

~ NORWAY HOUSE INTERLUDE ~

How did we ever come to go to Norway House? Well, I will have to blame Etta- indirectly. That is mean to blame someone else, isn't it? You know I don't mean it that way. She and Bess French were working in the school the year of 1919-20. Rev. Geo. Denyes was principal of the school and missionary for Norway House. During the late winter he came back to Ontario to secure his staff for the next year. He approached me in college. He wanted an assistant in the school that would free him for more time in his mission work with the native people. Would I come? If Etta had not been so competent in her work in the school he might not have even thought of me. If both Etta and I had not been so missionary minded I might not have considered the opening. But before he returned I agreed to go.

What a shock to Etta! He was back before mail got through so it was he who broke the news to her. I think she wondered at first if I had made a wise decision. But anyway she was standing by me. It meant a change in her plans too. And there was that wedding to get ready for. So she came out the last of June. Now in August we were going back together.

Leaving Winnipeg, or Selkirk, on the good (?) ship Wolverine on a Monday, we were two days going up Lake Winnipeg, calling at various points along the way. The northern end of the lake is quite open and can kick up quite a sea, which we sometimes found out, but this time it gave us good sailing. Wednesday at the head of the lake we transferred to a small tug and went the rest of the 25 miles down the Nelson River to Norway House. The Hudson Bay Post was the central location. Three miles farther, on pretty Playgreen Lake, the Mission was situated- Church, Mission House, School, Indian Agency, and Hospital, (under the Department of Indian Affairs) Also there was here a branch of the H.B. Post and another trading store.

The arrival of the boat is always the gala event for the week. Everyone comes down to the dock. Even what children are in the school for the summer are brought down. Of course there was a welcome for Etta, and a curiosity to see what kind of a fellow she would bring with her. Our welcome was really warm and hearty.

That School! There it stood back a distance, large and imposing. It had to be large to accommodate 105 children and a staff of ten to twelve. Three-quarters or more of the children went home for the summer but the rest had to be cared for during these weeks. The children came from the various reserves of that North country, Norway House, Cross Lake, Oxford House, God's Lake, Island Lake. The idea was that the children on the reserves had little chance for regular school. They had to go with their parents

to fishing and hunting camps. At the Residential School they were there year by year. They had every opportunity not only to get their schooling but to learn house work, kitchen work, laundering, sewing, social activities. The boys had gardening, farm work, carpentering, furnace and engine work (the school had its own electric plant and water pump, from the lake) The junior children went to class room all day, while the older ones had half a day and worked the other half in some department. When they got their high school entrance they had the opportunity of going out to Brandon to attend High School.

There were no movies to attend, no T.V. not even radio. It was truly a time for inventive genius among the staff for recreation. They measured up too. The close proximity and dependence on one another seemed to bring out the latent qualities of good fellowship and cooperation. The staff was there in that missionary spirit of service. Those not on duty were always planning something or carrying out some private project. For neighbours we had the Blackfords of Forestry Island, the Indian Agent and his family, the hospital staff.

Speaking of the Blackfords, they were grand people, much interested in the native people and always cooperative with the school. That winter before it got too cold Mr. B. planned a trip to Cross Lake. Two of his men would drive the dogs, his wife and Miss Herbert, matron of the school, would ride in the carriages. I had the nerve to ask him if I could take the school dogs and drive them, taking Etta in the school carriage. What else could he do but agree? But he made it look as if that were the very thing. I thought I knew more than I did about driving dogs— youhg fellow pretty sure of himself. We camped overnight in the bush and that was a real experience for us all, certainly new for me. Rev. and Mrs. Gaudin were overjoyed when they saw this cavalcade drive into their yard. What a joyous time we all did have together! I don't know how they tucked us all in for the two nights but they made it. We left early for Mr. Blackford wanted to make the 35 miles back in one day. Not being used to running so much my ankle gave out. One of Mr. Blackford's men (native) put me in with Etta and drove my dogs. He knew how too. Mr. Blackford drove the train he was driving. It was a memorable trip, not only for us, but it brought a bright spot to the early winter months of the Gaudins.

My work that year was mostly with the boys, and on the whole we got along pretty well. You had to be right on the job always lest someone put it over you. There were always things that had to be ferretted out to see who was guilty. But what would you expect? They were boys. A good bunch too when you got to know them.

Etta faced a different situation than I. In



the early part of the winter the kitchen matron, Mrs. Weaver, took sick and had to go out. (by dog train to Wabowden) Etta took over the kitchen. One of the big problems was bread. Etta was determined the children were going to get good bread, and the staff a little better still. I will let you figure out how many loaves would be needed per day for 105 hungry boys and girls. But Etta got the girls enthused and then work meant nothing. Bread to be proud of was the result, for both children and staff. Of course bread was but one item of the daily menu that had to be prepared and served. But the girls got to look forward to when their turn would come to work in the kitchen.

The Mission board was making new plans that year. The School and the Mission were to be separated, a man in charge of each. Mr. Blackford was retiring from the forestry and they secured him to take charge of the School. Rev. S.D. Gaudin would be transferred from Cross Lake to the Norway House Mission. For some reason Mr. Gaudin could not leave Cross Lake that year and the Board asked Etta and me if we would take the mission for the year.

July saw us moving into the Mission House on still another venture. We enjoyed the more intimate work with the native people. Sunday we had an English service in the morning to which the white people came, the children from the school, and some of the native people. In the afternoon it was a Cree service in which I had to speak through an interpreter. The School had its own Sunday School with the children. In the evening we went over to the school, for they held a variegated evening service in the class room for the children and staff.

It was somewhat of an upsetting year for us. We hardly knew just where we were at, or which way we should look. We even thought of returning to white work. During the year we were sometimes in touch with Island Lake men who had come in. (Island Lake was over 150 miles to the east) They had no missionary at present, though one had been there previously. They were asking for help. Finally we wrote the Mission Board and offered to go. Then we were busy, figuring what we would have to take, or could take, getting our order for supplies, getting packed—whatever we took would have to go by canoe. But we were happy in our decision.

## ~ I S L A N D L A K E ~

### - THE TRIP IN -

It took considerable planning and arranging to get ready for that first trip into Island Lake. Supplies— what would be needed for a year? House equipment?— what could we take? Personal belongings?— where draw the line? Everything had to go by canoe,

packed small enough and well enough for both canoe and portage. We could not take everything on that first trip of course. Other freight would have to follow all summer.

Miss Dorinda Sturdy, who had been on the school staff, was coming in with us as day school teacher. What the prospects were we could only draw on our imagination and hope for the best. Dad, at 72 years of age, concluded his work in Oshawa and came west to venture into the new undertaking with us. So we were a party of four boldly launching forth into the unknown, both as to route and destination. Rev. A. Barner, our superintendent, told us to picture every thing as bleak and as uncomfortable as we could- and find things worse as we encountered them. I think our adventurous enthusiasm toned that down a bit.

We had three canoes, two indian men handling each. Th canoes were typical of that country and its needs. Canvas covered, 17 feet long and broad enough for the two girls to sit comfortably side by side. One man pulled on the oars while the other leaned on his paddle in the stern, steering. I had to be active so sat in the bow of our canoe as pilot- my eye! I had a paddle. The third canoe was solely for supplies and freight. On regular freighting trips two men could take 1000 pounds of freight with their own food and equipment in one of these canoes.

We really tried to make it an enjoyable, explorative picnic trip. To some extent we succeeded, but sometimes it got pretty wearysome before camping time came. However, the men did not try to push things too much or make too long a day.

SUN- The glorious sun! yes, but sometimes too glorious. It could get uncomfortably warm on a stretch sheltered from the breeze. The reflection from the water could double the embracing warmth of the sun's arms. Etta learned later that a rich solution of plain epsom salts wiped on the face made a fairly good protection from burn.

LUNCH- As brief as possible. The grub box was in a handy place, and the men were adept at picking a spot and getting a fire going in no time.

NIGHT- The men were equally adept at picking a good camping site. Once in a while we were forced to make do with a second rate place. We had two small tents. The men soon gathered enough spruce boughs to cover the ground in them. On this we would roll out our blankets for the night- after we had killed all the mosquitos that had followed inside. (no mosquito spray) Supper could be prepared in a little more leisurely way and disposed of similarly. Sometimes we would have fresh fish to fry. After our evening prayers together we would all bunk in. The men used only mosquito bars for their shelter- unless it rained. In that northern clime the days were long.