

## Dutch Mennonite Historical Genealogy

### The Depression and War Years

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*This is the last 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.*

### The Depression

In the years leading up to World War II rationing and shortages were already well known. Pete remembers that they could only have three cows because of limits on feed due to the widespread drought sweeping the prairies. There were similar constraints on the number of horses a farmer could keep. They were limited to one steer for the same reason. Sometimes the family would also raise a calf to butcher because it was easy to keep the birth of a calf secret, whereas raising more than one steer was difficult to conceal.

During these years, in the depths of the Great Depression, many unemployed men hitched rides on freight trains in their search for work. In the earliest days of the Depression, before Marj was born, her father Al was one of those men. Along with many other young men he hopped aboard west bound freight trains hoping to find work. There was no work and he returned to Saskatchewan where he married and took any paying job he could find to make ends meet.

*Al (sitting in the doorway) with a work crew during the depression:*



Trains would regularly switch between Warman and Clark's Crossing, where Pete lived, and they would slow in the vicinity of the farm, making it easy for itinerant laborers to hop on and off the cars there. Since the farm was so close to the tracks it became a favored stopping point for hobos looking for a meal. Margaret would give them sandwiches and coffee and Dan built a

table in the yard for them to use. The family had a big, protective farm dog that would guard Margaret from any strangers on the property.

The government eventually provided subsidies to put people back to work during the depression and brought an end to transient workers riding the freight trains.

There was a lot of charity in those days. Farmers often shared butchered meat with neighbors who struggled to support themselves and didn't have the resources to feed their families.

Freight trains came from northern Manitoba during the winter loaded with frozen fish that families could purchase in 100-pound sacks. The fish kept well until spring, and then the remaining fish were canned. Families ate a lot of fish in those days.

## The War

War broke out in 1939. Dan bought their first, battery-operated, radio so that he could keep up to date on the progress of the hostilities. He listened to the news every day. Peter was ten years old, and he did not pay a lot of attention to the news. He knew there was a war, but it was far away, to him more an idea than an event.

To support the war effort there were parades in Saskatoon and military displays. Lots of young men joined the army anticipating the excitement of fighting overseas. They became less excited after experiencing six or eight weeks of arduous training in boot camp, and many went AWOL. Several of Pete's older cousins joined the military and went overseas.

One cousin, Peter Teichroeb, drove a tractor-trailer ammunition hauler in France and Germany, dumping ammunition into the trenches. At one point he left the truck and jumped into a trench to speak to the soldiers there. While the truck was idling, unattended, it was hit by an enemy shell and blew up. Cousin Peter survived and later went on to fight as a tank operator in the Korean War.

Cousins John Teichroeb and Henry Teichroeb served in France in the Canadian Infantry.

One cousin, Ed Penner, joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and became a tail gunner on a bomber aircraft. He flew 56 missions. On his last mission his plane was hit, and the navigator seriously injured. The pilot diverted to a military hospital in Africa to save the navigator. Ed later said he was thankful he crewed a bomber rather than a fighter because the fighter aircraft were instructed to gun down enemy civilians fleeing from attacks and this was dreadful.

A couple of female cousins also joined the military although they did not go overseas.

Pete's farm was not far from an RCAF training facility and Pete remembers a lot of airplane activity in the area, and planes crashing not far from the house. Once in winter the engines froze up in a bomber on weather reconnaissance. It crashed on the farm of Ed Penner's father. Sadly, the entire crew of four were killed.

*British Commonwealth Air Training Base in Saskatchewan:*

*(<https://saskaviation.ca/the-bcatp-in-saskatchewan/>)*



The family experienced shortages and rationing during the war, a continuation of the difficult times experienced during the depression. Sugar, butter, and coffee were rationed. Gelatin was unavailable because it was used to make ammunition. This was particularly memorable and distressing to children at the time because it meant there were no jellybeans. Generally, clothing was available, but nothing made of serge or wool could be purchased because that was used for military uniforms. Coupons were issued for rationed goods, and these were often traded for other goods or coupons. Farmers usually did not need their butter coupons, and these were almost always traded. The barter system was fully employed, and farmers would pay for necessities with produce rather than cash.

Before Dan had been given his naturalization papers, he received regular visits from the RCMP, and this routine continued through the war years. At one point they noticed that Dan had grown a moustache. One of the officers asked him why he had it and he jokingly explained he was a good German. They replied that they would not report him but suggested he shave it off. This was a time when Canadian citizens of Japanese descent were being incarcerated without cause, and Dan probably did not fully appreciate the riskiness of his jest.

The war years were a period of major disruption of families and livelihoods, but this was also a period of technological development. It was during the early war years that Pete's family purchased not only their first radio, but later their first Victrola record player. It played rolls rather than vinyl records.

Marj was only of pre-school age when the war started but she remembers rationing, coupons and care packages. People would knit socks and hats to include in care packages that were sent to the military overseas. Her mother, Helen, knit socks for this cause. Towns would host square dances where the entrance fees were articles for care packages.

Marj had never in her life seen an airplane until the war started and an airplane flew directly over their house, so low they could read all the markers painted on the fuselage.

She remembers the Strierner boys, her uncles, joining the army and then going AWOL. Sometimes they would hide themselves at Marj's house. Her mother, Helen (the boys' older sister), would hide the brothers in closets to keep their presence a secret when the military police came searching for them.

She remembers one of her father's friends had a severe case of shellshock when he returned from the war. He could not handle the sound of children playing, or other loud noises.