiting for us. We were expected.

Now, I had previous experience with Nuns before. None of them had been favourable to me, and I must admit I felt a little apprehensive. She offered Mom a chair in front of her desk and then told us guys to pull up a chair each. This, right away, was different. We were never privy to conversations between Mom and our teachers before, never mind with a Mother Superior, who was also our school principal.

Right away, the Sister Superior addressed Mom first, and then she included us guys.

“I have received a number of phone calls from different parents. As well as from the teacher involved in the incident on the school bus last night. I would like to hear what Donald and Michael have to say about it, if you don't mind.” As she said this, she looked at Mom, who told us to go ahead and explain exactly what had happened. We did, and the Sister Superior nodded her head.

“Just as the other kids' parents have explained it to me. That stupid man, he had no right interfering with kids' innocent interactions.” Actually she said “That fucking man”. I just don't want to squeal on that Nun for swearing.

We were all shocked, yet very pleased with her response. She sent us guys back to class, and asked Mom to stay back and have a talk with her. That night, Mom told us that the teacher involved had been fired, and that we had acted properly.



It didn't matter much though.

In grade nine, Mickey and I both dropped out of school.

We each got jobs in Montréal; Mickie with Canada Steamships Lines, and I at Greatz Brothers Photography.

One evening, I was sitting in a chair in Mom and Poppsy's room, Poppsy being the real estate salesman who had sold Mom and Dad our house. When the phone rang, Mom answered it, and she seemed quite shaken up. When she hung up the phone she looked at me.

“Your father's dead.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“His plane crashed.” She answered, “Everyone on board was killed.”

That is how it went down, that was the end of an era. And the start of something else.



After working nine years in the Arctic, in 1967, Dad died up there. Gone in an aeroplane crash. It was supposedly his last plane trip up there. After that plane trip, he was supposed to be coming home for good.

As rumour had it, we were all going to move to Winnipeg, where Dad was making plans to buy a hotel.

We were all going to be working in the hotel, running it. Dad had a safety deposit box in the Bank of Montréal, in Winnipeg. Even though I knew about that, it was never found.

The end, c'est fini.

Donald Bowles passed away at the age of 77 on March 21st, 2024. He created a beautiful family with Brenda Lawrence, the love of his life, and was devoted to being a present, playful and affectionate Dad & Grandpa.





Lender Bowles, on the DEW line



Mom and the Aunties (Marguerite, Joan and Dorothy)



Mom



Donald with his first daughter, Sarah



Top to bottom, left to right: Michael, Richard, Robert, Lender, Gerald, John, William, Marguerite, Donna, and Donald.