

## Dutch Mennonite Historical Genealogy

### The School Years

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*This is the third in a series of four biographical accounts chronicling the experiences of Marjorie (Fast) Teichroeb and Peter Teichroeb growing up on the Prairies in the early to mid 1900's. Interviews were conducted with Pete and Marj during the summer of 2021.*

Marjorie loved school. There was no kindergarten on the Prairies in the 1940s and children started their schooling in Grade 1. For Marj this was the beginning of twelve wonderful years in the same school in Waldheim. Her school had five rooms: Grades 1 and 2 shared one room, 3 through 5 another room, and so it progressed, 6 through 8, 9 and 10, and 11 and 12. Although some Mennonite communities in Saskatchewan established their own Mennonite operated schools, Waldheim had a public school. However, given the ethnic composition of Waldheim in those days, the students were all from Mennonite families and they also went to the same church. Marj had lots of friends in school, particularly in the more senior grades. The students all graduated together and socialized together. Some of them remained life-long friends.

In Grade 1 she remembers sitting at a long table with chairs, and days filled with lots of cutting and pasting of pictures from magazines. Her report card says she was a “tattletale”. Perhaps she was simply the moral compass of her class.

She liked all her teachers, and the teachers, working with such an enthusiastic student, all liked her. One elementary teacher, Miss Dyck, married the brother of one of Marj's uncles. Her Grade 6 – 8 teacher was Mr. Richert. No one really liked him except Marj. In his Grade 8 commencement speech he singled out Marj as a student who was outstanding for always doing her best in any endeavor. Starting in Grade 9 there were different teachers for different subjects. Her home room teacher that year was a man with a wooden leg. The students called him Peg Leg behind his back.

An important part of the student marks each year was based on how well their notebooks were maintained. Students put lots of effort into keeping these well organized and decorated. Marj was naturally fastidious, and her notebooks were always impressive works of art.

Marj enjoyed all the subjects she was taught except Mathematics, but even this she came to like when she studied geometry in Grades 9 and 10.

Marj lived close enough to walk to school, as did all the other village children. Farm children, on the other hand, had to travel long distances every day. In winter farm children would travel to school in enclosed, horse drawn cutters. The older students, thirteen years of age or older, would drive the horses. There was a barn on the school property to house the horses during the

school day. During colder months the cutters were heated by on-board wood burning stoves and students had to go out to the barn to tend the fires regularly.

The village children, living so close to school, generally went home for lunch, whereas the farm children always ate their lunches at school. One would think the local children enjoyed the advantage, but instead they envied the farm children. Luckily, when the weather was especially frigid village students could stay at school for lunch too. This was an extremely exciting event for them. The farm children had proper lunch boxes used daily all year, but Marj made do with a Rogers Syrup can she carried her lunch in because it was not worthwhile to spend money on something used so infrequently. Fortunately, there was never a shortage of Rogers Syrup cans in any Mennonite community.

Recesses in elementary years were spent on swings and see-saws or playing volleyball.

When not in school the village children occupied themselves with games such as hide-and-seek at the park (where her sister Helen fell through a barbed wire fence erected to keep the cows out, receiving permanent scars), skipping, hopscotch, ball games such as “auntie-auntie-over”, where a ball was thrown over the roof of the house, and open rink hockey. Marj liked to skate, but she only possessed ill-fitting, secondhand skates that had lost all their ankle support, making it difficult to skate well.

Waldheim had a good hockey team, and they would play against teams from other towns. They also played against the team from the residential school at Duck Lake. Hockey fans would go out to the school in open trucks to watch their team play. It was great fun but the spectators had no idea what was really going on in those residential schools.

In more senior years Marj played in a curling league on an indoor rink. Her team won the curling championship in High School one year. Broomball was another winter sport she played.

Marjorie and her curling team:



Peter did not enjoy school nearly as much as Marj, except for the school Christmas concerts. At the very beginning of his schooling things got off to a rocky start. The family was living in the Warmen-Clark's Crossing area when he began Grade 1 in March at the age of five, mid-way through the school year. In June he was promoted to Grade 2 in the normal course. Then he changed schools, attending the Malden school where his teacher quickly realized he was not ready for Grade 2 work and sent him back to Grade 1. This was a frustrating setback.

In Grade 3 he had a teacher who was abusive. One time Pete was caught teasing one of the girls in his class, and the teacher grabbed him by the hair and tore a patch right out. His mother was greatly displeased with both Pete and the teacher.

The family moved again in 1939, and he attended Roseleaf School starting in Grade 5. He had a good teacher there, a Mr. Siemens, and consequently Pete enjoyed school much more than in the earlier years, even though he was not a particularly devoted student. In Grade 7 Mr. Siemens told Pete he should consider studying Engineering after finishing public school, because he had an aptitude for it.

Pete took Grade 8 at the school in Virtue. This was his last year of school.

While he never missed school because of farm chores during the school year, the year he completed Grade 8 things changed. His father, Dan, became unwell and Pete's help was desperately needed to keep the farm running. Dan had developed stomach ulcers which were attributed to his constant worry about the crops and other concerns related to operating the farm. In addition, around the same time the family started a dairy, adding to the load of concerns weighing on Dan. Fortunately, with Pete at home on the farm full time, Dan's health improved. Pete put in the crops, and this allowed Dan to focus on the dairy.

Living on a farm meant Pete did not have friends living nearby. This limited his options when he was a young child. He does not recall playing with his sisters, but he and his brother Lou spent a lot of time together. They had a huge sandbox in the yard and played with cars and trucks. They also snared gophers and could get one cent for each tail they turned in. They would bring in as many as fifty at a time. They fished in the river and although they did not catch much, they did get the occasional goldeye, a bony fish that had to be eaten carefully. If you got a bone caught in your throat you had to eat dry bread to clear it.

Pete and Lou:



When Pete was older, he could range more widely and freely. In his teens he could consort with friends on other farms. He played football in Winter and softball in Summer. He and his friends took up cross-country skiing. He skated and played hockey until a large player fell on him and permanently wrecked his ankles. He could not skate well after that, dashing all hopes of an outstanding NHL career.