

2. Grade School in Veregin

Our Canora farm was repossessed by the Dergousoff Family when further mortgage payments could not be made because of the Depression and severe drought in the 1930s. Our family moved to a leased farm 2 1/2 miles NE of Veregin in 1944. I entered the Primary School in Veregin which housed grades one through three with one Teacher, Olga Chernoff. I basically spoke Russian as it was the language at home. As one can imagine there were trying times at the beginning until I picked up English.

The majority of the students were from Doukhobor families with some Ukrainians mixed in, and generally I was very comfortable there since no bullying or teasing existed at the Veregin schools in those days.

One incident from that time stands in my mind is when Dorothy Trofimenkoff and Lucille Rilkoff, may have been just flirting with me as "older girls" but some type of friendly teasing was definitely taking place. It was an unusual reaction from me, but I decided to chase them around the classroom at noon. There appeared to be some enjoyment by the girls which may have infuriated me to grab the 'gold-edged' yardstick from the blackboard and the chase continued outside.

Around the three-holed outhouses and on to the triple teeter-totter and I thought I had them cornered at some point. The attack was to jump over the teeter support, and I swung the yardstick just as the girls were able to jump aside. Yes, the ill-fated moment was when the yardstick broke in two, just hanging together by the metal edging.

All three of us realized that we were in trouble as I gingerly carried the "war weapon" into the school and gently laid it back on the blackboard ledge. It was not that Mrs. (Olga) Chernoff noticed it but that we had a few "tattle-tales" in the class and the question was raised "who is responsible?"

Yes, I now know how young George Washington must have felt after that "chopping of the Cherry Tree" incident, as I reluctantly raised my hand.

It was not the four straps on each hand that hurt that much, as I bravely took my penalty, but the fact that by the time I walked the three miles home, my mother had already heard the news about her wayward "baby boy" and, as was common in those times, I received a long lecture on how Doukhobors do not physically hurt anyone and that I was especially demonstrating a dangerous trait. Well, I got a spanking instead of the motherly consolation that I was expecting.

Come to think of it, I never chased any girls with a yardstick ever again, so the reprimand obviously worked.

Brother Lawrence somehow became very interested in cooking. It was customary with farming families of the day, for the parents to travel to the nearest Village on Saturdays. There the men would gather to discuss farming matters while the ladies' bought supplies and caught up on all the gossip with the other ladies. The children rarely were taken as we had chores to do that

included cleaning the barn and chicken coop, bringing straw from the pile out in the field and then feeding all the farm animals. The regular "egg picking" and "cow milking" were added to the splitting of firewood and making sure there was always enough piled on the porch to heat the house through the night and into next day. The floors in the house had to be swept and washed every Saturday so that on Sunday we started the week with a clean and very healthy house as we would use a bit of Carbolic Acid in the floor wash water.

The farmhouse in Veregin was very similar to that in Canora as there seemed to a "footprint" of sorts that was common to the "accepted" design for farmhouse that was popular in those days.



This photo would be taken about 1946 at the Veregin leased farm 2 1/2 miles NE of Veregin on what was referred to as "Evdakimova" (owned by Evakim Chernoff) by our parents. I do recall another Chernoff owned the land that was just East (kiddy corner across the same section) of my life-long friend Dr. Bill Chernoff's home.

Brother Russel (14) on the left with Elmer (6) on the right. Our eldest brother Lawrence (15) in the middle. We are standing on the porch in front of the door to the kitchen/dining room. We are looking South to Veregin. We are all dressed up to go to Kamsack on our Model "T" Ford. An exciting family occasion this Saturday in the Spring of 1946!

As the day progressed, Lawrence would delegate the rest of us to do all those chores while he started baking some delicacies like Angel Food Cakes and Lemon Pies. We relented to his choice of our jobs as we were always rewarded by the results of his efforts.

In this incident, he had just set out six (6) Lemon pies to cool in the Living Room and closed the door, so no one went in. Well, I came rushing into the house, oblivious to all these kitchen "goings-on" and ran directly into the Living Room. I realized too late that I had to avoid the six (6) pies on the floor just inside the door. Well, I hit one and tried to roll to avoid the others but too late as I scored a ten and got them all. A disappointed oldest brother, somehow gathered all the filling and damaged crusts into a large baking pan and we had a "party" of sorts, partaking in an unplanned pastry feast. Yes, my popularity reached a very thin edge that weekend.

I recall sister Mary baking Ginger Snaps for the first time. Whatever she put into the recipe caused the Snaps to become "rock hard". The three brothers thought the entire incident very humorous, especially when I experimented and gave my dog "Nxxxxr" (we did not use politically correct language in those days) one of the snaps as a treat. Well, "Nxxxxr" rolled this snap from one end of his big mouth to the other and even tried breaking it between his paws to no avail and finally spit it out and abandoned it on the porch.

Well, the laughing was out of control as "Nxxxxr" looked on with what appeared to be a smile while sister Mary broke out into tears. It took at least a week before Mary tried to please her brothers again with her baking skills.



This is Elmer at the farm NE of Veregin at about 5 years of age. Yes, my favourite dog was "Nxxxxr" and there was the up-and-coming dog, Sport, as a puppy at that time.

There was never a time when these dogs would let me go anywhere without them. When I started school from this farm, the dogs would escort me to the gate by the road and stop there.

After school, they knew what time I should be coming and would meet me about a one-fourth mile along the road before the gate.

Sunday mornings were special days and various forms of memories which had the following scope:

- My father would be nursing a hangover from the Saturday "Meetings" in Veregin.
- My mother would be walking around angry with my father but recognized that the family was hungry and needed something to eat.
- She would prepare a large batch of batter for "Blintsi" which were cooked in a large cast iron frying pan, each Blintsi covering the entire pan bottom. The cooked product would have one-fold and be stacked on either side of a large serving plate.
- A large container of melted butter would be prepared along with fresh cream and a variety of syrups that included bought corn syrup and canned Saskatoon, Pincherry or Chokecherry syrups.
- Soft boiled eggs were in good supply as father enjoyed them with his blintsi rather than any sweet additives.
- The family would gather at one large table. Typically, I sat in the middle on a bench against the wall with Lawrence on the outside and Russel into the corner. My father sat across from Russel on the other side of the table with mother beside him and Mary at the end across from Lawrence.
- My father did not really like Blintsi and preferred a bowl of Borsch since a pot had been prepared early Saturday morning by mother just before they went to town. The aroma of Borsch still permeated this setting. Dad wanted Borsch and the routine was that he could not get it until noon as that was the way mother set the rules.
- The usual consumption of Blintsi was about three to four each but I managed to sneak in a few more as I was the youngest.
- This one time I ended up by myself in the house as everyone left to do chores so I started experimenting with just how much syrup could be poured over a blintsi. Well, what happened was that the syrup ended up over the edge of the plate, on to the table and then unto the floor.
- Good thing that "Nxxxxr" was watching all this and came to my rescue to lick up the surplus syrup off the floor.
- This resulted into a game with "Nxxxxr" as I tossed a blintsi into the air, "Nxxxxr" would catch and swallow it before it touched the floor.
- Mother came back into the house to find all the blintsi gone and "Nxxxxr" lying on the porch in the sun, so satisfied that his legs were in the air as he lay on his back, flatulating.
- Yes, she got the picture loud and clear, and my popularity was very challenged the rest of the day as blintsi was usually our lunch that day.

It was late that November of 1947 that the family moved to a recently purchased 320-acre farm 3 1/2 miles NE of Pelly, Saskatchewan and we left the leased farm in Veregin.

I was absolutely in love with dogs and the love was returned as no matter where I went, the dogs went with me. I tried teaching my dogs to act like horses to pull whatever I had that could be "hitched" to it with the dog harnesses that could be purchased from Eaton's catalogue. This photo of my dog Sport obediently obeying my commands but would stop often to rest and my disappointment.



This photo is likely the Spring of 1946 vintage. Still on the Veregin leased farm.

I was standing facing East with the gate to the farm right behind me.

The "cart" was built by my brother Lawrence from two pulleys on a shaft supporting the cart.

The family used to humour me to ask me to roll this contraption over planted garden rows to "pack" the ground so wind would not erode same.

At this juncture in my life, I could not think other than I would be anything else except a farmer. Understood much later, that one aspires to excel into his surroundings. Whatever I did I wanted to emulate my father who I loved with all my heart. I wanted to be able to do whatever all the men did, and I could not wait to be considered an equal with all the grown men. I would always be there where the men were so that I could understand the adult world. I would be very disappointed when I was not able to go on "work parties" with men and be able to eat at the table with the men.

It was an obsession!

End Chapter 2 (Edited by EWV October 22, 2021)