

Chapter 7. Student Life in the City

My connections with my family and the farm at Busby remained strong after I settled into my university student years in Edmonton, even though trips home were not frequent—I had no car, and train or bus connections were not great, especially on weekends. Bertha and I hitchhiked at least once, on a Sunday, but I think we did a lot of walking. Phone calls did not happen because the farm had no telephone.

An incident related to what may have been my parents'—at least my father's—unspoken expectations occurred after my second year at university. Dad asked me to come home for a while to help with haying and I told him I could not do it because I did not get any vacation time with my summer job. He was very unhappy about that and grunted something about him having to do it all himself, “with my old bones”—even though he was 51 and hardly ‘old’ yet. We were able to make peace again afterwards, happily, and the matter was never raised again.

Bertha, in the meantime, was working away at her new job as cook and housekeeper in the Delta Upsilon fraternity house on Saskatchewan Drive, next to the university campus. To her, that job was much more interesting than her maid service at the Lenons, even if she did not like all of it all of the time.

“I hated making the beds on Saturday, especially alone when some guys might still be in bed, sometimes drunk. [Bill: My presence and help for a few months may have been a good thing from that point of view.]

I had the summers off. I worked a summer in Westlock, then a summer at Gainers, at \$1.13 per hour. There were four or five of us on the night shift, making wieners. I quite enjoyed it. One night we were making blood sausage that went into containers under pressure, and something blew up and we had stuff all over ourselves.

There were a bunch of students working there, mostly nice people. When they left in September, language from the other workers often was very bad.

I sent most of my money home for a long time. I was stingy too. Even when I worked in the bank. I might have to drop stuff off somewhere and take the bus there, then walk back to save a ticket. We could buy them at 20 for a dollar, later 14.”

Some time during my first year Dr. Art McCalla, the Dean of the Faculty, invited the entire first-year class to his house for dinner. I was impressed by the event and by the fact that he and his wife did this. It was an opportunity to meet my 26 classmates in a social setting, something very different from the classroom. From this distance in time I cannot recall how much real use I made of the occasion to get to know my classmates but at least the opportunity was there for it. For all the regular academic contact I had with Bill Corns, my supervisor for the better part of four years, I was at his house only once during that time. In later years, when I had become a faculty member and student supervisor myself, Dixie and I had graduate students and a few others over for dinner or a social event a few times but it was not a regular yearly occurrence. Looking back now, we probably should have done it more often.

The newest buildings on the university campus when I started in 1952 were the Rutherford Library that had opened the year before and the Student Union Building—now the Administration Building that houses the president's office complex. Several of my classes were held in converted Quonset 'army huts', World War II type 'temporary' buildings that remained in use for many years. The university was a much smaller place then, with a total student population of about 4,000 in my time—little more than one tenth of what it is almost 60 years later.

My first chemistry course was Chem 43, Inorganic Chemistry, taught by Dr. Stuart Davis—of Winspear Davis organ fame—a thorough if uninspired-sounding instructor. Quite a few of the chemical concepts in that course repeated what I had learned earlier in my Dutch high school years, except that now it was all done in English. That repetition was very helpful for my gradual transition into English. The same thing was not true for most other courses such as the required introductory courses in animal science, plant science, and something called political economy. In the latter course I had no trouble dealing with the mathematics of supply-and-demand curves but anything that included specific reference to institutions or events in Canada's agricultural economy was still quite foreign to me.

My favourite instructor was Dr. Reuben Sandin who taught my second-year organic chemistry course. He was a very down-to-earth man, never dressed very formally, who occasionally would come into class with a quote such as "I wish I was back on the farm" or, during Engineering Queen Week, "to me all girls are queens." My unfavourite instructor at the time was Dr. Fred Bentley who taught an introductory soils course and a public speaking course. In the soils course each of us received a set of typed notes from which I had great difficulty studying and that included arrogant-sounding statements such as, "Bentley says . . ." I could study much more effectively from notes taken by myself.

I learned to appreciate Fred Bentley more later on when he had become Dean of the Faculty. He was the one who formally offered me the faculty position in which I served the university for many years. In the required public speaking course I took from him during my second year I was forced to get used to speaking in front of a group of people—no doubt a good thing for me but very intimidating at the time. The very first time I was called on I was supposed to present myself as the coach of a hockey team who was giving a pep talk to the team. I have no recollection of what I actually said but hockey team experience then was only slightly less foreign to me than it is now and I probably sounded quite clueless in my talk.

The only English course I took was a required one, during my second year. The section I was in consisted of only agriculture students and our instructor, professor Fred Salter, was tough but excellent. He was the only professor on campus who came to class wearing a black gown. He read from and talked to us about a number of English classics and had us write essays in which he did not tolerate us making the same kind of mistake twice. The grades I got on my first two essays were 45 and 50 per cent, respectively, so not good. Later it got a bit better and I think I ended the year with a grade of around 70 per cent. In this course, for the first time, I began to learn how to write in English—very important for my further education and work.

Dr. John Unrau taught Plant Science 1, part of which was a general survey of a large number of crops. Each of us was assigned a crop on which we had to write a report—my assignment was citron, a crop of which I had never heard before. I remember hunting around in the library—no Google then—for information about it and finding very little. I may have been too shy to ask a librarian for help but cannot remember for sure. I believe I got a passing grade on my report but I was not proud of my success. Unrau was the only professor during my student years who once actually hinted at the fact that he was a Christian—in the context of some comment related to evolution.

Physical Education was a required course for all first-year students. As I recall it, we did some running around the gym, played volleyball and basketball, and worked at exercises on different pieces of gym equipment. The most memorable part of the course happened once in the locker room after class. While I was taking a shower, some villain stole my wallet from my pants in the locker that I had left unlocked briefly. It contained 25 dollars in cash, equivalent to something like 150 dollars today, and the loss left me quite disillusioned. A few days later someone turned in the empty wallet that had been dumped on the street somewhere and that still contained my driver's licence; I was happy to get at least that little bit back. But for a long time thereafter I never carried more than about five dollars in my wallet.

I had no regular income of any sort during my first year. Dad probably paid my tuition for the year—\$150, nominal in comparison to today's tuition, and close to the \$175 per month I earned at the job I had the following summer. Board and room was \$60 per month. I received money towards that from Bertha several times—presumably instead of her sending it home to Dad.

I found myself a part-time job setting pins at Scona Bowl on Whyte Avenue for three nights a week, even though the pay was less than spectacular, at 65 cents per hour. After a month of that and coming home at night with about two dollars, I decided that was not going to get me very far and I quit. Naïve as I was, I decided to take up part-time taxi driving and I went to the police station to apply for the necessary licence. Unfortunately, lying about my age did not work—I was supposed to be 21. Nice try but the outcome probably was the right one.

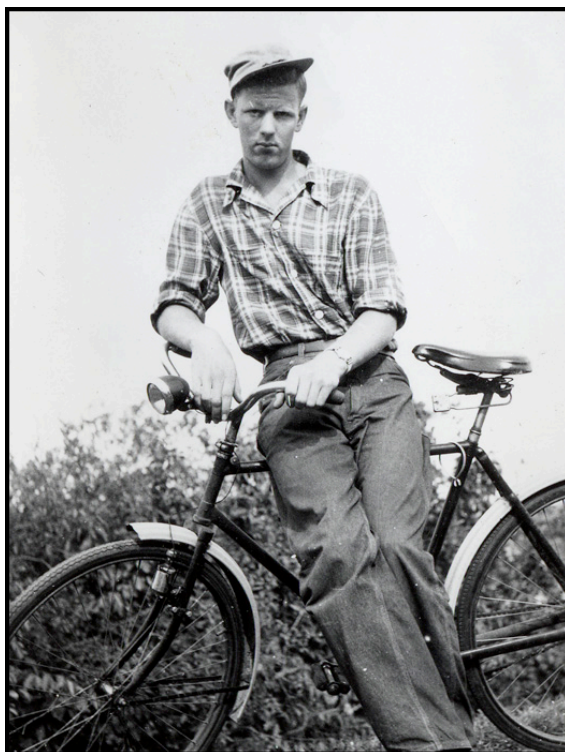
Towards the end of the term Corny Schuring, classmate and fellow CRC student, saw a notice about summer jobs in the Plant Science Department. I went with him to see about it and department head John Unrau promptly hired both of us. That was easy! Corny was assigned to Dr. Bill Corns who worked in weed control and I was assigned to the plant breeding group. For the first while I worked for 'Fitz' (Jack Fitzsimmons, farm manager) and his assistant, Rene Berg, putting out field plots. Later I got to work in the lab for a while, for Unrau's three doctoral students, John Kuspira, Eric Kerber, and Clay Person. Those six weeks were not the greatest, peering through a microscope much of the time and counting chromosomes. Clay Person in 1953 became the first recipient of a Ph.D. degree offered by the University of Alberta—an important event in the history of the institution.

Two events stand out from that first summer. The most impressive one was going on a plot inspection tour with Rene Berg and (Prince) George Obolensky, in the department car. We left early in the morning and, after we checked out the plots

somewhere west of Edson, Rene Berg decided we would drive on to Jasper. I had not seen the Rocky Mountains before—it was a beautiful sight. We stopped at several places, including Punchbowl Falls, and did not get back to Edmonton until well after midnight.

Some time later I heard about a young people's Bible camp on the Pembina River west of Westlock, and John Unrau graciously let me have a week off to go there. He was a serious and committed Christian—I found out later that he was instrumental in starting the First Mennonite Church in Edmonton and is considered its spiritual father. He died of a brain hemorrhage in 1961, just after I had taken up my faculty appointment.

During the summer of 1954, after my second year of study, I worked for professor Bill Corns. Well, not exactly—I was the designated assistant to his three graduate students, Jim Banting, Lorne Ebell, and Sherwood Miller. Lorne Ebell had a lot of field experiments with stinky early-generation wild oat herbicides; the other two did mostly lab research. I was exposed to several different research approaches, therefore, all of which turned out to be important for my future career—of which at that time I had no inkling whatsoever. On Saturday afternoons I did yard and garden work for a lady somewhere on the west side of town, a job I inherited from Corny Schuring who had gone back to his parents' farm in Neerlandia for the summer. I had bought a used bike in the meantime that got me around. I discovered that working in someone else's yard is not as rewarding as taking care of your own yard, but it brought in some cash and I probably learned a few things also. I remember enjoying a soft-ice-cream cone on the way home.



Summer employee in 1954

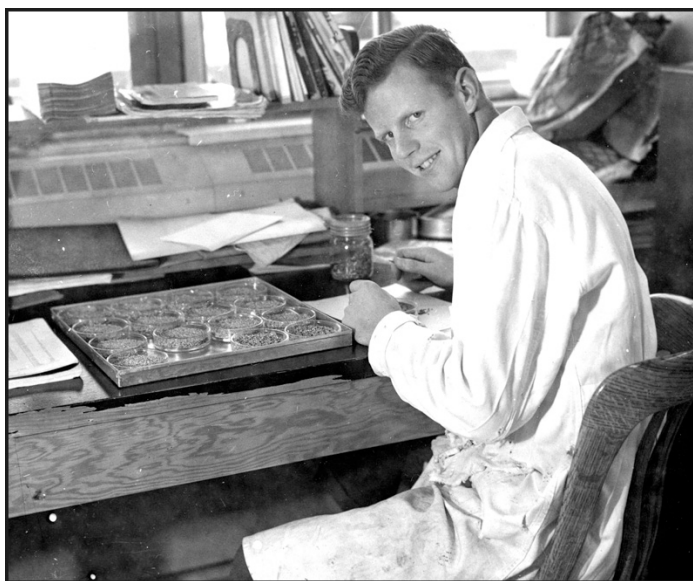
My summer work for the graduate students in Corns' lab continued on a part-time basis during the winter and helped out with cash, not to mention the important experience of working in an academic environment. Already at the end of my first year I had applied for a Dan Baker Scholarship, worth \$150 and enough to cover my tuition. On the application form Dad had to sign that he was unable to pay my tuition, which caused a small glitch. He thought that he could not sign such a statement in good faith and, instead, wrote that he would have to sell some livestock to be able to pay. I was grateful to learn that I was awarded the scholarship and I received it three years in a row.

During the summer of 1955, after my third year, Bill Corns asked me to work mostly independently on a

quackgrass rhizome burial project. No doubt good experience for what was to follow on my academic path for the next few years. That destination was still unknown to me then. The question to be answered in the project was whether quackgrass could be killed by burying it under a thick layer of soil. So I built wooden boxes of different heights, put them on a patch of quackgrass or planted quack rhizomes in them, and filled the boxes with soil. The experiment was successful in the sense that it yielded consistent results but the quackgrass survived whatever I did. A 60- or 70-centimeter layer of soil delayed the appearance of shoots at the soil surface but it certainly did not stop them.

Some time during that summer, Bill Corns asked me if I would be interested in a Master's degree program under his supervision. From my summer and winter work I had a tiny bit of an idea as to what would be involved but I certainly had never thought of actually pursuing such a program of study myself. I had no other plan for my life beyond graduation with a Bachelor's degree so I said I was interested. Then I had to follow through, of course, and apply for admission to graduate school and for a National Research Council scholarship to help see me through financially. My grades were good, I was admitted and my scholarship application was successful, so I was good for the next two years—financially, that is. I worked as a lab 'demonstrator' in a botany course during a couple of terms but had no more part-time jobs after that.

When Bill Corns asked me what kind of research project I would like to pursue, all I could think of was a sort of sequel to what one of his other students had been doing, with techniques that were generally familiar to me. With my scholarship in place I was now financially independent and not restricted to working on projects for which my supervisor had research funds. Not that I knew what a research grant was, of course, or what constraints there might be with that—that knowledge would come



Working at the lab bench

much later. In any case, he suggested a whole new project: study the biology and control of an important weed, Tartary buckwheat. The thought of going into unfamiliar territory was intimidating but what could I say? So Tartary buckwheat it would be.

In a wide range of field and lab experiments I studied seed germination at different temperatures, seed dormancy and how it could be broken, crop yield losses as a result of competition from the weed, and the effectiveness of chemical control

treatments. My interest in the details of the project grew quickly and I was happy that Bill Corns had suggested it. His help in all this was invaluable. He left me mostly on my own during the research but never failed to provide ideas and to give advice when I went to see him. During the 1956-57 term he was actually gone the whole time on study leave at UBC in Vancouver. Perhaps that was good for me; I certainly do not remember feeling abandoned academically. Writing up the results of my experiments in the form of a thesis was a major challenge, even though I had gained some writing experience in the different courses I had taken. Again the assistance I received from Bill Corns was great; his insistence on having things written clearly and precise was important for me at the time and it rubbed off on me, as I was told by my own graduate students years later.

A fringe benefit of his absence was that I was asked to 'represent' him at the meeting of the Western Section of the National Weed Committee in Lethbridge in early December. I stayed at the Van't Land farm in Coalhurst and drove their car back and forth during the conference, in bitterly cold weather. It was a great opportunity to meet all the people from western Canada who were involved in weed research. When the meeting was over I rode to Calgary with Henry Friesen and Bill Lobay, my feet slowly freezing in the back seat of their poorly heated car—poor or non-existent in the back at least—and took the train the rest of the way home.



Field plots with Tartary buckwheat

After I had stayed with Bertha in the DU house for a couple of months at the end of my first year, I had to find a new place for board and room and I found one on 76th avenue and 112th street, about a 20-minute walk from the campus. It turned out not to be such a great place but I stayed there for two years. On one of my morning walks to school during the first winter I was careless about covering my ears and promptly froze them. I did not realize it had happened until they thawed out during my first class and were sore. Fortunately no serious damage resulted other than losing most of the skin on my ears in the next few weeks and finding them more sensitive to cold for several years. Not unlike the big toes I had frozen once during my earlier logging work on the north quarter of our family farm. The landlady—whose name I have forgotten—had at least four other boarders, and she herself slept in her living room. I shared a basement room with Garth Davidson who worked for the telephone company, and later for a while with Vern Dressler, a fellow student.

Garth was gone most evenings and weekends so studying there was not too difficult. Most of my Sundays I spent with Bertha and her friends.

In the spring of 1955, I found a nice place near the campus, with the Horn family, parents and two daughters around my age or younger, Gwen and Betty. By this time I had become acquainted with Dixie, and I often went to her house after church on Sundays. Mrs. Horn would make me breakfast, and I would be gone for the day. The family had a cabin at Pigeon Lake and often went there on Sunday. My stay with the Horns was pleasant but temporary, because I had applied to St. Stephen's College for a room and could move there in September. For the next three winter terms that is where I stayed. The first year I shared a 'standard' room on the third floor with fellow Ag student Gerry Regehr. During the next two years I was in a larger room at the south end of the ground floor, with roommates that included Gordon Bruins and Don Fair, and for a short time Gerry Parlby, after Don got married and left.

I enjoyed my stay at Steve's and found it a positive experience. It provided a great opportunity to meet students in other disciplines, many of them Christians—some only nominally so—in a residence that belonged to the United Church of Canada. Rudy Wiebe, for example, lived there at the same time as I did, as did Bill Sinnema for a while, and also my brother John. Meal times were quite formal, at set times, served family-style, and with Dr. Johnson (residence director and theology teacher) or someone else offering a formula 'grace'. The food was generally good, especially the tender gravy-covered weekly pork chops. Left-over gravy on a slice of bread almost doubled as dessert. Friday, unfortunately, was fish day. I did not care much for the fish they cooked or the way it was done so I often would skip that meal and find something somewhere else. Contrary to the other places where I had board and room, there was no need to tell anyone that I would be away for certain meals, and I liked that convenience.

At the beginning of the term in September there usually was some serious hazing for newcomers, including getting flushed down the metal outside fire escape in waterslide fashion. I was able to avoid suffering through any of those torture treatments, partly because I was in my fourth year already when I moved there in the fall of 1955, but also by keeping a low profile in terms of information that might trigger action. For someone who was not a heavy-hitting socially-inclined person that was not very difficult.

A recurring event at Steve's was 'tubbing' people who were known to have a birthday or who did other important things such as becoming engaged. The tub in a bathroom near the dining hall would be filled with cold water and the hapless victim would be tossed in, clothes and all. Most people to whom it happened came prepared, by emptying their pockets before coming to lunch or supper, and submitted with a measure of grace. One day, however, the intended victim fought back, hit his head and was knocked out cold for some time. That was the end of the tubbing tradition.

A minor event that seems worth recalling is my way of rigging up a primitive clock radio alarm. The sleek ones that now are common almost everywhere did not exist yet. From the lab where I worked I got a small test tube with some mercury, made a

stopper for it with two wires going into the mercury, and taped it to the back of my wind-up alarm clock. When the tube was horizontal, the ‘switch’ was off, and when it was vertical, the switch was on. The system likely would not meet today’s environmental code but it worked for me for a long time, including the time that I was able to use my parents’ big Philips radio. On that radio I could pick up short-wave broadcasts as well as regular radio, especially late at night—an interesting pastime in itself.

On many a Saturday afternoon I listened to the then Texaco-sponsored radio broadcasts of performances from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, and I actually purchased a few opera records—most of which I still have. In an adjacent building where St. Stephen’s theological training took place, there was a lounge that had a ‘hi-fi’ record player; sometimes I would go there and listen to my records when no one else was around.

Occasionally I would take my speedskates and go skating on the public outdoor rink in Garneau. There was always music to which people could skate, presumably, but my sense of rhythm—or the lack thereof—did not work for such skating. In the public library I found a book with diagrams of star constellations, and several times I went out armed with the book and a flashlight to learn something about all those fascinating arrangements in the sky. Many of them still look familiar to me this many years later.

St. Steve’s was essentially right on the campus and, therefore, very convenient for me. It was not always the greatest place to study because of noisy students and creaky wooden floors but I could do my studying in the Rutherford Library next door or in the lab in the Agriculture Building across campus where I had a desk, and to which I had a key for access after hours.

The residence and dining hall at Steve’s were closed to students for the summer, so I had to find a place to stay for that period. That place was St. Aidan’s, a large house not far away that functioned as an Anglican student residence, complete with a resident chaplain. I stayed there two summers, with five or six other students. I had a room to myself so that was nice. Someone ordered groceries each week and teams of two took turns cooking supper for a week at a time. Another team looked after setting the table and doing the dishes afterwards. We made our own breakfast and lunch but always ate supper together. My stay there was also a positive experience. Two of the other students were Aggies—Ken Kasha and Tim France—and one of them was in medicine. Our collective repertoire for meals was not elaborate but we always ate well and the company was good. I have nothing but good memories of staying there.

One summer, Mike Ostafichuk, a technician in the Plant Science department, offered to teach a couple of us black-and-white film and print processing in the darkroom, something he did as part of his regular work. We quickly took him up on the offer. It seemed almost magical to stand in the dim red light in the darkroom and to see a blank piece of photographic paper float around in a tray with developer and slowly turn into an image. Learning and doing the darkroom work undoubtedly helped shape my interest in photography. I had access to good darkroom facilities most of the time in later years, and used them a lot. After we moved into our house

in Crestwood I decided I was going to build a darkroom in our basement and I went as far as actually buying an enlarger. I used the enlarger only once or twice, however, and the darkroom never came into existence. Our house did not have enough space to dedicate to it, and my time was taken up with other things. The enlarger stayed in a box in our basement until the fall of 2010 when, much to my surprise, I found a taker for it.



Photography lessons

For a couple of years I had the use of the Flexaret camera my parents had brought with them from Holland—a downscale version of the better-known Rolleiflex cameras—and in 1957 I bought a camera of my own, a new small 35-mm camera (Paxette). The following year I returned the Flexaret to my parents and bought a second-hand Zeiss that took the same 120-size black-and-white film. I soon began to use colour slide film in the Paxette and got started on my now large slide collection. Both cameras served me well for many years. After my parents died, I inherited the Flexaret and it is still part of my collection of things.

My social life was fairly restricted most of the time during my student years. On Saturday nights I sometimes visited with Bertha at a basement suite on Bellamy Hill where a couple of her friends lived, and we

would walk up the hill to a Youth for Christ rally at Alberta College. Later, when she lived with a couple of other women on the second floor of a house, I often spent time there on a Sunday also; that continued even after Bill Groot entered her life. ‘Pit’ was one of the innocent card games we played quite a bit.

Bertha persuaded me to go with her to the Edmonton Mendelssohn Choir where she sang in the alto section. I had no idea where my voice fit into the range of choral singing but I was told that the best place for me was with the tenors. I could read notes which helped a lot, but somehow notes functioned differently for singing than for a piano or organ keyboard. In any case, I learned what the pitches were for those notes in the lower bar and I became a tenor. The music was not easy, especially when there were long, almost yodel-like fast runs, so I sang softly during those parts and listened to my fellow tenors. During the years I was in the choir we sang Handel’s *Messiah* on an annual basis. In addition, we sang Mendelssohn’s oratorios *Elijah* and *St. Paul*, and Haydn’s *Creation*. They were wonderful pieces, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Mr. Moore was the director when I joined; he was excellent, in my not so professional judgment. His departure was a real loss to the choir, and his successor simply did not measure up. The *Messiah* performance under the new man went only as well as we could remember things from Moore’s directions, and the choir petered out soon thereafter.

Apparently I was able to get some time off during the summer, contrary to the response I gave to my father as described on an earlier page, and perhaps when there was a lull in the field plot work. Earlier I referred to the week's leave I had to go to a young people's Bible Camp in the summer of 1953. But I also made trips in each of the three following summers. In the summer of 1956, I was on an NRC scholarship, the rules for which actually provided for some paid vacation time.

In 1954, Dad loaned me his still new Mercury truck, and I made a most enjoyable short trip with Bertha and her housemate Grace Bos through Cardston, Waterton National Park, and Glacier National Park. I have no idea anymore of where we stayed, how and where we ate, and just how long we were gone. Perhaps it was only three or four days. The women probably stayed in a motel and perhaps I did as well, because I did not own a tent.



Waterton National Park 1954

The following summer, Corny Schuring borrowed his father's car, a 1952 Chev, to travel to the Young Calvinist Convention in Rock Valley, Iowa, and Gary Haarsma, Allan Sonnema, and I went with him. I was able to borrow a tent from the department so we could have a roof over our head at night. It was my first long-distance trip by car (1500 miles) and my first trip into the United States, and I was excited about the prospect. I had never been that far away from home before.

We did not get off to a very good start, because the car had a bad shimmy, and we spent the afternoon of the first day in a garage in Fort McLeod getting that repaired. At the US border, there was another glitch—I had my Dutch passport with me but some months earlier I had filed a Declaration of Intent to become a Canadian citizen, a consequence of which was that my passport now was deemed invalid. It must have had a stamp in it to indicate that but I was blissfully unaware of it and could only plead ignorance. We spent about half an hour at the border and finally the officials relented and let me across.

By the time we reached Bozeman, Montana, where we had planned to attend church the next day, it was 4 am. In the darkness, we pitched our tent next to a haystack in a farm field and went to sleep. It had been a long day. When we woke up we found

ourselves in sight of a farmstead not far away, but all was well and we made our way to the local Christian Reformed church where nobody seemed to pay any attention to us.

Rock Valley was memorable mostly because it was so hot—no AC anywhere. We were housed on local farms and that worked fine. I remember the two farmers' daughters at the place where Allan and I stayed, but of the convention program I remember only that federation director Richard Postma was an interesting speaker. One memorable part of the trip itself was Corny's driving speed. He thought nothing of cruising at 90 miles per hour and that became scary enough that we asked him to slow down. Another part was the smelly brakes on the long and curving downhill stretches coming out of Yellowstone National Park.

In 1956, both the Young Calvinist Convention and the Young Women's Convention were held in Hamilton and I went again, this time with James Olthuis, Allan Sonnema, and Adrian De Jong. Adrian had a car and I again provided a tent. A minor misfortune befell us somewhere in Minnesota when I happened to be driving. Foolishly I did not slow down enough while going through a small town and I was promptly followed out of town by the local police, taken back to the magistrate's office and fined 25 dollars, payable on the spot. I was not happy, of course, but could blame only myself.

Jim and Allan's uncle Herman Wierenga had married Harriet Westra in 1934 in Randolph—actually in nearby East Friesland—and eight years later emigrated to Alberta with her and their three young children, first to Neerlandia and later, in 1949, to Edmonton. At Jim and Allan's suggestion, we had decided to travel via Randolph, Wisconsin, to meet some members of the Westra family—Allan and Jim had met a couple of the uncles and aunts when they visited in Neerlandia during the forties. I had, in the meantime, become acquainted with

Dixie, the oldest of the Wierenga daughters—more about her later. It was midnight by the time we reached Randolph and looked for a place where we might camp for the night. We soon met up with a local police officer who told us we could pitch our tent in the town park, so we did just that. Next morning we made our way to church in East Friesland, thinking 10 o'clock, and found that the service had just ended when we got there. We met the right people, though, and we were promptly invited to stay. We managed to meet many of the Westra relatives before we pressed on to Hamilton, with a stopover in Grand Rapids at the place where Allan's cousin John Hellinga was living. During our stay in Hamilton, Allan bought a new car, a '56 Mercury hardtop, so for the return trip to Edmonton our foursome got split in half and I rode home in the new car with Allan.



Corny, Bill, Allan on Rock Valley trip in 1955

A series of documents that John J obtained from the Immigration Canada offices in 2010 includes copies of the paper work involved in my application for Canadian citizenship. According to those documents, I signed a Declaration of Intention on 15 January 1953 (another form has 21 January 1954 as the date) and a Petition for Citizenship on 8 July 1955. The forms included my request to have my name anglicized. I had decided to change Willem Hendrik Hendrikus van den Born to William Henry Vanden Born and to go through life under that name from then on. The small citizenship certificate I carry in my wallet actually says Willem Hendrik, but my passport has the anglicized version of my name.

The court approval form was signed on 3 November 1955, with the printed notation “I find the applicant is a fit and proper person to be naturalized and possesses the required qualifications” (the criteria listed on the form include residence qualification [five years], good character, knowledge of English, intention to reside in Canada, and awareness of the responsibilities attached to Canadian citizenship). I do not remember anything about a formal presentation that may have taken place but I do remember the one-on-one interview I had with a judge in early 1956. I don’t recall being asked any questions about Canada, its government, or its culture, but I do remember telling the judge, in response to something he said to me, that I thought going through the process was mostly a formality. At that, he raised his eyebrows a fair bit, until I explained. I told him that I believed I had gradually become a Canadian during the seven years I had lived in Canada and that the documentation process I was going through now was the formality part.

Fortunately, the judge accepted that and I was in the door. On 6 April 1956 I signed a declaration of allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second and also a declaration of renunciation “of all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign sovereign or state of whom or which I may at this time be a subject or citizen.”



Christmas domino game 1957

I saw my sister Bertha regularly, and she and I usually would go together on trips to the family farm at Busby. A bidding game with dominoes often was part of those visits. The rules for the game probably were similar to the rules for ‘Moon Dominos’ but neither Jack nor I can remember for sure.

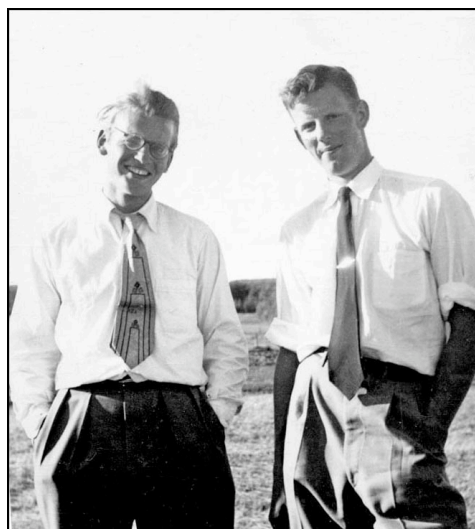
I did not have a lot of regular contact with my younger brothers. George worked a dairy farm near Edmonton for a time, and John J began his apprenticeship program with AGT (now Telus) during my student years. We did not see a lot of each other, and there are only a couple of photographs in my collection from those occasions.

During and after my second summer in Edmonton I was able to use the department truck or car from time to time for dates. I saw John Kuspira use the truck for what

appeared to be personal purposes on a regular basis, and so As a result of my work I had a key to the building as well as a key to the department office where the car and truck keys were kept. This was all in the new Agriculture building that was completed in 1954. During the winter the car was kept in a garage on campus, and I would carefully bring it back there after my outing, bring the keys back to the office, and walk home. Such personal use almost certainly did not have official approval; on one occasion John Unrau, the department head, came to see me in the lab and talked to me about using the truck. I don't remember the details of the conversation—he probably told me that there was no insurance coverage on it for such use. Apparently I was not too worried about that. In any case, he did not tell me not to do it again. Perhaps part of my rationale was that he himself and also Dean McCalla seemed to make use of the car for personal trips.



George in 1954



George and Bill in 1957

I had started attending the First Christian Reformed Church when I arrived in Edmonton, because that is where Bertha was going. Second and Third CRC had started already also but I had no connections there. Rev. J.K. Van Baalen was the gruff and brusque pastor and he taught the catechism class I went to. I remember nothing about the class itself but it did lead to a public profession of my faith in Jesus Christ on 24 May 1953, after a bit of a communal grilling by the elders. I remember it as the beginning of another and new phase in my life.

The Young People's group in the church met on Sunday nights, so that is where I went also. There were no such things as youth pastors then and the group ran its own affairs, made possible in part by the fact that the group's age makeup was quite different from that of most church youth groups nowadays—the youngest members probably were 16 or 17 but there were also many older ones, including several in their mid- or late twenties. When I started attending, the young men and women met separately 'before recess' and then met together for the 'after-recess' program. I enjoyed the group's meetings, including its social activities such as wiener roasts

and the occasional hayride. For a time I also served as its president. Contact with the girls was important also for this shy farm boy who at the age of 20 had never kissed a girl or been out on a date with one before.

Towards the end of my first year as a student, I finally got up enough courage to ask the quiet girl who sat beside me in my first-year chemistry class out on a date. It was not a memorable occasion and I did not go out with her again. During the next couple of years I was friendly with one of Bertha's friends for a while, and then with a friend of another friend, but none of those relationships became serious. I have heard rumours that some of the girls gave up on me because I was too 'green'. I had a couple of one-time dates with girls who worked in the Plant Science department but nothing serious resulted from those experiences either. I did become friendly with one of the girls in the Young People's Society for a time but, other than taking her 'home' after the meetings— she lived nearby, in a nurses' residence not far from the church—I never had a real date with her as in going somewhere together.

Then, in January or February of 1955, something happened that brought about a change. I was invited to join a few Christian School teachers at a small skating party, followed by a gathering at Nell Van Ry's home. The invitation probably came from Rita Oudman (she later married Walter Smith and changed her first name to Maria), whom I knew as a student from the year before. I cannot remember all the details but I think I was the only male at the party. There was also this new teacher, Dixie Wierenga, with whom I skated quite a bit that night, even as my long speedskate blades sometimes got in the way of her shorter skates. I had seen her once before, in First CRC, probably in August or September of 1954, but knew her only as the daughter of Herman Wierenga, immigration fieldman for the CRC, who had died in a car accident a few months earlier.



Dixie in 1956

If there is something like love at first sight—at least from my side—that is what bit me that night. It took some time before I got up the courage to phone her and ask her out on a date. She agreed, even though at the time she was not particularly interested in me—perhaps Rita Oudman had been interested, who knows? One date led to another and we soon saw each other regularly at Young People's meetings, though rarely at other times during the week. Our lives at school and study were busy.

Dixie had studied at Calvin College in 1953-54 and at the age of 19 had accepted a teaching position at the four-year-old small Edmonton Christian School, then located near the Royal

Alexandra Hospital. Teachers in Alberta were in short supply and one year of university education was deemed enough to get a temporary teacher certificate. Three years' worth of summer school courses had to follow, however, to become

eligible for a permanent certificate. Not long after Dixie returned to Edmonton from her year at college, her father died in a tragic car accident, at 47, leaving her mother a young widow with six children, the youngest not yet 2. Dixie was the oldest and she became the main breadwinner for the family for the next four years. As I think about it now in distant hindsight, I had no idea of the agony and grief the mother and children had been going through in the eight or nine months before I started walking into the family scene.

It took some time before we exchanged our first kiss but I remember it well. Gradually, Dixie had begun to accept my presence in her life—from my side there never was any doubt. She came with me to Bill and Bertha's wedding in June 1955 and occasionally we would be at their house on a Sunday afternoon. One of those times, perhaps for Bertha's birthday, my parents also came, much to Dixie's surprise—I had not told her and perhaps I did not even know they were coming. Meeting my parents without prior warning was a bit much for her this early in our relationship and a few times in the next weeks when I phoned about a date, the response was, "I am busy."

I was not about to give up, however, and as time passed the ice melted again. In addition to my spending Sunday time at the Wierenga home and the occasional other date we had, Young People Society and Northern Alberta League activities and meetings brought us together many times during the following months and years.

I was a representative of the First Church society on the League Board and Dixie became the League's representative on the board of the Young Calvinist Federation. Her role even took her all the way to Chicago for a meeting of that board. She also became heavily involved in the organization of summer Bible camps at Lake Edith in Jasper, and to a smaller extent in the planning of the first Young Calvinist Federation convention in western Canada, held in Edmonton soon after we were married and had left for Ontario.

Rev. Nick Knoppers presided over the League board; on one memorable winter trip Dixie and I rode with him to John Ellen's house in Lacombe—in the front seat—and John Ellen took all of us the rest of the way to Calgary for a meeting. On the return trip from Lacombe on, with the temperature around -30 C, we huddled under a blanket in Knoppers' freezing-cold car, and did not get home until the wee hours of the morning. Dixie had to teach that day, of course. Perhaps we were all just a bit crazy.

As time passed I began to think that I wanted to marry the young woman with whom I had fallen in love. She had been to the Busby farm with me a few times, mostly together with Bill and Bertha who provided the transportation, and she had even slept in the tiny and cold bedroom next to my parents' bedroom once or twice. I had spoken to my father about my plan to ask Dixie to marry me and had received his approval. One criterion he offered during our brief discussion was that I should marry someone of whom I could be proud. I was and I am. Many a Sunday afternoon Dixie and I would spend time on her mom's couch in the living room, mostly holding hands, of course. On one such occasion, around Christmas 1956, I decided that the time had come to press on. There was no premeditated plan or

speech, and no kneeling on the floor. I told Dixie I loved her and asked if she would marry me. She may have been more surprised about the timing of the question than about its content but, without hesitation, she responded with a “Yes.” Our fates were sealed. I had to clear things with Mom Wierenga, of course, and I received her approval as well.

Dixie and her mom had come to my B.Sc. graduation in June and I was well into my M.Sc. program of courses and research by this time. Of study or work plans beyond receiving that degree I had not thought much yet. Neither of us had any idea, therefore, that less than two years later we would leave family and home for an unknown and far-away destination. We were ready to marry the following summer (1957) but decided to wait another year. My father’s advice had been to wait until I had finished my master’s degree, and the wait allowed Dixie to stay with and support her family for another year. Not that she earned such a huge salary as Christian School teacher (\$2450 for the 1956-57 school year) but it was important.



In love in 1957



Dixie and Bill on Busby farm in 1957

Following tradition, and Bill Groot’s example, I took Dixie to Rae’s Jewellery downtown and bought her an engagement ring to symbolize our new relationship—for which I had nothing to show (on my hands, that is). It meant that we were formally engaged for a year and a half. At times that seemed to be a long period to wait for the promise of things to come.

Meanwhile, I actually began to make some plans for the future, in

the form of more study. None of these plans was worked out in a particularly rational way—they just gradually took shape. I enjoyed the research I was doing and decided that I would like to continue my study, towards a doctoral degree.

Most of my professors had doctoral degrees from universities in the US because only a few Canadian institutions offered them. The University of Alberta had just