Sutherland and the Canadian Pacific Railway

Sutherland, a Canadian Pacific Railway divisional point, was a town of probably 1,000 people. There were a lot of interesting things that went on in our little town and we knew practically everyone because almost everyone of the men in town worked on the railway in the capacity of engineer, fireman, conductor, brakeman, switchman, yardman or over in the shops. Since Sutherland was a divisional point, all of the train crews began or ended their run in Sutherland. When one would speak of some man being out on the road, it meant that he was out on a trip on the railroad.

Dad would often be called to go on a trip to Wilkie, Lanigan, Wynyard, Colonsay and we felt that we knew these places having heard of the activities in these small railroad towns. Sometimes he would get a call to go to Regina, sometimes to Prince Albert, Nipawin, Naicim or Meadow Lake which were all (with the exception of Regina) towns north of Sutherland-Saskatoon.

In those days we didn't have "Call Girls", we had "Call Boys". Call Boys were hired to call the men whenever they were to go out on a run or a trip. These Call Boys were men hired by the C.P.R. but couldn't take the jobs as brakemen because they were on what was called the "Spare Board". In those days very few people had telephones so the Call Boy would come at various hours during the day or night, usually an hour or so before the train was due to leave and call the employees to go out on a run. If a Call Boy was calling Dad during the night he would pound under my Dad and Mother's bedroom window and Dad would holler "Yes" and the Call Boy would say, "Frank, you're called for 2:30 AM on a 'drag west'. It might be a call for 3:45 on "977" or "978" -- these numbers were given to freights going west or east.

I can remember my Dad saying "odd numbers west and even numbers east" in reference to these numbered freights. Dad would usually have some idea when he might be called as he would say "we're first or second out" but didn't know exactly which freight or what time it might be. The Call Boys, like all railroaders had to get out in any kind of weather -- a blizzard or whatever.

The Call Boys had some peculiar experiences that they would relate to some of the other men. They said that at some places, they didn't know whose head would pop out of the window or whose voice would answer when they pounded on the wall. This was particularly true of the C.P.R. houses which were large duplexes on what we called "the other side of the tracks". These houses rented for quite a nominal sum. Some of the people that lived in the C.P.R. houses played what in this day would be called "switchy bitchy". The husband would be out on the road and one of the other men or one of the young bachelors around town would keep this man's wife company while he was away. Some of the men also were playing games when they were out on the road.

I can recall one case where there was a woman that got herself involved with a locomotive foreman. She was a very nice looking, dark-haired woman and her husband was a very nice looking dark-haired man. The man that this lady became involved with was a great big Swede or Norwegian -- a big, blond, husky guy. As it happened she produced a big, blond daughter and named her "June". People said that she had made a mistake in naming the daughter "June" -- it should have been "August" because August was the name of the big Swede. When this little girl and her sister would quarrel, the sister would say, "Well you're not my sister anyway".

Sometimes Dad would be called out in the middle of a blizzard to go out

on a snowplow and that meant that the train would consist only of a snowplow, engine and caboose. The length of the trip was contingent on the distance that they had to travel to the snow blocked tracks (50-75 miles sometimes) and the time it took to clear the snow from these tracks. My poor Dad went out many and many a stormy (30-40 below zero (F) night. He would bundle up well for his one mile walk to the station to pick up his train. I doubt, if, at that time, there were 10 people in town that had automobiles and we weren't one of the 10. The railroaders didn't hold down an 8 to 5 job, they could be called for a trip or return from a trip at any time during the day or night. Sometimes if he was lucky he'd be called at 7 PM for a trip and would return the next night at 7 or 8 PM but that was more on the regular freights. Dad worked on freight more than he did on passenger and he said he liked working freight better than he did passenger. Sometimes he was called to go out on "mixed trains". Mixed trains usually consisted of freight cars and probably a couple of passenger cars. The mixed trains would stop at every little town or station. Many of the passengers would be travelling on a pass so it really wasn't a paying trip for the railway.

Often on both mixed and passenger trains, the railway had "spotters". These "spotters" were often Chinamen and the men got so that they could "spot" a "spotter". These "spotters" were watching to see if the conductor pocketed the cash that was given to them by people buying their tickets on the train. Sometimes the "spotters" would offer a reduced amount of money to the conductor. If the conductor took the bait, he would be "turned in". He would either be suspended or fired. Often the man who had been suspended or fired would be referred to by other railroaders as "colorblind" meaning that he

couln't distinguish his money from the company's. A man by the name of Jack Williams was fired because he was "colorblind" as far as money was concerned. Another man "Dave Gould" was suspended but I think that was for drinking on duty. The day before Christmas that year, my brother Elmer came home from down town and said, "Mr. Gould died today, he shot himself". He was despondent over being let out. There were a lot of funny things that happened and there were also some tragic things.

I can remember the kids from across the tracks might arrive late for school because they had to wait for a freight train to pass and clear the crossing. There might be a lot of shunting around of the freight train making the kids late but the teachers took that into consideration. One time a kid named Johnny Rosmo decided he didn't want to wait for the crossing to be cleared and he tried to climb over the freight cars. He feel under the train and lost all the toes on one foot.

I must tell you about the time that my Dad "HELD UP THE TRAIN", that is, all the trains between Saskatoon and Sutherland. He came in from his run and had forgotten to turn in the "Clef". This "Clef" was a type of key that the conductor was given in Saskatoon. Dad must have been conductor on that train as he was given the key. When a conductor got to Sutherland, he would have to turn this key in so that the line would then be open between Saskatoon and Sutherland, a distance of about 3 miles. There was only a single track between Saskatoon and Sutherland and this key was to prevent any head-on collissions between trains on this track. It was a cold winter's night the night that Dad came in off that run. He had barely gotten in when the phone rang -- it was someone at the station calling to tell Dad that he'd forgotten

to turn in the "Clef". Sid and I were home for the Christmas holidays at that time and offered to return the "Clef". That mile walk back to the station was a cold one. For the length of time that Dad had the "Clef" all trains between Saskatoon and Sutherland were held up.

In my growing up years there were quite a few immigrants, Ukrainians, Polish, Russian and Italian people. The majority of these people lived "across the tracks". These people worked mostly on the section. The section men were responsible mostly for the maintenance of the tracks and the road bed. This was done with pick and shovel and was probably one of the lowest paying jobs. We more or less looked down on them because they just weren't our people -- in this day and age, that's called "discrimination". There was a Russian shoemaker in town whom we called "Nick". We didn't use that familiarity with other people in town. These people were called "bohunks" behind their backs. Speaking of familiarity, there was very little of that with anybody in those days. The men usually called other men by their first names but not the women. No matter how long they knew each other, it was always, "Mrs. Croteau, Mrs. McIntosh, Mrs. Quigley, etc."

One time there was an English Lord who came out on a hunting trip to Northern Saskatchewan. He was travelling on a mixed train (part freight and part passenger) and of course, he had his meals with the train crew as there was no diner on a mixed train. When the meal, served in the caboose, was just about finished, one of the brakemen said to this Lord from England, "Keep your fork, Duke, there's pie coming" so whenever we have pie, it's a standing joke at our house to say, "Keep your fork, Duke, there's pie coming".

One time my Dad left his dress shoes over at the caboose. He sent Elmer

over to get them. Dad's conductor at that time happened to be "Tiny Wooten". Tiny Wooten was a tall, slim man probably 6'6". Elmer went over to the caboose and brought home a pair of shoes. They weren't my Dad's shoes which were about size 9 -- they were Tiny Wooten's shoes which were about size 13. We all got a laugh out of that but of course, Elmer had to take the shoes back and get the right ones.

Dad would sometimes get a job on a work-train which meant that he would be away from home nearly all summer except for the occasional days that he would be able to come home. He'd catch a ride home on some freight or something of the sort and he might be home for only 24 hours.

The men put in bids for these work-trains and the man with the most seniority would get the job. Dad liked to bid in for the "work trains" because it meant longer hours and more money. In the 1920's and 30's that was very important. A work-train check seemed to be pretty good for the family. Dad was on a work-train at Crystal Springs in the summer of 1932. At that time they were laying a new railroad line from Lanigan to Prince Albert. He worked in the Crystal Springs area where a year later I got a teaching job in January 1933. Some of the people I got to know had known Dad and his crew quite well -- Leslie Watts, the station agent there had known Dad and his crew.

My Dad was a good cook and he was often the cook on the caboose. The tail-end brakeman, that is the one that worked the end of the train, was usually the cook but if Dad happened to be the front-end brakeman, they would have him do the cooking and the tail-end brakeman would do Dad's work up at the front end of the train. Dad would supply the food and prepare it and the men would pay him according to the number of meals that they had.

Often at the middle or the end of the month when they were paid, they would come up to our house to pay their board bill. There were a few that Dad would have to persuade to pay their bills but the majority of the men were quite honest and paid up promptly.

There was a young couple in Sutherland, the man was a brakeman who was frequently on the "Spare Board" and might only make a few dollars a month. Almost every Sunday afternoon they would come up to our place for a visit. Invariably, we would have a roast or roast chicken, because we were always well fed. They were always invited to stay for supper. Although Mother prepared simple meals we always had meat, potatoes, vegetables, fruit or pie and Mother was a good pie-maker. It was always a hearty meal. Riley, the wife of this young brakeman, Tom, told me many years later, "You may not have known it but we always went up to "Crotes" (that's what they used to call Mom and Dad) on Sundays because we didn't have anything to eat and we always knew we'd get a good square meal at Croteau's. This was in the hungry 30's when a lot of the men were on the "Spare Board".

I remember one time at the beginning of the "depression", Dad came home and said, "They're going to put us on mileage". Prior to that they could work as many hours and as many days as the trains ran. They were put on a mileage basis so that every man would have a little bit of work. If they were allowed 3,500 miles a month, when they got the 3,500 miles in, they had to lay off and that gave some of the fellows on the "Spare Board" a chance to get some mileage in too. Although it worked a bit of a hardship because it was like a cut in wages, it also gave the others an opportunity to earn a little bit of money as well.

One advantage of being on the railroad was the passes that were allowed. Dad had a pass at all times that he carried with him. If our family wanted to go on a holiday, Dad would have to apply for a pass for Mother and us children. We made numerous trips as we'd always say "down East". We were sort of the envy of the other kids because some of them never had a trip in spite of the fact that their Dad's worked for the railway. Probably Mother might have $10 or $15 when she left home in addition to her pass and that was for our holiday. You can imagine going down to Ontario, to Powassan, up to Northern Ontario to South Porcupine and Timmins by way of North Bay or down to Pembroke and across to the Island which was Alumette Island where my Grandmother Gallagher lived and only having that much cash in your pocket. I wouldn't go uptown these days without having that or more in my pocket as well as my Visa Card. Times were quite different then. In addition to our suitcases full of clothing, there was a suitcase full of lunch. When meal time came passengers on the train would open their suitcase or basket of lunch and the family would have a meal. At the back of some of these coaches, particularly the ones that were called "Tourist" coaches, they would have a little kitchenette where you could boil water over a gas burner to make tea. The "Newsy" would come around selling fruit, chocolate bars, etc. It was a real treat to buy an orange which would be almost the size of a grapefruit and it might be 10¢ but it was a treat to have something like that on the train. We always left on the noon train which would come into Sutherland around 12 PM or 12:15. We would go as far as Winnipeg then we would have to change trains. After leaving Winnipeg, we travelled through the "Canadian Shield", a beautiful rocky, forested area around Kenora and Lake of the Woods - there were numerous lakes in this area, some covered with water lilies. We would travel through Fort William and Port Arthur (now combined under the name of "Thunder Bay"). Our travel along the Lake Superior division was very beautiful and also very rough.

Our first stop would be Chapleau (Ontario), my Aunt Celie's, two days after the start of our journey. Invariably we would have pumpkin pie for lunch or a fruit dish of blue berries AND that was lunch. We would stay there for a few days visiting our aunt, uncle and cousins, and would always visit the cemetery. That was something Eastern Canadians always did at that time -- they'd take you to the cemetery so that you could see who had died since the last time you were there. Many times Mother would say let's take a walk out to the cemetery and invariably she would say, "Oh, I didn't know so and so was dead." It was interesting for her and a chance to reminisce. Chapleau was on a lake and it was quite wooded around that area. It was always nice to get there. After our little visit was over, we'd catch the train and go on to North Bay and from there on to Pembroke or else from North Bay we'd change trains and take the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway to Timmins or South Porcupine where our Aunt Phine, Grandmother Croteau and Uncle Zeb lived. Uncle Zeb lived there just part of the year when he came home from his "bush farm" in Pouce Coupe, British Columbia. We loved picking blueberries when we were there -- we always had a lot of fun in South Porcupine. The last time that I made a trip down East by railway was in 1932 just after I had finished Normal School but I have fond memories of that trip.

SUTHERLAND

On our way down town, we had to pass a livery barn that was run by Sandy Campbell, a Scotsman who was also one of the town drunks. It was a hangout for a lot of town drunks -- one of them was Bill Marks and another was old Mrs. Alexander. Any time you passed there, you hurried past because you were a little afraid, especially when you were a kid. I can remember that old Sandy had a big family. He must have had 10 or 12 children crammed into a little shack of a place. They lived in poverty while old Sandy drank with his buddies.

Whether his liquor was home-brew or not, I never did know. We played with the Campbell kids. They were looked down on but then all underprivileged people in town were. Also some looked down on those who didn't work for the C.P.R. At one time Old Sandy Campbell had been the janitor at the school and I guess the family did all the work. Then he graduated to having the livery barn.

The Campbell kids were known to be infested with lice. I can remember one time that I got an unplanned haircut in a hurry because Bessie Campbell had been pushing me on our swing and of course, every time she bent over I guess I got a few friends added to my hair. I had long red ringlets. I had red hair and freckles and was as ugly as a spotted dog when I was a little kid -- thank heavens I've improved. Mrs. Pickard told Mother that she didn't like me because I had red hair. In those days people with red hair or who were left-handed were almost considered freaks. One time when I was 3 or 4 years old, my mother decided that she would dye my hair, what color I don't know. She purchased the dye but Dad found out about it and prevented her doing it. To get back to the "lice incident" -- Mother discovered these in my hair so my long ringlets were cut off and I can remember having applications of coal oil, fine toothed comb and newspapers put on the table and being combed and combed to get rid of the lice and the nits which were the eggs of the lice. After that I was warned never again to let the Campbell kids push me on the swing. They were nice kids -- we liked them and played with them. It wasn't their fault that their Dad was a drunk.

I can remember too, old Mrs. Alexander, an old Scottish lady, who still wore long dresses, and who lived on the other side of the tracks. Years later during the hungry 30's or even the late 20's, Les was delivering milk for a

dairy. He did this when he wasn't going to school -- he had taken a year or so off after high school. He thought he had had his education by that time but later went back and got his degree with distinction in geology. To get back to Mrs. Alexander, Les said that she was the only one on his milk route (and this was with horse and wagon) who would ask him in on a cold morning for a cup of coffee or called him to get warm. Les was probably 17 or 18 then and this impressed him and nobody could ever say anything about Mrs. Alexander. He had a lot of respect for her. A lot of the other people had no consideration for anyone being out in the cold and in Saskatchewan it could get cold. Years later Mrs. Alexander was burning leaves when her long skirt caught fire, she was severely burned and died as a result of the burns.

Bills Marks, another of the town drunks, that I mentioned before, later became the caretaker at the skating rink. He was usually in his cups but we loved "old Bill". The kids would tell him their troubles and he would help us tie up our skates and make the laces tighter. He was a good old guy. He was just a town character that's all.

I can remember one time when Elmer, Ivy Delayen and I were sitting out on the back steps on a lovely summer's evening -- it was dark and probably 9:30 or thereabouts. Mother called Elmer and I to come in a few times -- we hadn't gone in, it was just too nice a night. After a little while, Elmer said "Look!" so we looked across at the back alley, behind Dunlop's garage and there was Mother. We didn't know at the time it was Mother -- she had thrown a sheet over herself and was acting up in the light from the kitchen window which was shining over onto the garage. We saw her in this light. She scared us so badly that Ivy went home and Elmer and I went into the house. Mother came in laughing at the trick she had played on us to get us to go into the house.

I must tell you about another character -- a young lad named Bud Spence. He was the same age as Elmer was and was an only child. He went to Saskatoon to take piano lessons and while he was taking the lesson and the teacher was otherwise involved (Bud was 15 or 16 at the time), Bud would swipe money out whatever place he kept his money. He would arrange to meet some of his friends after the lesson, he'd then hire a taxi and they'd ride all over Saskatoon or Sutherland on the music teachers money unbeknownst to the music teacher or Bud's parents. One time when this happened, Elmer and Calvert Gould were guests of Bud on the joy ride. Of course, Mother and Dad knew nothing of what was going on. Anyway, Mrs. Gould came up to our house because neither of us had phones -- this was a matter of six or eight blocks that she had to walk. She had come up to see if Calvert was there. Calvert wasn't there, Elmer wasn't there, so it was decided that they were in Saskatoon. The parents met the streetcar at 9:30 PM, no boys; at 10:30 PM three smiling boys got off the streetcar to be met by some very unhappy parents. Each boy was escorted home. Dad told Elmer to take his clothes off because he was going to get a spanking. Dad never did give any of us a spanking -- Mother usually did that. At any rate, Elmer went to hang up his clothes in the clothes closet and when he did Dad gave him a boot in the rear. Elmer fell down, was laughing so hard he couldn't get up. Dad didn't know whether he'd hurt Elmer so badly that he couldn't get up or what. Elmer's laughter finally subsided and he was able to get up. He wasn't punished for the caper and I don't think he did anything like that again. Afterwards, Mrs. Gould told how when Calvert got home, Mr. Gould wacked him with his hands and Mrs. Gould who appeared to be a very pious lady, although she really wasn't, said to her husband, "Father, may the Lord give they hand more power". I

might add that Mrs. Gould often acted as the chaplain for the Lady Trainmen Lodge and appeared very, very pious.

In the Fall, the boys would go out "stooking" or "pitching bundles of grain for farmers in the area. They would probably work 16 hours a day for $3.00 to $4.00 a day for 10 to 12 days, depending on the weather. They lived in bunk houses and their meals were provided. They would come home tanned and with blistered hands in time to start the next year of high school. This money (in the 1920's) helped to purchase some of their books and clothes.