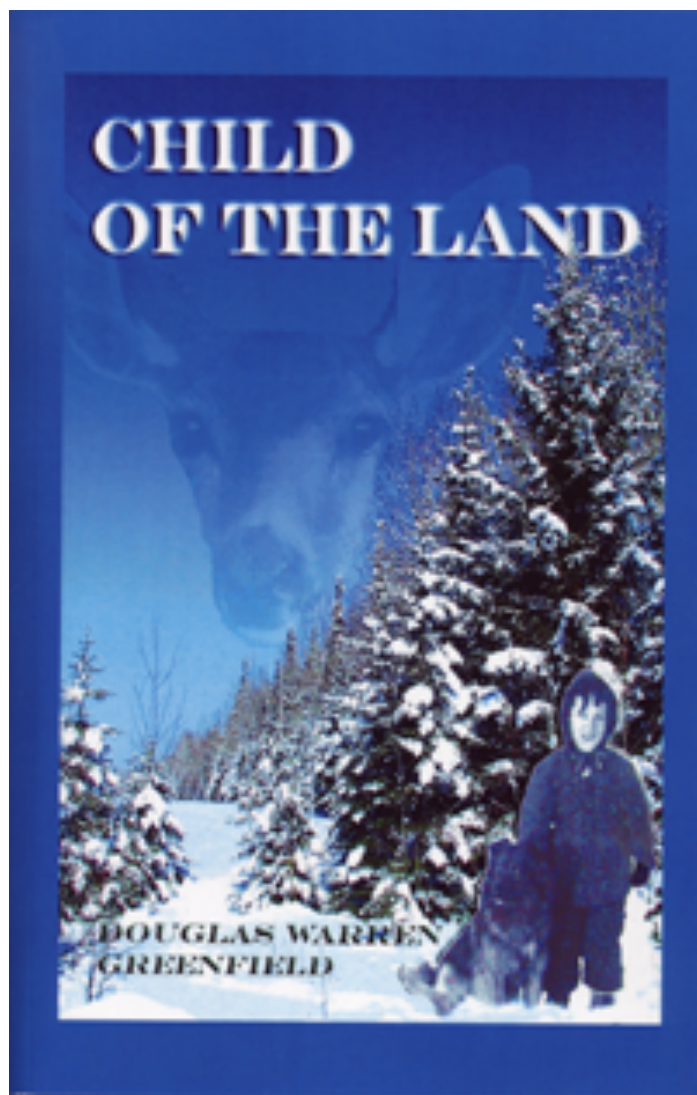


A Sample Chapter of:

An autobiography by:
Douglas Warren Greenfield





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Written compilation and layout: Doug Greenfield

Editor and advisor: Maggie Greenfield BA-ICS

Contact the author: editor@artscriptpublications.ca

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Forward

Child of The Land is a true story written as a record of my childhood growing up on a homestead in northern Alberta. It is also a story of how the experience of that simple, wholesome beginning gave me a vital foundation on which to build an exciting and adventurous life to come.

Furthermore, it is written to commemorate my parents. I am deeply thankful for all that I learned from them as they laboured to raise their children and develop our family business.

The names in this book have not been changed to protect the innocent because, as I recall, none of us were very innocent! We were all full of fun, mischief and tomfoolery. We saddled every adventure that rode by and gave our parents good reason to grow old.



Chapter Three

A cabin under the northern lights

**A sample Chapter from
Child of the land**

By Douglas Warren Greenfield

www.childoftheland.ca

Douglas Warren Greenfield

Having travelled half way around the world in my lifetime, I have seen every conceivable type of dwelling, from grass huts on the South Sea Islands, to great mansions on the hills overlooking Hollywood. Experiencing everything from the scorching heat of an Australian desert to the monsoon rains of Polynesia, my heart is still most at home in Canada's north.

Possibly, I am a hopeless romantic, but even while sun tanning on the famous Bondi Beach near Sydney, Australia, I would close my eyes and visualize our little home in the north, all banked with powdery snow on a cold winter's night. Overhead, the Northern Lights would sweep in colourful bars of green, yellow and red, as our windows glowed with soft lantern light. Seasonal extremes and the vibrancy of life in the northland will somehow etch its imprint on the human heart for life, as it surely did on mine.

The first northern homes were only cabins or shacks, but were movable, practical and affordable. The skid logs under the shack kept the home up out of the dirt and water, and left a necessary air space under the floor to prevent the building from rotting. In winter, the home had to be banked with snow all the way around to prevent the frigid northern air from blowing under the floor. While not as efficient as a modern insulation, this method was still quite effective. There was something wonderfully romantic about cabin living. The creature comforts were not always present, but it was affordable shelter and fit the need of the day.

Our cabin under the Northern Lights

Our first buildings on the farm were constructed of shiplap lumber. To keep out the wind and rain, each board was cleverly overlapped by the one above. Then, to further deter the elements, the outside walls of our home were covered by a practical material much like rolled roofing. This covering on our little shack gave it the appearance of grey brick construction, and was a modern exterior cladding at the time.

Board floors were common in every cabin and proved very practical. Living out on the land meant that your boots were always loaded with samples of the last place you walked,

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and upon entering the house, some of these particles got left behind on the kitchen floor. Barn boots were the exception, having been carefully scraped off or left outside. With this early type of flooring, a simple broom was all that was needed to remove the dirt and other nefarious particles back out the door again.

If the lumber hadn't been adequately dried before the building was constructed, it would usually shrink and leave handy spaces in the floor through which the dirt could be easily expelled. Because of these natural openings, we almost always had a mousetrap set to catch little fuzzy rodents before they found their way to the oatmeal. When they did persist in attempting to join our household, they were bound to meet my mother, the pest exterminator! It was indeed pure entertainment, watching Mom with broom in hand and an unswayable determination, trying to catch one of these panic-stricken creatures.

Another useful and simple feature of our home was the inside walls that were also constructed out of lumber. These could suffer intense abuse without much apparent damage. This, I recall, was a definite advantage in the heat of wooden sword fights or wrestling matches. One could also drive a common nail absolutely anywhere without having to find a hidden stud. Hence, there were nails for coat hangers, nails for calendars, nails for pictures, and spikes to hang larger items such as the rifle or tools.

Over the oil or wood stove, there would always be some type of drying rack suspended from the ceiling, a simple device that proved to be a very useful and economical dryer for wet clothing.

Illumination by lantern

Inevitably, there was also a steel hook, usually screwed through the middle of a large automobile hubcap in the ceiling above the kitchen table. This was where the gas lantern hung that provided light and even some heat for the entire house. The hubcap served as an inexpensive safety shield to keep the ceiling from catching fire from the heat of the lantern.

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These lanterns were fuelled with high-test gasoline, which was pressurized with a little hand pump on the lamp. They provided a bright, white light, as the fuel burned inside of silk mantles. Like the ticking of an old clock, the calm hiss of the gas lantern late in the evening was a soothing sound for tired little ears. These lanterns had the added versatility of being portable, so if you required a light somewhere else on the farm, you could quickly lift it down from the kitchen ceiling and carry it away.

A portable light more commonly used in those days was a coal oil lamp. They were smaller and could be carried easily from room to room. Coal oil lamps offered quite enough light to read by, and were simple and practical. Coal oil, which is like kerosene, did not burn as clean as a gas lantern and emitted an oily residue, which eventually appeared as a sooty film on windows and ceilings.

On dark winter nights, we even lit the barn with one of these simple oil lamps. It hung on a wall mount and had a metal reflector behind the chimney to deflect the light, giving just enough light to milk the cows by. One had to be careful with any of these lamps, as the glass globes (or chimneys) were hot to the touch and very breakable. Many a pioneer home was burned to the ground because of a lantern accident.

Cabin practicality

Our little cabin was the most simple and practical dwelling I've ever had the pleasure to live in. I always liked the soothing sound of a warm summer rain on the roof, and our little home seemed to be constantly filled with the friendly aromas from the wood cook stove. Delightful smells, such as freshly baked bread or hot saskatoon pie tease my memory to this day. Despite its hominess, however, I recall that my parents could barely wait to replace this rustic little cabin with a more modern home, but we would have to wait another ten years for that.

The old house held other dear memories, like those cold winter nights when the mercury plummeted out of sight in the thermometer! Since the walls were insulated only with wood shavings, the "R" value insulating factor diminished with the age of the structure. This happens as a result of

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moisture collecting in the shavings, causing them to settle over time. So it was, that on a cold morning, one could readily detect where the level of insulation was in any given wall by the frost line on the *inside* of the wall!

When the outside temperature dropped suddenly, as it often does in the North Country, the nails in the walls would jump out a little. This made a popping sound that would add to the symphony of creaking and groaning sounds also caused by the cold. Consequently, this became our weather barometer, in that, while sitting in the comfort of the oil or wood stove, one could fairly accurately interpret changes in the weather by the sounds the old house made.

On days when we were pinned down by the cold weather for a period of time and the door was kept closed to keep out the storm, moisture would build up on the windows so thick that it was futile to attempt its removal. The cold crept through the walls anywhere it could, and from each nail head on the walls furthest from the stove, clung a little ball of frost. These little white studs decorated the house in a most unusual manner and added to our unique northern décor.

My little bedroom was at the opposite end of the house from my parents' bedroom, separated only by the kitchen. It was the furthest room from the stove, and for at least one month each winter, my blankets were permanently frozen to the outside wall. When I could not sleep, I would lie in bed and draw patterns in the frost on the wall by my feather pillow.

Of course, the cold temperature was never as serious for the *little pioneers*, as we were not responsible for outside chores. We were never required to tumble out of bed onto frozen floors at 6:00 A.M. to do farm chores like our parents had to, at least not for the first few blissful years of our lives.

A rough experience

The greatest advantage of being a child was in not being required, during cold or wet weather, to make the trek out to the outhouse on the other side of the yard. We had our own little handy potty that was kept warm in the bedroom. Adults, on the other hand, often waited until they could stand the strain no longer before dashing madly through the swirling snow to the *biffy*. The point at which this custom is transformed from routine into an adventure, is when one has consumed too much coffee the night before, and the outhouse call comes at 4:00 A.M! (I believe the chamber pot was invented for such emergencies.)

The pages of the Eaton's catalogue, which faithfully served as toilet paper, did not get any softer as the temperature dropped, resulting in a *rough* experience! Visitors from the city with soft bums often took exception to our recycling the catalogue in this way. But think about it for a moment. Where else could one pause and think, read a little, place an order for new blue jeans and then use the pages for cleanup? It was obviously the initiative of deeply profound and insightful minds, wouldn't you agree?

Some may think it a great hardship not having indoor plumbing, but there is an advantage. This was realized on those particularly crisp mornings when you arose to find that the oil stove had gone out, last night's dishwasher was frozen in the pan, your long-johns were frozen on the rack and your boots were too stiff to get into. This was the time to be thankful that the water pipes were not frozen, only because *there were no pipes!*

Daily, water for various uses was carried in by hand. When the water became dirty and required draining out, one merely flung the contents of the basin or bucket out the door. Of course, it was always prudent to first check to see if the walkway was clear!

Wrigglers for lunch

Our water supply in the dugout became increasingly smellier as the winter went on. With two or three feet of ice covering the pond, natural aeration was diminished, causing the water to become dark and stagnant. There was

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also a growth of naturally occurring fauna in the water in the form of little wrigglers. Visitors from the city would often refuse a cup of *dugout* coffee simply because of the little cooked wrigglers floating on top. My dad would calmly announce that this was our most consistent supply of protein, and he would continue to sip away, but the general routine was to remove the scum from the water before proceeding.

During the summer, farm days consisted of long hours, often from six in the morning until sunset. For northerners, this meant sixteen or eighteen hours of labour, for by mid-June the sun was still in the sky at 11:30 P.M! The late sunset allowed for a great amount of business to be accomplished during those crucial growing months.

Bright crisp winters

By the winter solstice in mid-December, however, the reverse was true, and we experienced very short days and long, long nights. This allowed hard working homesteaders a chance to recover from a summer of physical exhaustion and sleep depravity. One still had to rise early to feed milk-cows and other stock, but after the barnyard chores were completed, there was more time to relax and enjoy family life.

Farm chores did, however, get one outside in a veritable winter wonderland, but there was always the warmth of the house to escape to when you could no longer feel your toes! Alberta is famous for its clear blue winter skies and sun so bright that you can barely open your eyes. After a fresh snowfall, the whole land was covered with a brilliant, white sparkling powder, and the natural beauty of the scene helped you forget the hardship of the cold.

Northern air is often so still when it is very cold, that sound carries a remarkably long distance. Morris and Edie Burroughs lived with their family a mile and a half west of our farm. From our house, on a crisp winter morning, I could clearly hear Morris walk out on his front step and set the milk pails down in the snow. I could hear him speak to his farm dog and hear the crunch of his feet on the frozen path as he made his way to the barn for morning chores.

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We could plainly hear the train coming into the Eaglesham station five miles away, and the sound of the cars closing up as the engineer applied the brakes. The sounds of a tractor working or a truck travelling two or more miles away was as clear on a cold winter day as if it were only across the yard.

I can recall my Uncle Bob recounting a story about having shot at a moose one winter, that was not far off the road allowance. The moose went down like he was on an elevator and Bob smiled with pride, slung his rifle over his shoulder and headed for his catch. A moment later, to his surprise, the moose leaped to his feet and crashed off into the bush on the dead run without looking back. Uncle Bob stood there, dumbfounded and disappointed, but soon found what had happened. His careful aim, to diminish the chance of spoiling any meat, was just an inch too high. The all too careful shot had blown an antler right off, which caused the animal's temporary unconsciousness and the reason for its sudden escape.

Bob rested under a great spruce tree and listened as the startled animal crashed blindly through the forest on that cold morning. He recalls hearing the moose break out of the bush a full two miles away, and there was a quiet moment while it crossed the road before more crashing could be heard again in the bush. In the thick air of summer, of course, one would never be able to hear much beyond a couple of hundred yards.

The clear, cold air was only one of many unique characteristics of the northern winter. The pleasant crunch of the snow under my boots was also an enjoyable sound, and is something that I still enjoy today. That sound and the feel of the snow would often change as the day progressed from a crisp, dry morning to a sunny afternoon.

Little fellows love to follow along in the bright snow, trying desperately to jump from one of their father's footprints to another. Once one is exhausted from jumping footprints, you simply fall backward and make snow angels or enjoy the sunlight sparkling in the frosty tree branches.

Living far from a city does grant a quieter lifestyle, so that the natural sounds of the world become much more intimate in one's daily life. The sweet song of a Chickadee

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bouncing along a snow covered branch, or the welcoming call of the migrating geese in the spring and fall were such delights. These were daily pleasures that gave cheer to the hardworking pioneer, and indelibly imprinted the music of the northland upon our memories.

One cold afternoon, I went on a trip to our neighbours, the Elmquists. I was five years old, and I guess my mother needed a break, so on this sparkling winter day, Dad and I went out to purchase a wagon load of feed wheat. We had a grand visit with Hilding and Frances in their little warm European-style home and enjoyed supper with them before heading home in the dark. The moving tractor created a wind chill of nearly minus 60 degrees that night, so Father had to bury me in the load of grain to keep me from freezing to death on the way. The clear night sky was studded with the most brilliant stars imaginable. Dad drove the John Deere through the snow while I rode in the relative comfort of that wagon load of grain. A scarf covered my face and nose, so only my eyes were left uncovered, with the rest of my snowsuit being covered by the wheat. Part way home, a most delightful light show began, such as I had never seen. The whole sky became alive with brilliant streams of colour that swept across my view. I forgot about the cold. The noisy throb of the tractor faded away and I was somehow immersed in these rivers of spectacular light before me. Since then, I have witnessed the Aurora Borealis many times and have seen extraordinary man-made fireworks and laser light shows, but absolutely none compare to the celestial show I remember that night when I was just a child.

The old copper washtub

Growing up without central heating or indoor plumbing meant that once a week on bath day, everybody shared the same bath water. The big copper tub, hung on a nail on the outside wall, was hauled in and placed in the middle of the kitchen floor. It was then filled with melted snow or dugout water that had been warmed up on the cook stove. Children always got to bath first, then Mother, and last of all, poor old Dad, who doubtless had the most to scrub off. The dirty water was then bucketed back out the door and the tub returned to the spike on the wall. Between weekly baths, we

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needed to be content with a daily *birdbath* or sponge bath from the enamel basin.

As the farm grew, we eventually graduated to a larger, round galvanized tub, which allowed us greater freedom of movement in the bath. The flat bottom copper tub continued as a container to heat water and wash clothes for many years to come.

The Enterprise cook stove

Our kitchen was graced with an “Enterprise” wood-burning cook stove. This great wood stove had a water container, or reservoir at one end, which provided us with a ready supply of warm water for cleaning or cooking purposes. Each morning, it was filled by bucket either from the dugout during summer, or with fresh snow in winter.

A handy copper dipper hung at the side of the stove and was used to bail the water from the reservoir when needed. These wood or coal burning cook stoves proved to be a very versatile appliance, with a warming oven above the stove and a large baking oven below. There was twice the usable room on that stovetop than on today’s electric versions, leaving room for an extra pail of melting snow or several pair of wet mittens to dry. When the stove was used for cooking, the whole house was toasty warm, again a far more economical process than we have today. The Enterprise stove was not always appreciated, however, because when a large meal had to be cooked indoors on a hot summer day, the heat in the house would become almost unbearable.

Every day during winter, fresh firewood had to have the snow knocked off and be carried in and placed in the wood box to warm up. As I grew, splitting and carrying wood became one of my daily chores and helped to build strength and endurance. I recall struggling up the back steps with my arms piled high with snowy firewood, dancing on one foot while kicking my boots off in the porch and then sliding across the kitchen floor on my frozen socks to place the wood near the stove. Mother might turn from her bread dough and holler, “Warren! Next time, sweep the snow off your pants before you come in.” I would respond with,

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“Uhhh, yes Mom...ok, I’ll try,” thinking to myself, “Oh boy, with an armful of wood, how am I going to do that?”

Washboards to wringer washers

Washday usually filled the house with extra moisture, which the dry wood heat was handy to remove. When I was just a baby, Mom would use a washboard in the copper tub to hand scrub the clothes. These washboards consisted of a wooden frame with a ribbed metal or corrugated glass surface in the middle. The dirty clothing was soaked in the tub full of warm, soapy water, and Mom would vigorously rub the clothes over the washboard until the desired cleanliness was achieved. Extremely greasy coveralls were washed in gasoline first and then washed last in the washtub. Many of the pioneers then boiled the bedding and underwear to ensure that they were free of uninvited crawlies!

Most often, lye soap was used for serious cleaning either on badly soiled coveralls or for washing floors. When used too often, this harsh soap would cause red, raw and cracked hands, so in the early years, goose grease or bear grease was administered as a softening and healing agent. Eventually, the Raleigh dealer, who travelled from farm to farm, provided us with an ointment for this purpose.

As the years progressed and technology evolved, we obtained a Beatty wringer washer for laundry cleaning that Mom would have to wrestle in from the porch on washdays. This new machine would be a great boon to the hardworking farm woman whose job it was to keep her family clean. A small, Johnston gasoline-engine powered this modern washing machine, with the exhaust pipe vented through a hole in the kitchen wall. Unlike the smooth, electric machines of today, it was a hot, noisy, smelly and sometimes dangerous apparatus to operate. These wringer washers used a powered agitator for washing and rinsing. Then, rather than spinning out the excess water, the clothing was fed carefully between two hard rubber rollers to squeeze the water out. We had to exercise extreme caution when feeding wet clothing into that powerful wringer. It had a nasty way of catching loose clothing, or on painful occasion, one’s hand.

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These washing machines, brutal as they could be, were a modern marvel compared to the corrugated washboards they replaced. As with the automobile, however, there was often a price to pay for speed and convenience, which sometimes materialized in the form of an accident.

Once, when our family was visiting the Donaldson's home several miles north of us, their neighbour's boy David came screaming into the yard all out of breath. "Mother's hurt, Mother's hurt! She is bleeding!" he cried. Mrs. Donaldson went back with David to the Clemo farm and found that Mrs. Clemo had caught her hand in the wringer washer, which had quickly and painfully extracted her fingernail. My folks stopped in to see Mrs. Clemo on the way home later that day, and while the ladies were visiting, I inspected the evil device and found that it had indeed drawn blood. Life has a way of asserting its more painful lessons even at an early age. An experience like this is enough to make a small boy stuff his hands deep into his pockets and cringe at the thought of parting with a fingernail.

To dry our laundry, we used nature's wind and solar heat to complete the task. Once the washing was wrung out and the laundry stuffed into a basket, it was hauled outside to the clothesline. We would have all had a good laugh back then, at the thought of someone actually paying money to dry clothes the way we do today, because nature had provided such an excellent method for free! Kids did not get to hang out clothes until they were tall enough to reach the line and keep the clothing from dragging in the dirt. I fondly remember Mother in her gum rubber boots and skirt out under the clothesline in the mud, trying not to drop the whites. A stream of descriptive words often accompanied the task as mother swatted mosquitoes with one hand and pinned clothes with the other. If the sun was out, the clothes dried quickly; if it rained you sometimes had to leave them out for a day so they could re-dry. In the winter, the clothing froze solid for the first few hours of being outside until the moisture evaporated. Frozen clothes always smelled so wonderfully fresh, that no laundry freshener was ever required.

By nightfall, if the clothes were not completely dry, the frozen garments were pried from the line and brought in to hang near the stove to complete the process. The cabin was often decorated with an array of *undies*, long johns, socks

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and pants hanging from an indoor clothesline, or draped over chairs. Here again, the dry heat of the wood stove was helpful to remove the extra dampness from the air.

As a little tyke, I remember traipsing out into the kitchen at night and being frightened by all the strange people *hanging around*. Surprisingly, these bizarre people were still around in the morning and I was embarrassed to find that they were just the long johns hung to dry. Occasionally, when a mid-winter storm would last for a couple of weeks or more, our cabin would eventually look like a department store with drying clothing hung up everywhere.

Isolated

The disadvantage in being a kid from the bush is that isolation can leave you lacking in the practical knowledge of the outside world. One day, my uncle Owen arrived for a visit from Edmonton. As I helped him unpack his car, he handed me a banana, which I took straight to my mother and asked, "Mom, can you cook this for me?" Mother broke into a grin, kneeled down and began peeling the strange thing, all the while muttering something about *living in the bush*.

In later years, my cousins and good friends, the Camerons, would visit each May long weekend with my Aunt Dorothy and Uncle Doug. The boys would arrive full of new and strange *city* words and ideas that helped round out my education of the world. After hearing them relate their experiences from the city, however, I believe it made me even more thankful for my remote farm life. My cousins and I were full of fun and energy, bent on exploring the world around us. We exhausted countless hours out along the creek banks or hiding in the haystack. Playing and hunting with our pellet guns, we generally tried to avoid at any cost, being put to work by our mothers.

Farming is a business venture

Being engaged daily with our agricultural venture was an advantage, in that life was very consistent and predictable. Mornings were routinely busy with milking cows, processing the milk, feeding the animals and poultry.

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Afternoons were filled with other farm work and building projects, then evenings found us again back at the barn with the animals.

Developing a mixed farming operation was an economically wise venture. Specialized farming, on the other hand, was far more prone to failure, simply because there was no other source of backup income. On our mixed farm, we were building a small dairy operation from which we sold milk and cream. We also raised poultry to provide meat and eggs, hogs for meat and sale, and, as well, our grain growing operation. We also grew all of our own feed for the animals, which decreased our overhead costs. This diverse business kept us very busy at home with little time to spend elsewhere.

One of the challenges we faced was in the area of equipment, because such a diverse operation requires a great assortment of machines to complete all the various tasks. This adds to the expense, and also requires the farmer to be well versed in the repair and maintenance of each complex apparatus involved. This fact alone contributed largely to my development in mechanical and electrical understanding, which proved valuable in virtually every career and business of my life.

The administration of such an enterprise was also demanding. Farm animals produce and reproduce as a result of careful feeding and care on the part of the farm manager. This is very critical, especially with a dairy operation that depends upon very specific milking times and practices. For instance, cows will produce the greatest amount and the best quality of milk when milked at exactly the same time every day, without exception. Managing their stress level by keeping them secure and providing a good quality of feed also makes a difference in the quality of their produce. Hence, when *the old man* rouses his son at six in the morning to help milk the cows, there is more to it than the vengeance his son suspects him of.

Grain must be planted, managed and harvested at very specific times to ensure maximum quality, so here again any deviation will cost the farmer precious time and money. Every aspect of farming is similar, in that, strict discipline is required for success. Again, this was a childhood lesson

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that has aided me all through life because good discipline is vital for success in anything we strive to do.

Our ready cash in those early days came primarily from the sale of cream. Before we could afford a cream separator, the milk had to be left undisturbed in containers for hours until the cream naturally separated and floated to the top. This still seems unscientific to me, simply because cream was thicker and seemed much heavier than milk, so therefore, it should sink instead of floating. Although I excelled in high school science, I never did learn the secret of this anomaly.

As our farm grew more prosperous, Dad finally purchased a hand operated cream separator. This was an economical device that effectively separated the cream from the milk and rendered clean, skimmed milk and rich cream for sale. The Northern Alberta Dairy Pool in Edmonton purchased all the product that our little dairy operation could produce, and paid us in the form of cream cheques issued each month.

My industrious mother soon purchased a one-pound butter press and proceeded to make butter for sale. Without the automated equipment available today, this became a lot of work for the whole family. Working together, we separated the cream, churned the butter, packaged it with N.A.D.P. wrappers and shipped it at precisely the right time so it would not spoil.

Modern coolers would have been a great asset, but of course in those days we had no consistent supply of electricity. Dairy products must naturally be kept from freezing in the winter and from spoiling in the heat of summer. Ingenuity prevailed, and as most early homesteaders did in those days, we used our water well as a cooler. This natural refrigerator kept dairy products fresh and ready for shipping. With a long rope attached to the cream cans, which could be either three or five gallons in size, it took strong arms to lower them in and out of the deep well.

When the train came into the Eaglesham station, the dock was usually cluttered with a long row of cream cans and other packages bound for Edmonton. These would be exchanged with all the empty cans coming back from the

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creamery, ready to be filled again. After testing the product, the creamery paid on the basis of how clean and fresh each lot was. Number one cream would fetch a handsome \$7.00 per five-gallon can as opposed to \$2.00 or \$3.00 for a lesser quality number two product. Each cream can was required to be sealed with a wire and fitted with a little lead lock through the handle so that the creamery knew which can was fresh. There was always a supply of those little locking devices on the kitchen windowsill that I used to play with as a child.

Each morning and night, Dad and Mom would carry the many large pails of milk back to the house, skim off the bits of straw and other nefarious non-dairy stuff and go through the exercise of separating, churning and preparing the product for sale. It was exercise indeed, as the cream separator itself was enough to play your arms out, not to mention churning butter by hand. Carrying a 16-quart bucket of milk in each hand all the way from the barn to the house also helped to build hard muscles. After the cream was removed, the separator required an extensive cleanup. To do this, we had to disassemble the complicated machine and wash the twenty or so cone shaped disks and apparatus in hot soapy water. You can guess who it was that became very, very adept at that job. On one occasion, I heard, "Warren, get your skinny little butt over here," to which I replied, "I think I'm going to run away!" "Sure you are," Dad announced, "right after you finish the chores!"

As I recall, I wasn't the only kid to attempt to negotiate the allotted duties. One day, I overheard my friend Shaun ask his father what he was willing to give him for the chore he was asked to do. Mr. Burroughs, in his infinitely humorous way, retorted, "It isn't what you get when you do the job, Son, it's what you get if you DON'T do it that counts!"

After the cream was separated, the skim milk was used to feed calves and little hungry pigs in the pen. To prepare feed, we used a machine called a chopper that was basically just a grinder, powered by a long belt to the great pulley on the tractor. Dad and I would haul nutritious oats, barley and wheat to mix and grind into a kind of dusty cereal for the animals. This *chop* was then bucketed into wooden troughs for the pigs, and with fresh milk poured over top, it made a kind of porridge that they seemed to really enjoy.

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When a good supply of oats was not available, we would mix up a mash of barley and water in a barrel. The water-softened grain became more palatable for the animals and a source of high-energy food. If the barley was left too long in the barrel, however, fermentation would occur and it soon became *pig beer*, which they quite enjoyed, possibly a little too much! I have seen pigs falling all over themselves and acting quite silly after a feed of this potent swill.

To supplement our income, Mother also sold eggs to customers in town, and for years supplied her clients with these farm fresh nuggets. The reason that Mother's eggs were so popular was that they were always squeaky clean, which was rare, as most available farm eggs needed to have the chicken manure washed off before using! Mom also invented a handy egg candler that she had designed to inspect each egg for blood spots or other impurities. This was a wooden box with a small egg shaped hole and a light under it. As the eggs were passed over the light, we could readily see any blemishes and remove those eggs unfit for sale.

Humour in the old corral

When we received a visit from the young United Church student minister visiting in the area, Dad took him on a tour of the farmyard. As we arrived at the pigpen, Dad poured a bucket of leftover food slop and milk into the pig trough. This caused a flurry of snorting, squealing and intense slurping noises as the pigs fought each other for this succulent mix. The poor young man just stood there in absolute unbelief as he surveyed this foul display. My dad peered curiously at him and asked, "Are you all right?" In a few moments, he drew his eyes off of the snorting animals and said to us, "Umm, my father often told me when I was a boy that I ate like a pig. Dear Lord, I didn't know it would be like this!" Dad winked at me and told the young fellow that he would get over it. At any rate, I think this experience contributed to his rather reserved manner at the dinner table that night.

One spring, when I was small, I was standing on the back step of the house with my mother while she was calling the dogs for their supper. My six-foot-two-inch father came striding up from the barn in his usual way with our farm

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cat on his shoulder and two enormous pails of fresh, foamy milk in his hands. Dad arrived at the gate, and instead of setting the pails down in the mud, he simply stepped over the fence, as he was accustomed to doing when both hands were full. One long leg came gliding over, and in fluid motion, Father turned and lifted the other one to clear the fence. This was a well-practiced routine that would not normally require him to even break stride. That is, until that fateful day when his coveralls got hooked on the top wire of that barbed wire fence. While still in forward motion, but now facing backward with one leg hopelessly caught on the fence, Dad plummeted into the spring muck with both pails of milk held up in the air!

I learned the value of our product that day from Dad, because despite the tumble, he didn't spill much milk. There he lay on his back, in the mud and water, with the two large pails held high off the ground and one leg hung up on the fence! I thought my mother would die of asphyxiation before she was able to stop laughing. She was down on the back step on her hands and knees, snorting and weeping while Dad was cursing a blue streak, trying to get her to come and rescue the milk pails and unhook him from the wire.

Farm boys got accustomed to lugging heavy hay bales and large buckets of feed around, so you could always tell a seasoned farmer by his over-sized shoulders and knuckles that dragged along the ground. This isn't entirely true, of course, but that visualization was possibly one that helped me later in life with a decision to leave the farm and join the Navy! There was something about travelling the world that seemed infinitely more exciting than feeding farm animals. I am now envious of the modern farm operations that have all that heavy handwork mechanized. Perhaps it was a good thing that I didn't know as I was growing up, how efficient and easy a mechanized operation could be. I am quite certain that I would have traded my own baby sister for a real front-end loader to clean the manure out of the barn rather than with the shovel and wheelbarrow I was so familiar with.

Lubricating oil came in five-gallon pails with sturdy handles, which, when emptied and the lid was removed, became handy tote buckets. These pails were used to carry grain to the animals, slop and chop to the pigs, and water

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to the cows in winter when ice covered the pond. As a little duffer, I would drag a partially filled pail along, grunting and complaining while trying to keep it from falling over. As I grew older and stronger, I could drag two partially filled pails until I was tall enough to lift them clear of the ground. The one single factor that prevented these chores from being pure drudgery was the fact that we were a family business and each member of the family benefited from the profits and rewards.

On winter days, someone had to go down on the dugout and hack out a fresh water hole through the ice. Three or four inches of ice would have accumulated in yesterday's water hole overnight, which took a lot of chipping to make the opening large enough to dip a pail into. Naturally, as winter progressed, the water became more and more black and stagnant due to a lack of oxygen under the ice. As spring grew near, large ugly beetles would come flying out into the sunlight when the hole was opened. Those bugs had a wingspan of about two inches or more and gave me the creeps. When the ice was removed, I would dive for cover until these monstrous bugs had all escaped. Had they known that the winter air temperature would quickly freeze them solid, I think they might have remained in the dark warmth of the dugout.

Cougar cat

Ingimar, our big tomcat, would often sit poised on the roof of the porch or in the barn loft, patiently waiting for some unsuspecting human soul to emerge. As you would pause to secure the door, this massive cat would carefully aim, and then leap onto your back, expecting a soft ride to or from the barn. For those of us who were familiar with his tactics, this was routine, but for an unsuspecting visitor, he could strike sudden terror. More than once, with a terrified screech, this big tomcat went flying into a snow bank after a pinpoint landing on the back of a visiting man. The real trick for us was to remain upright with milk pails in hand, when this would-be cougar would launch from the barn loft onto our shoulders. Ingimar, aptly named after Ingimar Johansson, the world champion heavy weight boxer of the day, left all of his feline siblings meowing in the dust as he grew into this formidable farm pet.

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One particular day, Ingimar was riding on my shoulder as I carried two full five-gallon pails of water up the dugout bank to the cows. (Do your math, now, each gallon of water weighs 10 pounds.) Because of water leaking from the pails, the ice steps that I had cut to climb the bank became increasingly more dangerous with each trip to the water trough. Finally, with full water pails in my hands, my foot slipped off the top step and everything went airborne. Down we went, water pails, Ingimar and me, screaming back out onto the ice! My cat let out a shriek as I hollered, “INGIMAR, LET GO!” In his desperation to save himself from pending disaster, and grasping madly for his footing, ten-pound Ingimar had hooked a claw deep into my ear. He stayed attached all the way to the bottom and then left me bawling on the ice in a pool of blood as he scrambled up on the nearby fence. It is times like this that one feels justified in trying out one or two of Father’s favourite curse words, though I cannot recall that it helped any. The pain was excruciating, but the lesson was sound. I was more careful after that to preserve good footing, and no longer allowed my cat to ride on my shoulder at chore time.

As with the dogs, our farm cats were essential members of the *crew*. No farm is complete without a guard dog to warn of impending danger, or a cat to keep the rodent population at bay. So it was, that, our home was graced with the company of many generations of four-footed family members. There was many a winter when batches of kittens were born behind the wood stove, and countless times that both cats and dogs shared the foot of my bed at night.

Our family, as well as our farm animals, all seemed to get along without fighting. The family dog curled up with a sleeping cat against him, or turkeys and chickens could be found sleeping with the pigs. This was a sign of the ambient peacefulness that permeated those quiet days in the country. Sometimes, however, our animals, in their attempt to stay near us, found themselves in trouble because of it.

Dad and I drove to town after a heavy rain, one summer day. The road was very wet, so the truck was caked with mud by the time we arrived. After doing a little shopping, we

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paused briefly at the post office for the mail. While we were speaking with the postmaster, someone noticed this unusual shape on the open springs by the wheel of our truck. Dad said it looked like a big old root that had become caught up in the springs. He took two long strides over and pulled it out, only to find that the *muddy root* was soft and long and very frightened. Poor Ingimar had been sitting there on the truck spring when we started out from home, and being afraid of the large spinning tire beside him, had clung on for five, fearsome, bumpy miles. We peeled the mud off and took him back home, with him purring loudly in the warm cab of the truck.

Laddy, the faithful

Our family dogs changed from decade to decade. From the early years with Buster, we had several good faithful friends of man. However, living on the edge of the wilderness soon weeds out the *dogs from the pups*, so to speak. If a dog wasn't born with wilderness savvy, it usually didn't last long. Sadly, we lost a few farm dogs to fights with coyotes and porcupines. I felt sorry for some of our dogs that came home from an encounter with a porcupine. Dad would have

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to pull the long, sharp quills out of the dog's mouth with pliers, while the dogs winced in pain.

My black and white Collie, whose name was Laddy, was especially clever and keen to protect us from harm. Laddy would follow me everywhere as I explored the creek banks and the farm, and occasionally warned me of an unnoticed bear nearby. He would help to pull me up the creek banks, and in winter would pull me along on home-made skis. Dad built a wooden sled with metal edged runners and a clever harness out of a flat drive belt from the old threshing machine. Laddy was so eager to pull, that whenever we came outside in the winter, he would voluntarily climb into the harness and stand there in the snow, happily wagging his tail. This dog was so duty oriented that even when his feet became sore and bleeding from the sharp road ice, he would still climb into his harness and beg to pull me around. Because Laddy was so keen, Father made him a set of leather moccasins out of old work gloves that would protect his feet and prevent further damage.

For years, the school division had an inconceivable rule that allowed the school bus only a quarter of a mile off of the main road for pickup. For so many of us, this would mean that we were left up to our own resources to get the rest of the way home. For me, it meant a mile of walking, or if the weather was poor, I might get a ride in the truck. Happily, during nice weather, there was much for a young lad to explore and study along the way to or from the bus.

The cold of winter, however, was not the time to dally around, because if one did not keep moving vigorously, you could soon lose the feeling in your hands or feet. Here is where faithful Laddy came to my aid many a snowy winter day. All suited up in his harness, he would dutifully pull me a mile down the road on the sled to catch the bus. I would then turn the sled around for him and send him home again. Laddy was again a welcome sight when I got off the bus. Some days, I was unable to see very far in the swirling snow, but here would come my faithful old friend, ploughing through the fresh snow with the sled behind to give me a ride home. Mom would listen for the sound of the bus out along the correction line road before putting Laddy in the harness with instructions to fetch me from the bus. My old friend taught me a valuable lesson about being faithful and true, even in the face of danger and discomfort.

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He was my constant companion for many more years, but as a young teenager, I had to finally put Laddy to rest. He was old and suffering from arthritis with large, painful growths on his body, so my father said that it was not fair to allow Laddy to suffer so much just to have his company. He said the compassionate thing to do was to end his pain and that he hoped I would understand. That was a hard lesson in understanding not to be selfish. Many years have slipped by since that day, but I still miss my faithful old friend, and I think of him each year when the snow begins to fall.

A “higher” education

Throughout my boyhood, I lived in a kind of peaceful dream world when I was out alone in the forest. The silence of the forest and the presence of the wildlife were fascinating to me, and kept drawing me back to their domain. I wonder now how many of my father’s tools disappeared along the creek banks on days when I would *borrow* them for little building projects somewhere out there.

I was gifted with a great imagination, which, when encouraged by nature’s wild land, entertained me for many years. There were so many other boys that I knew who sat playing games, or in later years watched television. But, for me, the great outdoors was all the entertainment I needed. To this very day, I look to the hills to satiate that need to escape the noise of society. As often as possible, I climb down along some lonely stream to enjoy the quiet tranquility of nature.

Nature taught me how to listen, to move slowly and carefully when trouble is near. It taught me an appreciation for a beauty that is not man made, but can only be found in what humans have not spoiled.

Countless hours of my time were spent studying industrious beaver as they built their lodges or dams, watching birds build their nests or examining coyote or bear dens. I learned so much from the natural order of the wild and found it a peaceful contrast to what I find prevalent in man’s world.

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At times, bull moose or buck deer would compete with one another of his species for *family status*, but when the negotiations were complete, they never returned to attack out of vengeance or hate, as man does. A male animal would naturally choose a healthy female to begin a family with, and go off to raise their young in the quiet of the forest. They never competed with each other for anything but the right to be a valued member of their society.

I see this order as nature's "established normal." I have yet to find a drunken animal lying in the gutter, or a drug-crazed, wild creature looking for some pleasure beyond what they enjoy in the wilderness. Perhaps, as humans, we believe that we have need of these destructive pleasures, simply because we have all but destroyed the wonderful peace and beauty that was ours to enjoy in the backwoods...I don't know. I wonder how many people are aware of that beautiful, peaceful world just beyond the pavement?

Contrary to *somebody's* tale, there has actually never been a desire in me to leave society and disappear into the hinterland forever, although momentary departures from our noisy world are most agreeable.

Living by the principles that I learned on the homestead and out in the wild, have for me, never been a disappointment. Man can learn a great deal by following the normal pattern of life displayed in nature.

There are often significant experiences in a person's life that serve to change their worldview, their philosophy or their purpose in life. As for me...

My homestead upbringing made me so very thankful to have been a farm boy.

Travelling the world and experiencing our spectacular country from coast to coast made me proud to be a Canadian and taught me an appreciation for cultural differences.

The Royal Canadian Navy taught me personal discipline and greatly increased my self-esteem.

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My children give me great purpose to live and an even greater appreciation for life.

But, the beauty of nature, as we find it vibrant in the wilderness, nurtured me and formed me as a passionate outdoorsman, a lover of peace and forever a devoted “Child of the Land.”

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