

## ***At Home in Poland***

I was born October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1923. I lived in the eastern part of Poland with my immediate family, in a place called Zarnowka. The provincial city was Rowno. Zarnowka was an area, not a town, with scattered housing. We lived on the outskirts and were at the edge of the forest. My dad Antoni, my mom Valeria (nee Paszkowska), my older brother Leon, my younger sister Halina, and my youngest sister Lodzia. That was the family.

Our house was all on one story. It was quite large and at one point part of the house was a country school. We had surrounding land with a garden and orchards – apples, pears, plums. We weren't rich, but we lived comfortably.

My dad was a forestry supervisor, like a ranger. My brother was working around home with my dad. My younger sisters just were girls growing up, enjoying school and home. I remember Lodzia broke her arm. It didn't set very good and they had to re-break it to set again. In young ones things heal well. But ever since, her arm was a little bit crooked in her upper arm. Halina, the older one, when she was about 12 she was already enjoying fancy clothes and was growing up fast. She cared about her appearance. As kids we were happy and getting along.

We lived close to the forest. We enjoyed a lot of mushrooms that we picked in the forest. Also blueberries and wild strawberries. Winter was spent building homemade skis and skiing. We also skated on a frozen pond. People used to travel by horses to go visiting. Winters were long but not severe in that area.

We traveled to a Roman Catholic Church. And sometimes we walked - it was a longer walking distance to a place called Niewierkow. I still remember hearing the bells as we were going, the big bells outside the church. I just learned that that church is still standing, but that place is not in Poland anymore. It's now in the Ukraine.

In an area not too far away from us lived extended family. Dad's sister Ola Gilewska with her family, and Dad's brother Mikolaj Jarmolinski with his family. And other relations. We visited quite often, especially at big holiday seasons like Christmas and Easter. Transportation in those days was by horse or bicycle.

## ***Holidays***

We didn't celebrate birthdays that much, but we celebrated name days. And we observed religious holidays. At Christmas, families used to gather. Christmas Eve was a very important day, when our family gathered together for a special meatless meal. We shared a thin bread similar to what we had at communion, called *oplatek*. As you broke a piece off you wished everybody all the best.

We always had a Christmas tree decorated with apples and candies. Sometimes we used to sneak some of the goodies off the tree. As a group the kids used to gather with a colorful lighted star, caroling outside the windows of neighbors, where we would get some treats – candies or baking. In Canada, I made a similar star and sometimes took it to the Legion's and Lions' Christmas celebrations.

By Easter time the snow was gone. It was warm and crocuses were already blooming. Easter was maybe the greatest religious observance we had. We colored eggs and exchanged, with other kids, eggs of different colors. Some coloring was quite involved, with multiple colors on each egg. We used to go to church at midnight and take the food to be blessed and then come home and share that food with all our family at a big meal.

## ***School***

I attended junior high and high school in a close town called Międzyrzec. I used to board in that town and come home on the weekend by bicycle. Or sometimes my family would pick me up with horses. They were always happy when I got home. I was happy too, and I looked forward to Mother's special baking. There was always a feast because I was coming home.

In school I participated in soccer and volleyball. And very popular in our school was gymnastics. They used to get us outdoors to do gymnastics to music. We had fun.

Starting in junior high, I belonged to cadets and marched with a wooden rifle. The cavalry was stationed in the neighborhood close to Niewierkow. I was fascinated with the military and looked up to them.

In grade nine I was doing pretty well, and in the year 1939 I won a scholarship – a free trip to Warsaw in the first week in July. That was a big excitement for me – getting on a train and spending one week in Warsaw, where we were shown all the highlights of the capital. That was very memorable.

My dad had a good connection with the neighborhood military. When I got back from Warsaw and later through that summer, the military personnel and my dad encouraged and helped me to join the military school. In August I traveled by myself on a train to the south part of Poland, to Lwow and Nisko, where I had an interview at the Nisko Military School. They told me I would hear from them in early September. I never heard from them, of course, because the war started.

## ***WWII***

Our life was interrupted. September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939 in the early hours Germany invaded Poland. Poland was a relatively new country that got independence in 1918. Always before that, Poland was occupied. By 1939, Poland wasn't really powerful enough to defend itself. But the Polish soldiers fought desperately. Eventually, some of them fled south through Romania and south to France and other countries. Within two weeks of the invasion, Germany occupied the capital of Warsaw. Then on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September the Russians entered Poland from the east to occupy the eastern half of Poland, as they had pre-arranged with Hitler. We lived quite close to the Russian border and the Russians were, already the first day, in our area.

Not only had we suffered from the Germans, but now the Russians invaded. We were scared. My dad was hiding for a while. We didn't know what to expect. The western part of Poland was occupied by Germany, and the eastern part by Russia. Then things sort of quieted down and we tried to continue living. I went back to school and my dad came out of hiding. We were scared to trust and we were living on the edge. We lost our country. We lost our freedom.

In the meantime the Russians, with the help of the Ukrainian people who lived in our area, compiled a list of people who were in the military, in government, or better-off citizens.

## ***Siberia***

In February 1940 when I was back at school, my family was wakened about two o'clock in the morning by Russian soldiers on the pretext of searching the house for arms. They told my family, "Grab whatever you can carry and you

are going to a new life." The Russians were taking families by horses. They had lists of everyone and they knew where I was. So they traveled through to pick me up at the school in Międzyrzec. I was 16 then and I was in a class at the time. What a surprise.

I joined the family and we traveled to the city of Rowno. We saw lots of other people taken at the same time. Altogether, two million were taken. Eventually, when the Russians gathered my family and enough other people, we were loaded into train boxcars, which were like cattle cars. Many were packed in each car with whatever belongings we had with us, and we started traveling. There was no heat. Sometimes it was cold. The toilet system was a hole in the floor. Sometimes somebody would put up a blanket for privacy. We seemed to travel for weeks and weeks. Some people were sick. Occasionally, if there were sick people, the train would stop and the Russians would take them off. They also stopped to give us some boiling water sometimes, and a ration of bread. Good thing that some of us had a few goodies from home.

Eventually, after weeks, the train stopped. People were dropped off in different areas. I didn't know where we were going. Then we were put on barges and traveled on rivers and canals. And to the last destination, part of our group was taken by truck. The final distance we had to walk. Some belongings were put on a travois pulled by a horse toward the camp. There was one big and one adjacent smaller camp, both along a small river.

In the smaller camp, called Chlopok, there were a number of wooden barracks with a hallway in the middle and rooms on both sides. We were placed in a small room. Not to exaggerate, the entire room with its bunk beds was only about 12 by 12 feet for our family of six. Soon we discovered, of course, beds full of bedbugs. And it was awfully cold. Maybe only every six rooms, there was one stove in the hallway.

Because Dad had some experience in forestry that's what we worked at. It was primarily a spruce and pine forest. We were assigned to cut down trees with two people using a long saw. Then we scraped the bark off the trees for

telephone poles or some other use. All by hand. The trees were dragged to the shore of the river, mostly by horses. But sometimes by tractor. If the tractor worked. Those trees lay there and when the spring came or when the river thawed they would float someplace else. In Russia they used to say, "There's only nine months of winter, and all the rest is summer." And in summer the flies were so bad we used stinky black fuel on our skin to protect ourselves.

We had to get up by the bell in the mornings and of course my dad and my brother and myself worked together. We were given a quota to produce so much. My mom went to work but she helped someplace in the kitchen. And my sisters, who were 10 and 12, eventually went to the larger camp where there was some Russian schooling. Propaganda schooling.

The able women worked along with us in the forest. When a tree fell down, sometimes in four or five feet of snow, it was hard to trim the branches. Especially in the wintertime it was some salvation because the women could burn the branches and get some heat, and we men working could occasionally warm up as well. Only when the temperature reached -50, then they wouldn't send us to work.

One time I wasn't doing the right thing. When a tree fell, we were supposed to stay on one side and chop the branches on the other. One time I didn't pay proper attention and I split my knee. I was taken by a horse to camp and a good thing there was a sort of medical nurse from home. She looked after me. Lucky it healed okay. All I have now is a good scar.

Eventually the clothing we brought with us was worn out. In the wintertime we used to wrap any rags that we could find around our feet to keep warm. The Russians wouldn't provide us with adequate clothing. They had quite a system there. If you worked really hard and fulfilled your quota you might get boots or a better ration of food. Our daily ration comprised, most of the time, 300 grams of bread and some boiling water to drink. And in the kitchen when we got back, lots of times we had fish soup with some barley. Many people were

undernourished, especially the younger ones. There was a lot of sickness and death.

Before the German-Russian war, Russians allowed the delivery of parcels. We were fortunate to receive a couple of parcels from our family in occupied Poland, from my dad's sister, the Gilewski family. Two large parcels. I remember lard and clothing, things that wouldn't spoil.

Our thoughts seemed to be always around home: how it was at home, wishing for better food and clothing. And as we worked among the evergreen trees at Christmastime we were thinking of Christmas trees and of home. But there were no holiday celebrations in Siberia.

However, they did give us some time off. And during the short summers, sometimes we had a home-built steam bath. Like a sauna in a covered shed, where we heated rocks and poured water on, so we could get rid of some lice and dirt.

Because the situation in the camp wasn't getting any better, we had the feeling that the reason we were there was for them to get the best of us and get rid for us. The Stalin solution. We didn't know what else was going on in the world. No news.

In the camp there was no attempt to escape. We were too far away from everything. And if someone was sometimes not cooperative, some were taken and never seen again.

## ***Leaving Siberia***

What saved us was the German-Russian war. Hitler and Stalin had been good partners. Then Hitler broke their friendship and invaded Russia in June 1941. Germany advanced so fast, not only into Polish territory but also deep into Russia. They were threatening Moscow and Stalin, needing help, turned to the

Western Allies – the British, Americans and Canadians – for support. Which they provided, with armaments and all kinds of necessary war supplies.

The western Allies, along with the Polish provisional government that was in London at that time, turned to Stalin to release the Polish people who were in labor camps throughout Russia. Then the released Poles could assist Russia to fight the Germans. Near the end of 1941, it was a lucky day because we received the word of amnesty for us. And I guess for two million other people. We were given a chance to move to the south part of Russia, the Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan area, near the Caspian Sea. There was talk of forming a Polish army. I don't know if we knew at that time it was an army; we were just traveling.

## ***Samarqand***

Now we repeated our journey back from the camp, traveling somewhat freely and hoping for better things to come. We went again by rivers and eventually by train, south along the mountains, through the deserts of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, to the cities of Tashkent and Samarqand. As we traveled, we gradually picked up more and more people. Our family was together and many others joined. Along the way we stopped often to pick up ration bread.

At one point we stopped between the two cities of Tashkent and Samarqand. Two of us from the train boxcar were delegated to go and pick up the bread. We had two sacks of loaf bread for the people in our boxcar, and we were somehow delayed. When we got to the train it was gone. Two of us with two sacks of bread. The poor people on the train, including the rest of my family, would have been hungry. Illegally, we traded the bread for other things and for money; that was my first business deal. We were scared. The next day we got on a train headed the same direction we had been traveling, hoping to catch up

with the rest of our families. We were on an open platform and had a few loaves of bread still with us. We were following the other train, and at night resting with the bread under our heads as pillows. In the morning when we woke up, someone had cut the sack and the bread was gone.

The train with my family got stopped in Samarqand, our temporary destination. They were waiting and hoping we would catch up to them. And the next day we reunited.

They placed us in Samarqand for a while in clay huts with dirt floors. We slept there and we worked in a factory where they processed cotton, Dad, Leon, and myself. Then we were transferred to a collective farm not too far away, where we used to all pick cotton in the fields. There again we were living in clay huts. And sometimes from the collective farm we would get some flour and Mom would try to bake some meals. There was never adequate food. My sister Lodzia always used to remind me that I stole a chicken at the farm once, and we had a real feast.

## ***Joining the Army***

News came that finally the Polish army was forming in the desert west of Samarqand in a place named Karmana. One day Leon and I decided to go and see if we could join the army, and we traveled to this camp. It was a dreadful place. The Poles streamed in, skeletons in rags. We were in rags, too. Many died from typhoid and dysentery, and every morning we dug graves.

January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1942 we went to the tent to join the army. I was 18 at that time. Leon was assigned to one company and I was assigned to another. From that day, we were separated for seven years.

My company was sent to an area where we had to dig into the ground two or three feet to make a base on which to set up our tents. The desert at

night was still cool, and below ground we were a little warmer. Wearing rags, we were trying to be soldiers. We had to get up at a certain time and march to a distant kitchen to pick up some boiled water or a little porridge. Our ration was very limited and we were desperately hungry. One time a group of us from our tent chased a skinny dog. We killed that dog and boiled the meat in the tent. Without any seasonings. It smelled a little doggish but we had, that once, a great feast.

We did a little bit of exercise and sometimes they told us to take our shirts off, kill the lice, and put the shirts back on. There was no place for washing or showers. Clothing wasn't available. At one point, the Red Cross sent condensed milk and eventually some blankets. When a camel died they tried to use the meat for cooking and everyone was sick with dysentery. Disease was continuous and the conditions were not getting better. The Russians could not supply us with anything, really, to speak of.

Then Churchill asked Stalin if he would release some of these young men, about 200,000, to the Middle East under British command, so they could open a second front somewhere in Germany. Stalin did release them, and I was among them. We were so happy it came true.

It was the end of March 1942 that we traveled by train to the port at the Caspian Sea. With a ration of dry bread and two herrings, we boarded an oil tanker, thousands of us at a time, to cross the sea to Persia, which is now Iran. The Caspian Sea is salt water, and on board they couldn't produce enough distilled drinking water for all of us. Because the sea was rough it took us more than two days to cross. Eventually we landed, but not in the best condition. We tried to march through the streets of Pahlevi. For the first time since we were home in Poland, we saw streets where vendors sold fruits and other food. Some of us occasionally grabbed food, and some vendors threw fruit to us. But the British soldiers warned us not to eat anything that we were not accustomed to or we would get sick.

We were still wearing rags when we arrived at big camps that the British had set up to process us. They burned all our belongings so we could clean up in showers. Then we were issued British uniforms and became soldiers under British command. In those camps, sand and hills like a desert, we tried to get our strength, including spiritual strength. I remember us Catholics going to reconciliation to the priest in a sandy outside place. I confessed all my sins. I guess I had acquired many of them.

After we were organized and more fit, we were on the road again, loaded into big trucks designed for transporting troops. We traveled through the mountains. Iran, Iraq, Syria. With the British in control the journey was much different. Sometimes we stayed overnight in a desert at a well-prepared camp, and on the road we saw people living quite comfortably and with plenty. Finally we arrived in Palestine.

### ***From Palestine to England***

Palestine was the main destination for all the Polish forces to gather and train. Our camp was in an isolated area in a sandy desert in tents. Sometimes during sandstorms we could hardly get out of our tents. But we started our military training, and were well looked after. Good food and weekly showers. We had a huge long building with showers, used by many thousands of soldiers. We wrote our names on the walls hoping that somebody would recognize us.

Eventually, my dad came through and noticed my name. He had joined the army in Russia after I did and had come the same route to Palestine. He traced me to the regiment where I was stationed. I was very surprised and it was great to see him. He briefed me a little bit about the rest of the family. Because all the men in our family had enlisted, Mom and my sisters were allowed to leave Russia.

In the meantime, on our time off I had a chance to visit the holy cities with my regiment – Jerusalem and Bethlehem. That was quite an experience. Then after more than two months of training we were once again on the road, with big trucks traveling through the Sinai Desert – extremely hot. Again we had regular stopping places and eventually arrived in Suez, Egypt. Thousands of us embarked on a ship called the *Frankonia*. We weren't sure where we were going. Our ship traveled through the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and further south, zigzagging to avoid German submarines. We arrived in Durban, South Africa. Some people were surprised to see our ship docking as the Germans had announced they had sunk a ship with thousands of Polish soldiers. Later on my dad told me they had heard the same news in Palestine and he thought that I was gone. Apparently another ship was sunk; it wasn't ours.

We disembarked in Durban and went inland close to the city of Pietermaritzburg, where there was a transitional camp established for troops from the Middle East to regroup and head to England. We stayed in that camp for about six weeks and experienced some African scenery and culture. Lots of black people there. Some guys used to go from the camp to see movies in Pietermaritzburg. Sometimes there was some confrontation between the soldiers and the people of the city. That camp existed for quite a while and the road between the camp and the city was named Poles' Road. My sister Lodzia told me later that she remembered talk about the camp and that road.

Once more we traveled, back to Durban and a different ship, where German and Italian prisoners captured in northern Africa were also being transported to England. Because of the prisoners on board, my company was given arms as guards. We traveled around South Africa, stopping occasionally for refueling and to gather supplies. As we were coming to the Cape of Good Hope, where the Indian and Atlantic oceans meet, the seas were very rough and we were all seasick.

Our first stop was in Cape Town, but we stayed on the ship. Then we continued along the African coast heading north to Freetown in Sierra Leone. On

our final destination to England, we had to go a long way out from shore and zigzag into the Atlantic Ocean to avoid the submarines.

### ***Training in England and Scotland***

Finally we arrived in England in the port of Liverpool around the middle of August 1942. There we were met by the Polish army organization that was already in England and Scotland, some of them since 1940 when France was overrun by Germany after the Ally defeat at Dunkerque, where many Polish soldiers had fought with the Allies. Many more of the free Polish soldiers, transported in from the Middle East and all around the world, came to join the Polish forces in England. At one point there were about 200,000 Poles who fought with the Allies in the army, the marines, and the air force.

We were asked what regiment we wanted to go into, and I chose to go to the armory division, which was organized in Scotland. I was assigned the First Polish Armored Division under Commanding General Maczek. We were in the ranks of the Second British Army under General Montgomery.

Scotland was quite hilly in some places, and in the summer it was very nice. In winter we had a lot of rain and damp weather. As we were meeting people, we found them very friendly and accommodating. But we had a problem, as we didn't know the language. A lot of conversations took place with our hands, with gestures. We got along and began learning some English. And as we learned we were accepted into social events, like dances.

Of course, our emphasis was on extensive training, mainly to learn to operate different types of vehicles and become acquainted with arms, as the Allies were preparing for an expected invasion to liberate Europe. We trained all around Scotland and in 1943 we moved to southeast England to exercise not too far from Cambridge: Newmarket and Bury St. Edmunds. And Thetford, where we

had live ammunition exercises. Not very populated areas. All the different troops trained together. We exercised particularly with the British and Canadians. But the British Isle was a large military base with millions of concentrated troops of many nationalities all preparing for invasion.

When the expected invasion was postponed, we went back in Scotland for more training. Our headquarters were in Melrose, Galashiels, Duns, Selkirk, and Peebles – all places where we were stationed and exercised. We weren't very far from Edinburgh, where we used to go quite often on an outing.

All the time our thoughts were still on our homeland in Poland. We heard and observed what was happening in the world and we knew the German-Russian war was continuing. We hoped things would happen soon so we could go into action to help liberate our country.

The majority of the Polish army was formed in Palestine. The Allies defeated General Romel in northern Africa, where some Polish forces were also involved, in a place called Tobruk. In 1943 the Polish corps of about 100,000 troops, along with Allied forces, went to liberate Italy, and they distinguished themselves by fighting and capturing strategic Monte Casino, a religious cloister and the main obstacle to Rome.

In the meantime, we marched again, moving south, gradually from Scotland to northern England, for more exercises in the area of eastern Yorkshire, south of Middlesbrough and near Scarborough – a beautiful place.

Some soldiers were writing and getting letters. But I didn't have connections with anybody until one day I received a tiny censored postcard from the Red Cross. That was from my dad. He wrote to the Red Cross to find out where I was. It was quite a surprise and a thrill that somebody was looking for me.

When I connected with Dad I learned what had happened to the rest of the family, as Dad was in the Middle East all the time and he knew where everyone else was. My brother Leon got out of Russia in the later months, almost with the last transfer, as he had been very sick with typhoid. Later on the

Russians stopped releasing anyone. Leon was trained in Palestine with the Polish Second Corps and was fighting with the forces in Italy. My mom and two sisters got out of Russia through the Caspian Sea to Iran in 1942, to live in a camp close to Tehran. But as they crossed the Caspian Sea my mom wasn't feeling very good. My youngest sister Lodzia was taken to hospital as she was also sick, with typhoid and jaundice. Lodzia told us later that she never saw our mom again. Our mom died in the Tehran camp. Halina, my older sister, was with Mother in the camp before she died.

Before my brother went with the forces to Italy, in 1942 he traveled from Palestine to visit my two sisters in the camp. Mom had already died by that time. Then Leon had to go back and they were separated, and that was the last time Lodzia ever saw her brother Leon. In 1943 a large number of young children, including my sisters, were taken care of by the Red Cross and the British Government, and they were re-settled in different parts of the world. My sisters went to South Africa, to the town of Oudtshoorn. They were then about 13 and 15 years of age. Dad did not go to the front line, as he was older. He stayed in Palestine with the reserves all the years of the war.

I was very sorry to have lost my mom in a far away country. But I was happy to still have most of my family and hear all the news about them. Now I knew I was not alone. From that point I kept some connection – not always very possible during the war – with the family.

### ***Active Service in Normandy***

Eventually we heard that the invasion of Europe was immanent. Soon after, we heard that D-day, the day of the invasion, was taking place on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944, when Allied forces were to land in Normandy, France. We began hearing about the hard conditions of the warfare. The Allies managed to establish a front

after heavy fighting, and hold the beaches to land more troops, gradually moving inland. More and more troops were on the way to assist.

Our time was coming. By train, we moved with tanks and heavy equipment closer to London. In July, our division was loading equipment in different British southern ports. My company loaded at the port of Tilbury on the river Thames. Crossing the English Channel we saw thousands of ships; nothing but ships, all heading to Normandy. We landed on the two beaches called Gold and Sword. At that time the beaches were relatively secure. As we were getting together and assembling the division, we could hear constant shelling. Sometimes the area was quite congested with troops and we couldn't tell where the fire was coming from.

Luckily the German air force wasn't too active in a big way at that time. There were times when they flew very low, so they would not be detected by radar. We got used to it all, and after full preparation our division went into action. As we progressed through Caen and further, we encountered strong opposition. Heavy fighting continued and sometimes we fought through the weeks in full gear. We didn't get proper rest or fresh meals, and we ate a lot of mutton and dry rations. Orchards were abundant in that area and when we approached them as we advanced, we would look for the French cellars to find apple cider and calvados to quench our thirst. That was a hot summer. During the fighting we encountered almost none of the French people. They all had been evacuated. Some areas were so heavily damaged by artillery and bombs they were unrecognizable.

We became part of the Second Canadian Corps. Canadians, British, Poles – we kept the same front, sometimes relieving each other in action. There were a lot of casualties and a person didn't particularly think about it. It was war. At one point I got a little shrapnel on my right hand, on my knuckle. The Germans had good equipment and tanks and were hard to destroy.

As we were fighting, quite often we'd call for aerial support for our division. Once our artillery guns pounded for maybe three hours steady on the

enemy position and then the American Super Fortress Planes arrived from England to bomb the Germans. And once, later on, the Americans were a little off course and dropped the bomb on our division instead – 60 dead and 200 injured. We were bombed by friendly fire.

I recall it was sometimes really hot and crops grew where the enemy was hiding. We took a lot of prisoners, some who were Polish and had been conscripted into the German army. Later they were quite helpful to us because they knew the German language and could communicate with our prisoners.

Serving in reconnaissance, I've seen lots of action. We took prisoners and we Poles had a particular hatred towards the Germans because of their brutal invasion of Poland. Therefore, we were particularly motivated to fight them. Some nights the Germans would throw flares into areas concentrated with troops, which lit up the ground so you could really see. Then they bombed. We were not heroes; we were fighting to protect ourselves. I remember digging in the ground and hiding from the shells. And many times saying little prayers.

The battle of Normandy continued until August. Finally the Allies succeeded in encircling the German army in a *Falaise* gap. German troops tried to break through and the severest combat was in those areas. Our division encountered our heaviest fighting at Chambois. We were cut off for a while and then managed to get some help from Americans in the south.

The battle of the gap was really a massacre. The dead were laying everywhere among the burning tanks and equipment, with swollen carcasses of horses that contributed to a repulsive stink. The battles continued until August 23<sup>rd</sup>. Germany was completely defeated and surrendered in Normandy. German prisoners by the thousands were taken.

We assessed our losses in men and equipment. Among the many cemeteries, there is a Polish cemetery at Langannerie with 1,374 dead. British General Montgomery, who was commanding the British sector, praised the Poles. He said, "We got the Germans in the bottle, and you were the cork."

Some men really distinguished themselves and received many medals – Polish, British, and French – or got advancement in the ranks. Almost right after Normandy, I received the rank of Corporal.

### ***Through Belgium and Holland***

The battle of Normandy was over, but the war was not. We regrouped. The Allies were advancing to liberate the rest of France. Our division was heading north to Rouen, liberating Abbeville, and towards Belgium. Along the way people in many towns welcomed us with slogans, “*Vive la Pologne!* Cigarette for Papa. Chocolate for Mama.” The Germans resisted by blowing up bridges and roads to delay the advancement.

Eventually we reached Belgium. We liberated familiar places from the First World War, such as Ieper, where Germans had gassed Canadians. Then to Tielt, where we encountered intense fighting. Then to Gent. People in Belgium didn’t encounter hardship because they didn’t officially resist German occupation. Therefore, there were plenty of good things for everybody. In Gent people showed us great respect. They were very grateful. While we were stationed there I encountered a very friendly family and after the war I spent a few visits with them. They always welcomed me back.

From Gent we headed north. Our division encountered heavy fighting and losses across the Dutch border in Hulst, Axel and Terneuzen. We were trying to push the Germans into the sea. Then we turned back to Belgium territory through the outskirts of Antwerpen, to clear Germans from the area of Turnaout and advance north again, crossing the Dutch border at Baarle-Nassau, sometimes encountering very youthful German soldiers. Hitler-Jungen. It was pitiful to see them – so young, fighting and dying. They were desperate fighters. Fanatics. We used to take prisoners, some still yelling, “Heil Hitler!”

Our destination was a larger Dutch city of Breda. I remember so well entering Breda through the outskirts called Ginneken. Our general tried to avoid damaging the city. We were encircling the Germans and the result was good because although the fighting was intense, the city was not badly damaged. I can still see people dancing in the streets. And one thing that was not very pretty: the Dutch underground paraded women – German sympathizers – with shaved heads.

The people of Breda were very thankful and never forgot this quiet liberation. At one point they held a big celebration and all the divisions were granted free citizenship to Breda. Our headquarters from that point stationed in Breda, and we advanced north to Oosterhout and the Mark Canal, which was well defended, with severe fighting. Eventually we reached the well-known and well-fortified Moerdijk Bridge, the last fortified place in southern Holland. The hard fighting continued until the Germans were cleared out of the south side of Holland.

With excessive losses on our side, we had a cemetery in Breda with 1,250 Poles buried, and later on our Commanding General was buried there according to his wishes. The cemetery is still looked after by the Dutch people of Breda.

Through the years our division always remembered the day of liberation of Breda as our special remembrance day. After the war the Dutch also always celebrated it. And wherever we had our veterans' gatherings, we used to have a special mass to commemorate that day. In Canada the organization was in Toronto. The Poles that fought in Breda always remembered.

Then the Allied advancement through Holland and Germany stalled. On a big scale, paratroopers were dropped on the city of Arnhem, Holland to secure the bridges, but they were unsuccessful.

We were stationed in the south part of Holland patrolling up to the River Mass, sometimes exchanging fire and artillery with Germans across the river. From their bases in northern Holland, the Germans launched V-1 rockets at troops and cities. Sometimes the rockets flew over our heads, and as long as we

could hear the noise we knew we were okay. But when the sound stopped the rockets were going to fall.

When we were stationed in Breda those months, patrolling to the River Mass, we had visits or inspections from the British Sector Commander General Montgomery and from the American Supreme Commander of all troops, Dwight Eisenhower, recognizing our division's achievements.

During the time we were in Holland, our General and a company of soldiers, myself included, drove to Paris. We marched along the Champs-Élysées to the Ark of Triumph where our General laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. There were also decorations by the French given to some Poles distinguished in the battle for France. We were able to spend a few days in Paris to enjoy the highlights, like the Eiffel Tower. That was the only time I've been to Paris, but I have a clear memory of it.

Holland had quite a severe winter. But we were getting some warmer clothing and sometimes got treated with rum on special occasions.

## ***The Fall of Germany***

During the months of February and the beginning of March 1945, Allies prepared for the final assault on northern Holland and Germany itself. They strengthened the First Canadian Army and made a push on northern Holland from different sites. The Allied forces – including the American, British and some Canadians and Poles – prepared to push into Germany.

Our division liberated eastern Holland, advancing through Tilburg, Nijmegen, Hertogenbosch, Hengelo, then moved into Germany, to Meppen and Haren, and advanced north. I remember lots of places still, because I was serving in reconnaissance and I was a good map reader.

Now Germans defended themselves on their own territory and fought desperately. North, we went to Papenburg and our final destination was to be the seaport of Wilhelmshaven. Here in German territory there was no welcome. People were afraid and would shy away. Poles were coming and they didn't know what to expect.

Although we had a hatred towards the Germans, we didn't retaliate on innocent civilians. We had learned by now that during the Polish resistance in September 1944, Hitler completely destroyed Warsaw, starved many, and took many Poles into prison camps. We happened to liberate one of these camps with 2,000 Polish women who had fought in the underground in Warsaw. The camp was called Oberlangen and was close to the Dutch border. It was quite an incident – a surprise to them and to us – that a Polish division happened to liberate these Polish women.

The battle continued on to the Kusten-Kanal. We were still taking a number of prisoners. As we searched some of the older soldiers, we found treasured photographs of their families. For them life was important – their families and their kids – always thinking about them. Now that they were captured, perhaps they were glad that war was over for them. They had enough of the war.

## ***Cease Fire***

In the meantime, we heard that Hitler's war was collapsing on its eastern front with Russia. Russians were advancing and there was a race with the Allies as to who would get to Berlin first. We advanced to Leer. On May 7<sup>th</sup>, as we reached the city of Wilhelmshaven, we received the message that Germany had surrendered, not only on the ground but everywhere – air and sea – and we were to cease all fighting. For the Germans it was demoralizing when we

marched through their positions as they surrendered, laying their arms aside and disbanding their regiments.

Hitler's brutality had come to an end and the world was jubilant. But it wasn't so for the Polish people. We had fought for the freedom of all nations, but our hearts were in Poland. Now in the Yalta conference, Churchill and Roosevelt sold us out to Stalin. The Allies let Stalin annex part of Poland, occupy the rest, and establish communist government again, not only in Poland but in other eastern countries as well. As Poles our intention always was to march into Warsaw and bring our provisional government that was then located in London, England. Our march didn't materialize. Stalin got his way.

Allied soldiers, wherever they served, were happy to return home. Poles did not have a home to go to. Most of us were afraid to go back to occupied Poland. We tried to find freedom in some other parts of the world.

### ***Germany During Occupation***

The war was over and I received extra ranks and special recognition with the Battle Cross. But this war brought hardship to so many people, including many civilians. People were displaced. People lost homes, lost property, lost their lives.

I saw Germany in ruins, ruined by the war and misery that Hitler brought on his own people. The German people really suffered as well and not all of them supported Hitler's war. I also saw horrifying German prison and refugee camps.

I stayed in Germany's British zone with occupation forces for over two years, in places that were familiar to us from the fighting. We had our headquarters in a smaller city like Meppen. Also Lingen and Osnabruek – all in northwestern Germany.

I joined the military police during occupation. Police were required to control the German civilian population, to relocate German military prisoners, as well as to police our own troops. We traveled quite a bit while relocating prisoners and had to keep peace as well, and enforce curfews.

Sometimes I had duties to travel to different cities. Hamburg up north, and the central industrial areas in the south like Essen, Dusseldorf, and Koln – all of which had particularly heavy damage. You could hardly find the streets. I also traveled to the far south all the way to Munich, which was not quite as damaged.

It was a big country to travel in, and sometimes I went on the autobahn that was in the American zone. The German people really suffered hardship in the larger cities. After the war, they traveled by loaded trains up north, where we were mostly stationed, and where a greater number of farming areas meant more food. One time our duty took us to Brussels for a couple of weeks to control soldiers and civilians who were using the black market. Eventually, Allied help began arriving for Germany and other European countries that had suffered during the war.

While we were stationed in Meppen I bought a camera. A friend and I got interested in developing some pictures that we took in Meppen and also when we were on holiday. We had some free time and a lot of us used to go on holidays back to Belgium, as it seemed to be a country that was plentiful with everything. I used to occasionally go to Gent and Brussels to see the people that I met during the war.

As we were going one time to Brussels on an overnight trip by train, during the night we got comfortably to rest. Suddenly there was a big crash awakening us, and we felt the whole car roll. Two trains had collided in the industrial German area of Krefeld, not that far from the border of Belgium. Our car, third back from the locomotive, was jammed, pushed out, and rolled over and over down the embankment. Finally we found ourselves motionless – all scratched and beat up, with whatever we could find of our belongings. Those in our car all seemed to be in fair condition. It was after midnight when they got us

out and we saw the terrible destruction of the two trains. The locomotive and the first and second cars from our train were shattered, with soldiers screaming. At first we thought it was sabotage, as the second train was also full of soldiers, coming back from Brussels. There were a lot of deaths and injuries. But the soldiers in our car got lucky. We were taken by ambulances and had lots of tape and bandages, but mostly only cuts and bruises. Later we continued our trip to Brussels.

Already while we were in Germany, the friendship between the western Allies and Russia broke down. Soon we saw lots of conflict between the Allied and Russian zones, especially in Berlin. We were soon in the Cold War era, which lasted for almost 50 years.

### ***Family Contacts***

While in Germany, I was in contact with my family by letter. But I never had a chance to go visit my brother in Italy or my dad, who was still in the Middle East. I remember receiving a letter from Dad in Palestine with two gold wedding rings enclosed, with a message saying that I might get married sometime. He was right. We are still wearing the wedding rings he sent.

My sisters were in South Africa in a school, and their hope of returning to Poland after the war didn't materialize. My sisters and all of the kids from Siberia were afraid to return to Poland, which was occupied again by the Russians. I would occasionally send my sisters a few cents as I was able, a small token.

## ***England and Demobilization***

Gradually the occupation forces were reduced. Our division began moving back to England, thinking of demobilization. I returned to a camp in southern England at the end of 1947, near Salisbury and close to Stonehenge. Next we moved south of London, near Guildford, close to the historic soldiers' gathering place of Aldershot.

We then became a known Polish Resettlement Corps. We were still provided with regular pay, but we had to gradually prepare for civilian life. They tried to encourage and help train us in different areas. A lot of men immigrated to Australia, South Africa, Europe, South America, Canada, and some tried to find work in England.

I moved to London and was contemplating my future. My dad also moved from the Middle East and was stationed in a camp in central England, by Staffordshire. In the winter of 1948 I went to visit him and later on I saw him once more in London in 1949. Father looked good and he was proud of his son. We had lots to talk about – our family and our war years' experiences.

I had already enjoyed a little photography in Germany, when I took pictures and developed them together with another friend. I still have many of those pictures from our holidays. Now in England I found and enlisted in a photographic course. The Polish Resettlement Corps helped to train me as I was still in the corps and still being paid. In the course they taught not just the proper use of cameras, but all the props. It was quite intensive – posing, lighting, and the chemistry of mixing your own developing solutions. I went a bit on assignment. I found it quite interesting and I stuck with it, hoping that it would sometime come useful in life.

During this time I also heard from my brother Leon. After the Allied war ended in Italy, Leon decided to go to Canada. In 1946 the Canadian government took thousands of soldiers from Italy. Still in uniform, they came to work under a

two-year contract for people who requested them. The soldiers were guaranteed board and room and received some pay.

As Canadian people became aware of this opportunity, one of the prominent Rimbey businessmen – a member, at that time, of the Alberta legislature, O.B. Moore – applied for one of the soldiers. The soldier happened to be my brother Leon. Leon didn't know English. He had to learn the language and work in different capacities – driving truck, working at machinery shops, and later working at the Used and New Furniture Store.

## ***Canada***

I had lived in London about a year-and-a-half, and had gotten to know it pretty well. I knew how to get around on the underground, and was visiting and enjoying all the London sights. I learned more English and was brave enough to go to some dances. There was also a Polish center in London, where I could get acquainted with others and learn what they were doing and where they were going. Which countries. What kind of work. I even found information about a job in England and had places in mind to settle there. Hearing about Leon and receiving his picture, where he looked quite well and happy, I was interested. Leon encouraged me to come to Canada, and I decided to go.

At that time the situation in England was difficult, as everything was rationed. But people said, "If you go to Canada you're lucky. We heard you can have six eggs for breakfast." In England, the ration was one egg a week.

Soon I was ready to go to Canada. I didn't have to sign any contract, but I needed a guaranteed place to stay, so I wouldn't be a burden to the country. Once Mr. O.B. Moore guaranteed that I would have a place to come to, the papers were processed accordingly with the Canadian government. I was admitted to Canada after a clearance of health.

Making the necessary preparations, I was excited and had a fancy civilian suit made. I brought that suit with me and occasionally wear it to show off. I can still get into it all these years later. Since I was moving to Canada I hoped I could use my knowledge from my photographic course – perhaps open a photography studio in Rimbey. So I brought with me some equipment – a camera and an enlarger – hoping it would be useful.

Since during the war we were still under the British government, the British War Office issued me passage by ship and train fare to Lacombe, Alberta. I received all the papers in order to travel on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1949 to South Hampton to board the ship *Aquitania*. Being on the ocean reminded me of other sea travels. Although the seas were rough, we weren't in any danger from submarines, as we had been during the war. We arrived safely in Halifax on November 1<sup>st</sup>. There were a number of other new immigrants coming as well. We got acquainted and next traveled by train, stopping for sandwiches and warm drinks. At one stop someplace we had a chance to move around, and we saw some really nice goodies to buy – fancy baking, sausages, and so on.

As we traveled to northern Ontario we saw snow covering the ground. I was afraid about what to expect as we came to Alberta – a lot more snow? I thought it would be worse. In Winnipeg we changed trains and the next stop was Calgary. As we traveled, my impression was of a vast and beautiful country, not very populated. I felt lucky to be here and I was confident a great opportunity awaited me.

I finally arrived in Lacombe on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1949. There was no snow. The weather was lovely and we were in short sleeves. At the station I met my brother for the first time in seven years, a very emotional meeting. Then he invited me to stop and have a meal in Lacombe at the Club Cafe. We sat down and my brother asked me to order whatever I liked; that would be maybe the first real meal since we traveled from Halifax. I said, "I don't know. Order something for me." He ordered pork chops and something else for himself. When my pork chops were ready, the waiter brought a big plate with three chops and a

whole load of veggies and potatoes. I was sure it wasn't for me and I moved it to the center for us to share. Leon said, "No, no. It's all yours." I had never seen those kinds of portions; everything in England was rationed. My brother said, "We have to fatten you up." I was always on the skinny side.

## ***Rimbey***

We traveled to Rimbey in my brother's borrowed car, borrowed from O.B. Moore. There wasn't much of a road from Bentley to Rimbey. Dirt and gravel; more like a trail. Arriving in Rimbey we first stopped at the elevators, to visit two Polish families – Gajb and Pierzchajlo – who were living in the same little house and who had come a few months earlier. They already had a cow and I was offered a glass of milk. That was my first stop with a Rimbey family. And we had many more meetings with them as long as they lived in Rimbey. Forever friends with both the families, we continue forever.

After Leon and I left the Gajbs and Pierzchajlos that day, I anticipated meeting the person who was responsible for my coming to Canada and Rimbey. I was very thankful and was so glad to meet Mr. Moore. He was very gentle, a good man all around, who was like a father to us. He helped and encouraged us in many ways in our new life.

I also met his youngest son George, with whom Helen and I continue to keep connection. George still laughs remembering the first thing I asked after meeting the Moores: "Where is the police station? I want to register." Because I was a newcomer I thought I had to register with the police.

Rimbey was not at all like London. It was quite a small western settlement, without running water, without sewers, without natural gas, without paved roads or sidewalks. But we were happy. We didn't go hungry. And we were free.

## ***Opening a Studio***

After a short acquaintance with the town, I decided that I wanted to open a photographic studio. But the equipment I brought with me wasn't quite suitable. I had to learn what would be appropriate, where to buy supplies, and how to charge. It was all new to me. So I asked the owner of a Red Deer photo studio if I could help him before Christmas – that was in 1949 – and at the same time learn the necessary procedures to establish my own studio. What I learned was quite helpful.

The next step was that I required some finances to buy equipment. I got support and help from the local Credit Union. Then I needed to find a location. Again, Mr. Moore was helpful. He rented to me his bedroom and small office, which were adjacent to the furniture store where my brother was working. Then, with some help from my brother, I was in business early January 1950. I wasn't that sure of myself, starting a business with almost primitive conditions, without running water and proper heat.

Before my official opening to the public I needed practice. Nurses from the hospital volunteered to pose for their photographs, which helped me and also led, eventually, to my brother marrying one of them. And in my business, things got going well. I was accepted into the community and got busy in my work. Since my brother worked in part of the same building in the furniture store, we called the studio Bro's Studio. A lot of customers used to come and call me Mr. Brothers.

Everybody young always wants to have their own car. So I didn't waste any time getting a '39 Dodge. It spent more time in the garage than on the road, but it was mine and I was proud. And brave enough to go to Edmonton. I was driving on Jasper Avenue by the Bay, and I wanted to make a left turn. I put my hand out to signal and pulled into the middle of the intersection, waiting for a car to go by. Then my car stalled. The starter was on the floor, and the choke was

on the dash. I tried to pull on the choke and step on the starter. The light changed and everyone was tooting their horns. A police officer came running over. Now I was scared; would they send me back to Siberia? The officer called out, "Use your noodle! Use your noodle!" I said, "Officer, I've tried everything already. Can you show me where the noodle is?" He sighed and said, "Get out and push." So we pushed the car off to the side. That was my first experience in Edmonton. Now if I'm not catching on to something fast enough or not doing it right, my family reminds me, "Use your noodle!"

With the Polish group – Ray and Hedi, Adam and Bernice, my brother and myself – we used to gather to socialize. Grandma Gajb used to add to our celebrations by making a good dandelion wine. And as a group we enjoyed a lot of singing. Therefore, some local people invited us for social parties, meals and singing. I met a lot of friendly people, among them Dr. George and Mrs. Blanche Boorman. They were the first people who were really helpful and encouraging to our Polish group. Mrs. Boorman found the time to give us some English lessons, and we made a good beginning. We were always thankful to the Boormans and never forgot their friendship.

After a while our Polish group went different directions and left Rimbey, some of them to work, some of them to school. But they have been forever our best friends and like family to us. Then my brother left as well, for Calgary. As he was an x-ray technician from his army training, he got a job as an x-ray technician at the Calgary Holy Cross Hospital. Shortly after moving, in 1951 he got married to Irene who had worked as a nurse at the Rimbey Hospital.

Now, of our entire Polish group, I alone was left in Rimbey. But as an army veteran of the Allied forces, I was invited to join the Legion in 1950, where I found camaraderie and could talk about the war experience. The Legion, a big interest for me, became my second home. I still remember pouring cement for the foundation of the present hall and chairing on-going renovations. I also did lots of other things in the Legion and served in different capacities, both as president and on various committees. And I am a life member of the Rimbey

branch. In 2011 I was recognized with the Certificate of Merit for 60 years of service.

## ***Marriage***

I was happy the way things were going in business. Besides doing photography I expanded to sell cameras, records, and record players. In 1952 at a square dance I met Helen Jepson who came to visit her sister, Mickey, who owned a drugstore in Rimbey. I danced with Helen – “Swing you high; swing you low”. Then she had to return to Vancouver. In 1953 I made the long trip to see her and we talked about and finalized wedding plans. We were married that year in a cathedral in Calgary, as Leon and Irene were living there. Our wedding was on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, Boxing Day, the only day I felt I could get away from business. Mickey helped plan the reception, which we celebrated with special guests. That year there was no snow. But as we were walking out of the church the first flake came down, and it was pretty snowy by the time Helen and I drove to Banff, where we stayed for a few days. We returned to Rimbey, and from Mickey we rented a house called “Jepsonville, population 2”, where we spent seven years. We have many happy memories of living in that small house.

## ***Business and Community Involvement***

As a couple we were happy, enjoying the people, and we had fun participating in community activities. Helen worked in the drugstore with her sister. I was doing relatively well in my business but I wanted to build a new studio. With Mickey’s assistance, in 1956 I purchased the land and built a one-story building across from the Grand Hotel. I added a second story in 1965. That

building still stands today. And when I built I changed the name of my business to Michael's Studio. Underneath the sign it said "Cameras and Music Shop". The studio room was upstairs on the second floor and the main floor had a little bit of everything. I had cameras, projectors, records, cassette tapes and players, and I branched out to televisions and stereos – all types of small electronics. And also musical instruments, some of which I sold to the school band. As well I carried all string instruments and musical accessories. I was also encouraged by the art club to carry paints, canvases and frames.

Since I was quite busy and things were going good, I spent long hours at work, especially at Christmas. In those days I did a lot of weddings and family groups. And I must be the only photographer who took a picture of a ghost. This is true. There was an older gentleman in town named Tom, who walked through the cemetery to his home. He used to come to the store quite often and ask me to take the picture of a ghost that was under the bed in his room. So finally I obliged. I climbed the stairs to his room on the second story, and asked, "Where is it?" He said, "Can't you see? It's right there." And he pointed under the bed. I had brought a Polaroid instant picture camera, so I snapped a couple of pictures and showed them to him. And he was happy.

I did all my developing, printing and processing by myself in a basement dark room. I also did the framing myself. Before color film I did hand color. Prior to Christmastime I almost slept in the dark room, I spent so many hours there. But I had some hired help in the store, and later on even Helen helped, especially with the bookkeeping.

After I had established myself in Rimbey and built the new store, I wanted to become a Canadian citizen and was acquiring a knowledge of Canada. In 1957 I drove to Wetaskiwin court. I was asked a few questions by the judge, including, "Are you taking good pictures?" I said, "Well, it depends on the subject." That day I was pleased to receive the privilege of citizenship.

I was trying to fit more into the community and in 1957, besides becoming a Canadian citizen, I was invited to join the Lions Club, a well-

respected organization. Since it formed in 1946, it has been involved in many projects in the community. I served as president and also enjoyed working on numerous projects – pancake days, Oktoberfest, casinos, playgrounds, a walking trail, and many others. I have been an active member for 54 years and I am a life member. I was recognized by the highest Lions international award, the Melvin Jones Fellowship.

In this small community, business people were willing to work together and they formed a strong Chamber of Commerce. It promoted the activities and growth of the community by bringing new professional people in, and encouraging the building of better roads and services. As a businessman I did my part and served as president of the Chamber.

A few local people, who had been golfing in Lacombe, suggested we build a new course in Rimbey. Although I didn't know much about golfing I wanted to be part of it, and even helped physically when we built the course in 1954 and 1955. I was one of the original shareholders. Later I held the position of secretary/treasurer for a number of years. Father Murphy, who helped design the course, gave us golfing lessons and he told me, "You have a good swing. Even if you are left-handed." Golfing became my passion. I have lots of memories of golfing in Rimbey and many other places. And I'm still swinging.

In 1974 the town decided to expand the arena with an addition and the installation of artificial ice. I was financial publicity chairman, and our object was to raise \$120,000. The community was very supportive, both young and old, and we received many donations. As a result, the arena was completed and enjoyed for many years.

In community, one thing led to the other, and lots of things were going on. For example, in 1979 when Rimbey received a grant for main street improvement, I was chairman of the project and made the arrangements to hire an architect. He drew up the necessary plans to plant trees, move benches, place many large flowerpots, and a number of other things necessary for town beautification.

Your involvement in community never ends. I belong to the Catholic Church and when we built the new church in 1964 and 1965, I was asked by the priest to be on the building committee. Later I was on the finance committee for many years until the church building was paid for. It's still rewarding. Every time I go to church I am still proud of my contribution. Another arm of the church is the organization of the Knights of Columbus, which promotes religious activities as well as community involvement. I am a 50-year honorary life member. I have so many life memberships – the Legion, the Lions Club, and the Knights of Columbus – I guess I will never die. My wife sometimes used to say, "You are married to community." She still says that.

## ***Family Life***

With all my involvement in community, it seemed as though I could do everything except make a living and start a family. Finally, among all the things happening, Helen and I started thinking of raising a family and building a new house. We began building in the fall of 1960 in a new development, and we moved in July 1961. The house was quite a change from what we'd lived in for the past seven years. It was comfortable and well landscaped, and for the times, quite modern. Here we raised our family and here we are still living.

Our family was started late and we were blessed with three kids. Loretta was born on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1961, Patrick on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1965, and Teresa on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1966. Like any family, our kids were a great joy in our lives. I remember putting them to bed with bedtime stories. And later on as they were growing up, they used to come home with stories that kept us awake all night. But we were very proud of them. It was nice to see them grow and be involved in the community and not give us any particular concerns. We had a setback when we learned that Patrick was diabetic at the age of 11. We were worrying

about his health, especially in the teenage years. But with all his problems he coped.

While the kids were still at home we made numerous trips. We spent many summers at Gull Lake with our trailer, as well as taking different holidays in the B.C. mountains. Helen and I took the kids to Disneyland when they were small, an exciting trip.

Our kids were helpful at home and sometimes at the studio store. One thing we promised them was that if they graduated from high school they would get a trip to Hawaii. We kept the promise. They got a trip and we enjoyed it also. The kids went on to pursue their further education. Loretta graduated from nursing. Patrick and Teresa finished computer technology in Red Deer.

Helen and I were good friends with Frank and Bernice Leboldus. During one conversation when we were talking about some holidays, the ladies said, "How about Hawaii?" So in the company of Frank and Bernice, we made an early trip to Hawaii in 1972. In those days, Hawaii was considered a real paradise. That was our first time in a tropical climate; we received a great welcome and shared many memories. With Frank and Bernice we also made a trip to Mexico in 1975, to Mexico City, Puerto Vallarta, and Guadalajara. Not only did we enjoy the good climate but also Mexican music, and we had a wonderful time. We are sorry the Lebolduses are not with us anymore, and we miss them in our lives.

### ***Extended Family and Grandchildren***

Through all these years we had contact with my family. In 1957 we learned that my dad, who lived in England, had died of a heart attack. It was sad news, as we were planning to eventually bring him to Canada.

We also corresponded with my sisters, who were still in South Africa, now in Johannesburg. They had gotten married and were raising their families. In

1967, the Canadian Centennial year, Halina's husband was joining a meeting in Montreal and Halina came as well. Leon and I met her in Calgary. Although we knew something of what she looked like from her pictures, we asked her to carry some animal from Africa so we could recognize her. She came from the plane – which had landed out in the field – and we saw her walking with a toy giraffe. That was the first time we had met since January 1942. A few days later, Jimmy, Halina's husband, joined us. We spent a wonderful ten days in Rimbey and Lacombe, where Leon was living at that time. We also showed them our mountains at Banff and Lake Louise. We spent lots of time together and shared the news of our separated years. In Africa, Jimmy and Halina enjoyed comfortable living in Johannesburg, with their children Justin and Belinda.

Brother Leon had moved from Calgary to Lacombe to work at the experimental farm. It was great having him live nearby, so we could enjoy a close relation as the kids were growing up. At that time Leon already had a family of three: Grant, Christine and Michael. Then in January 1982 came something tragic. Leon died unexpectedly from a heart attack. I sat with him at the Red Deer hospital while he was dying, and held his hand. He said, "You've been a good brother. Look after my family." That sticks with me always. I experienced the grief to lose my only sibling here in Canada. We had gone through so much hardship. It was difficult to lose the brother with whom I had so much in common.

Leon and Irene's kids eventually went their different ways. Grant worked in a photographic studio in Stettler and later moved to Lacombe. He had a health problem and died of a heart attack at the age of 49. Christine, who married Garry Whittaker, is a speech therapist working in the school system in Kelowna. And Michael lives and works in Edmonton. Irene, after an aneurysm and a stroke, died in September 2006. Leon, Grant, and Irene were all buried in Lacombe.

In 1974 we had learned from my youngest sister Lodzia that her husband, Kazik Kowalik, had died of a heart attack on the way to work. She was

devastated, and was left with three young daughters. She did not have an easy time to raise the young girls, Joasia, Haneczka, and Basia.

In 1983, Lodzia finally made a trip to Canada to see me. She brought her youngest daughter, Basia. After 41 years, I did not know how this meeting would go – how to express my feelings after so long. But it was a great moment as we embraced and shared some emotional tears at the Edmonton airport. They spent two weeks or more with us. We had a wonderful time catching up on the news of those long separated years, and were so glad it wasn't our last visit. Since then, Lodzia visited us five or six times. We always felt so close.

Gradually, now that our children were all married, our own family began getting expanded, with six grandchildren born between 1996 and 2005. Fred and Loretta had two daughters, Shaelynn (b. 1996) and Carleen (b. 1998). Patrick and Leona also had two children, Jessica (b. 2002) and Michael (b. 2004). And Teresa and Shannon had Chad (b. 2002) and Paige (b. 2005). We are proud of our grandchildren.

Our families in Red Deer keep busy with their professional jobs and are doing well. We are so fortunate they are all living in Red Deer. We are a very close family and see each other often. Having them so near, it is easier to plan family gatherings. Helen and I were married 50 years in December 2003 and we celebrated our anniversary in January 2004. Our family prepared a wonderful computer presentation, showing pictures of our married life. And because I had once impersonated Cher, Shaelynn and Carleen – aged seven and five – played Sonny and Cher. They also did a Hawaiian hula dance. And Wendy Huff prepared a beautiful album with pictures and captions, honoring our 50-year marriage. A good celebration for a good marriage – Helen was very understanding and a devoted mother.

## ***Retirement and Seeing South Africa***

After 42 years in business, it was time to retire and I was looking to sell. Then an ideal purchaser came along. Wendy Huff used to work in Sylvan Lake at a drugstore with one-hour photo finishing. She purchased Michael's Studio on October 1, 1991, and was so anxious to get into the store; she came even before the purchase date and was tearing the place apart. She was ambitious, with plans to streamline the business, and she had new ideas, such as setting up one-hour photo finishing and getting out of electronics.

When Wendy purchased, we agreed that I would work with her for one year to ensure a smooth transition. With me around, she learned portrait photography very quickly. And she also took additional courses and learned well. A year later, almost to the year according to our agreement, and to the horror of Wendy, Helen and I left the country for an extended vacation. Wendy was on her own and used to joke that we went holidaying for life.

Wendy is an accomplished photographer. With new equipment and new technology, she is doing excellent work. But the store – even in its new location – still carries my name. So it still seems like my store, and I drop in regularly to learn something new and give Wendy and Dave a hard time. They are like family to us. And actually we *are* family: Wendy's brother Fred is married to Loretta.

The trip Helen and I made after the transition year of working with Wendy was in 1992 to South Africa. How exciting to see my sisters. And after the long journey, it was great to meet the rest of my sisters' families. First we stayed with Jimmy and Halina. Their yard was like a park with beautiful trees, and with birds that kept us awake. We also visited with Joasia and David, Basia and Garth, and Haneczka and Greg. They all showed us their country and good hospitality with African-style barbecues and African food and dances. Greg was so helpful with driving us around. Most of the time we stayed with sister Lodzia, in her

comfortable suite. I still remember the orange tree outside her building and the tiny patch of grass underneath it, which I trimmed with scissors.

During our five weeks in Africa, they showed us a great time and we visited many places, like the trip to Kruger Park by van with both my sisters and two sons-in-law of Lodzia's, Greg and Garth. It was hot and very dry, over 40 degrees. You couldn't put your bare foot on the ground. The animals were well exposed and it was easy to see their movement. It's a huge park and we stayed just three nights there, in Skukuza and Olifants. The heat got to me and on the drive home I wasn't feeling very well and had to see the doctor. But I felt good for the rest of our trip.

And then Helen and I went on a luxurious blue train ride from Johannesburg to Cape Town – very fancy, overnight with a sleeping area. My sister Halina met us in Cape Town. Since she was familiar with the city, she took us on different tours: city tours, the Cape of Good Hope, and winery tours to Stellenbosh and Paarl. I acquired a taste for wine and it still is my favorite. Next we traveled by bus to the famous Garden Route, which extends along the south coast of South Africa, all the way to Port Elizabeth. Unbelievably beautiful.

In between we stopped at Oudtshoorn, an inland place. That's where my sisters went in 1943, arriving with a group of 400 children from Iran, and they lived there for a number of years. Because Halina was with us on that trip, she took me to the actual camp where they had stayed, and it brought back many memories for her. Oudtshoorn is well known for the Cango Caves that stretch forever, a great tourist attraction, well preserved and developed. Not just dirt. Oudtshoorn is also known for ostrich farms, where even in the early 1900s they built famous "feather palaces", built with the profits from selling feathers. While in Oudtshoorn we had breakfast made from ostrich eggs, and they also put on ostrich races. We got pretty close to racing – Helen actually sat on an ostrich. This exciting trip ended and we flew back from Port Elizabeth to Johannesburg.

While in South Africa, they also took us to Pretoria. They called it Jacaranda City – all the jacaranda trees in full bloom. Most beautiful. And near Pretoria we visited a gold mine. I saw a lot of gold but didn't bring any home.

Another exciting trip, with Lodzia by bus through Pietermaritzburg to Durbin, reminded me of my short stay there in 1942. We drove further south from Durbin along the coast to Margate and South Broom on the Indian Ocean, where we met Halina. The place she had arranged for accommodations was beautiful – beaches and monkeys. Helen and I had a game of golf there, with African caddies. We always remembered that first trip to South Africa as a trip of a lifetime. And I thought, "I'll be back again."

## ***Poland***

Throughout the years, I kept connection with war veterans' organizations in Canada and abroad. When Poland became free from Russian domination in 1990, I received a medal from the Polish president for fighting for Poland abroad. Also, for past service, the Polish Forces promoted me to the rank of Second Lieutenant.

As time went on I found that I still had some relatives in Poland, one aunt and cousins. After the Russians left Poland I felt it would be safe to go and visit. Since their home area, where I was raised also, was annexed by Russia, my cousin had moved near Wroclaw to the city of Swidnica in the western part of Poland, which used to be part of Germany before the war. I went in 1994 and took my youngest daughter Teresa along with me. For the first time since 1940 I was on Polish ground. My cousin Pola with her son Arthur met us in Warsaw. We stayed for a couple of days and toured the city, what was left of it. It wasn't the same as I remembered when I was there in July 1939. Some historic places – such as the residences of presidents, the King's palace, and different museums –

were rebuilt from pictures and sketches with help from western countries. Some places where Chopin played were also rebuilt. It was nice to see memory prevail.

From Warsaw we went to Pola's home in Swidnica. It was so nice to see Aunt Ola. She was in advanced age and couldn't hear too well, but she told us many stories of what happened after we were taken to Siberia. They also had their struggle in life, first under the Russians, and then the Germans, and then the Russians again. We had a great reunion with Aunt Ola and the rest of the extended families, and enjoyed good Polish cuisine. But it was very hot and there was no ice. You couldn't get any ice cubes and drinks were warm.

Pola and Arthur showed us around, not only in Swidnica but in the adjacent city of Wolbysz, which also had been part of Germany. Pola used to work there, at beautiful stables with highbred horses. In that same city is a famous castle called Ksiaz. Underground of this castle, Hitler had excavated and was remodeling big hallways and rooms in order to locate his office there.

For our visit to Poland, my sister Lodzia with her two daughters, Joasia and Haneczka, came as well from Africa. We hired a driver with a van to go to Czestochowa. It's a place where miracles had happened as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was a miracle that Czestochowa had been defended so vigorously through the years, from so many enemies, including Tatars, Swedes, and Russians. Czestochowa, Church of Queen Mary, with a historic picture of Mary in the church. The church is much larger than it used to be and many people today still make pilgrimages there.

Our next stop was Krakow, the place where the most Polish history was preserved, as this was the first capital of Poland until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At a special castle called Wawel, the king used to be crowned, live, and be buried. They also buried a few prominent historical people, such as General Pilsucki, who fought for Polish independence in 1918. He was the father of liberated independent Poland. It was nice to see, for the first time, these places I had learned about in school. The city of Krakow itself wasn't much damaged during the war, and so the historic sites were preserved.

As a group we had great reunions. Teresa got along well without knowing Polish. And it helped that Joasia and Haneczka spoke both Polish and English. Sometimes part of our group would go to visit different sites. Teresa, Lodzia and I stopped to see Auschwitz when on our way back to Swidnica. We had heard a lot about it but now we saw it, what took place there. The camp itself used to be a pre-war military camp, and was later converted first to Polish political prisoners during the war, and gradually to a Jewish and other nationalities camp. We saw the horrible torture places, the execution wall outside, the gas chamber, and the crematorium. In Auschwitz there's also a big museum where you can see piles of suitcases, glasses, boots and hair that were left after people were dead. Being there was a poignant reminder of my friend Ray Pierzchajlo from Canada, who had experienced the horrors of that camp.

From there we went to Birkenau, an adjacent camp built later on, which had big crematoriums. Birkenau's long bare barracks had narrow wooden-planked bunk beds, at least three levels high. We saw some of the barracks, a few of which had been preserved. Dreadful unlivable places. The people, primarily Jews, were brought in by train, sorted out, and assembled in different areas depending on who could still work. Some didn't survive very long because they were put into the crematoriums. The majority eventually found the end of their lives. The retreating Germans destroyed most of the crematoriums and barracks.

I'd heard a lot about the camps and to me it wasn't a total surprise. I had also seen lots of German brutality when I was stationed in Germany. But for Teresa and Lodzia it was quite a shocking experience. It was truth but still some people couldn't admit what Hitler did.

We left our relatives in Poland after having learned so much of what had transpired through 54 years. I felt sorry for what the people and the country had to go through. And it was so nice to get back home to Canada.

## ***England***

Two years later, we learned from Halina and Jimmy that we were invited to their son's wedding in England. In 1996 Helen and I flew to Heathrow and were met by Halina, Jimmy, and their daughter Belinda. From there the five of us traveled by van to a smaller town called Hathersage, close to Stafford. Hathersage has a lot of history. The church where the wedding took place had its beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and in the cemetery that lies around the church is the grave of Little John of Robin Hood fame. We had the privilege to stay at an old church vicarage where Charlotte Bronte had stayed in 1845 when she wrote *Jane Eyre*. We witnessed lots of historical items and sights. And of course we witnessed the wedding of Justin and Claire; Claire's father was the minister in that church. Everything was lovely and we had the reception in an ancient armory. It was very memorable and we were so proud to be part of that celebration.

After the wedding we decided to see a little more of the English countryside, so the five of us headed north and stopped at York. We had great tours of the Yorkshire Cathedral, the Roman wall ruins, and different towers. Traveling further north we reached Hadrian's Wall, built across that part of England, then we went on to Carlisle and the Lake District. That was very interesting; I saw many places I never had a chance to see when I was there during the war. And then through northern Wales viewing ruins, and to Stratford where we visited Shakespeare's places, but I didn't learn better English. What a good trip.

Traveling east we went through places familiar to me, where we had exercised during our 1943 training: Newmarket, Bury St. Edmonds, and Thetford. And we stopped at Sudbury for a few days, where Jimmy and Halina had friends. We had a good visit and Jimmy and I even fit in a game of golf. From there we

toured London for one more day before parting. Helen and I went home, again with a lot of happy time spent together. We enjoyed the trip and learned a lot.

## ***Visits and Travel***

Things at home continued, taking it easy. I always had time for golfing. We kept in touch with community events. And over the years we had a number of visits from my sisters, Lodzia and Halina, from South Africa. Also from Garth and Basia's family, from Joasia and her daughter Juliette, from Haneczka and Greg and their kids, and from Joasia's daughter Nicole when she came with Lodzia. Through the years it was so marvelous to see them. And they enjoyed Canada as well. The only person who had never come was David, Joasia's husband. We decided to work on him to see if he would make the trip.

Helen and I went with Patrick and Leona to Palm Springs, a great place for golfers and sight seeing, and I always wanted to go back. In February 2004, with Teresa and Shannon and baby Chad, we went to Extapa, Mexico. It was a smaller resort but more peaceful and lovely.

A few months later, I went to Disneyland with Loretta and her girls. This was 30 years after my trip there with my own kids. Disneyland was greatly expanded by then, with lots of new entertainment places, and I enjoyed it a lot.

We did a lot of traveling, so I might as well mention a trip to South Africa in 2006. This time, because Helen had a health problem, I went with Loretta and her kids. Loretta always wanted to go and it was my favorite place to go, too – to see Africa again. This was the first Christmas I spent with both sisters since 1939. And now also with their families, all at Garth and Basia's home. That was very memorable for me. Then David and Joasia drove us to the east coast to their place in Umhloti, my favorite spot, with beautiful beaches. There Basia and Garth and their families joined us, for more celebrations and good times. While

in Umhloti a monkey got into the house and opened all the cupboards and touched everything but the booze. We also stayed in the other place of Joasia and David's, their official holiday residence in Ballito-Zimbali. A lovely place, where we had a great New Year's party and also one golf game with Garth and his three sons. His youngest son, Matthew, who was then age 11, showed me how it was done.

We returned to Johannesburg, and off we went again, with Haneczka and Greg and their kids taking us somewhere in the bush northwest, near the Botswana border, on a safari to Camp Thakuvu. What a great time it was. A new camp with very modern accommodations: individual quarters for each family, covered with a top like a tent but with modern clean facilities. To see the animals, the best time was to go early in the morning or later in the evening. We traveled with a guide on a big truck, and we had a good view. We saw many animals of all types, including rhinos and many birds. We were a few meters away from lions that had just killed a wildebeest; we sat very quiet and watched in silence. During these outings the guide would stop in a safe place and we would have a picnic lunch in the wilderness. We were at this camp for four or five days and never got tired of it. At the camp, the swimming pool and eating facilities were excellent, including the refreshments. Sometimes the serving ladies would entertain us with their dances and songs. We had the best you could have.

After the safari we stopped at Sun City, a very well-known vacation area with casinos, many fancy places, fountains, and golf courses. All secure. A place known to the elite. We had a game of golf with Greg and his son Michael. One time I shot the ball into a crocodile nest. I said I should go retrieve it but they wouldn't let me.

We saw a lot of country and then we went back again to Johannesburg, where we continued to enjoy the rest of our family. Finally it was time to have a farewell party with all our African family, and what a great party that was, in the evening in a park with lights. Good food and fun. They showed us a great time

and we were sad to leave. South Africa always seemed to be on our minds, because of our family there. And it is lovely country as well. The only bad thing is it's so far away and a long trip. We enjoyed it all, and home again.

In 2008, all three kids took me to Vegas for my 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. Good shows, gambling, and good food. I managed to keep up with them as they dragged me all over to many beautiful places. While visiting the Venetian hotel, we had a canal ride, serenaded by gondoliers. I also had my picture taken with "Marilyn Monroe". And wherever we stopped to eat, even though my actual birthday was a few months away the kids always announced that it was my birthday, and I got a special treat.

In 2009, Halina and Jimmy – dual citizens of England and South Africa – decided to move to the Cambridge area in England, where their son and daughter reside. In England they could take advantage of a better health system. But in our correspondence with them, we hear it is taking quite a while to adjust.

Then in 2010, Loretta, Fred and their family took Helen and me to the Mayan Riviera in Cancun. One of the nicest places we enjoyed there was The Grand Palladium.

In 2010 we also had a surprising visit from my cousin Arthur in Poland, who got married to Gabriella in New York. Arthur and Gabriella traveled all through Canada to visit us just for two or three days. We had a great re-acquaintance with all our family. They left with a good impression of their visit in Canada, and their visit left us with many good memories.

And in April 2011, with Loretta and Teresa, I went to Vegas again. I know Sin City well, and on this trip I enjoyed it even more so, with new hotels and new shows. I also enjoyed some gambling for entertainment, but I'm not a big gambler. I never got rich.

## ***At Work and Play***

Through the years we became a golfing family. We made many golfing trips to Radium, Fairmont, Kelowna, and Whitefish, Montana. We would place bets among ourselves. I kept my pace and managed to make a few dollars, with some complaints that I was not given the proper handicap. But they must not have taken it too seriously because we still play often at different courses, and have a lot of fun. The kids always see that I have the latest clubs and equipment. With the most recent club, a ping driver, I can still show them how it's done.

As a family, we were also active in skiing, especially enjoying Banff and Lake Louise. Sometimes the kids would bring friends, and while they were skiing downhill, Helen and I used to enjoy cross-country skiing, especially around Lake Louise. Occasionally we would stay at the Chateau Lake Louise. Lovely to stay there, enjoying also the beauty of the scenery.

It sounds like we only traveled and played all the time, doesn't it? You would wonder if we ever worked. Perhaps I took a more easy way out with retiring, but I kept busy in the community. And I also was involved in land development with some partners. We developed many residential lots in Rimbey in the Eastview area, and thought we contributed something to the town. Sometimes people talk, "If you're in development, you're making a fortune." But it's like anything else; it's a big undertaking and requires a lot of hard work and risk. We didn't get rich, but neither did we go broke. We made a few dollars and got lots of experience.

The rest of the family also was keeping busy in real estate. Loretta and Fred, and Teresa and Shannon, together owned vacation property on Okanogan Lake at a resort called Outback, close to Vernon. There we spent many holidays: boating, golfing, skiing, and always enjoying ourselves.

## **2011**

In the spring of 2011 we received the bad news that Teresa was diagnosed with breast cancer. The word itself raises a lot of fear that we had to face. It was hard to accept. She had to have surgery and start the necessary treatments. She finished the main chemotherapy and is still continuing additional treatments. We all are hopeful everything will go well. Teresa seems to be showing good progress.

As this was going on, we were delighted that my sister Lodzia was once again coming to visit Canada with her daughter Joasia and Joasia's husband, David, who finally decided to make the trip. Patrick and I picked them up in Calgary and at the airport we presented David with a cowboy hat. He looked very handsome and he wore that hat on many other occasions throughout his visit.

We particularly wanted to show him that we really enjoyed his company. He fit in and we all had a great visit. Since it was David's first time in Canada, I wanted him to see our beautiful country. I drove with him and Joasia to show him the highlights of Banff and Lake Louise, where we stayed overnight. The next day we were on the road again with David helping to drive. Although they drive on the wrong side of the road in South Africa, he did very well and even drove through the Rogers Pass, the highest road in the B.C. mountains. Our destination was my daughters' vacation home in Outback. My sister and my wife flew and joined us there. Teresa, Shannon, Loretta and Fred also joined us, with their families. What a great time we had, visiting many places, boating, and enjoying many festive occasions together, with good food.

David and Joasia visited our cousin Christine and her husband Garry in Kelowna, and also went to Vancouver before returning to Red Deer, where they stayed with Loretta and Fred. We still had a few joyful gatherings, including, of course, in Rimbey, where my sister stayed with us. "I love Rimbey!" Lodzia often

said, as she particularly enjoyed Rimbey. She had been here a few times and knew some people, so she met some ladies – friends – for coffee. She was the type that would entertain with her conversation, and she would always say, “I think I won’t get lost in Rimbey. I know where the Grand Hotel is.” She had a hard time to break her habit of smoking. Sometimes I gave her a hard time for that, but she always smoked outside.

Eventually, Lodzia, Joasia, and David all departed, leaving and taking good memories of our visit, and we missed them a lot. Upon their return home, they sent thankful messages. And of course we keep in touch regularly.

A couple of months later we were awakened by the phone. My nieces were calling to say their mother, Lodzia, had died during the night in bed. It was a shock to the whole family. So sudden. I could hardly believe it. I had just talked to her the day before at length about what she remembered from the past, and her journey away from our home in Poland. We both had many long journeys, but this was her final one, a heartbreaking one. After our first reunion in 1983 – following a separation of 41 years – we had kept in very close contact, helping each other to remember our past. I really sympathize with her daughters and the family who had to experience this sudden death. It will take time to heal this loss, and I will always have a loving memory of her.

## ***Our Life Now***

I sometimes like to joke, “I started in Rimbey with nothing and I still have most of it.” But really I have gained so much. My community life keeps on going. Over the years I had lots of enjoyment working in different organizations with many different people. I had many friends and had a good time taking part in some local plays. One time I was a bullfighter in a play, and I also played a pirate in *The Pirates of Penzance*. Once I also played Cher from the duo Sonny

and Cher. I enjoy an extensive social life – playing cards at the Legion, golfing, and curling have all become a regular part of my life.

I recall the really good friendship of some of the members of the Lions Club. One time we went to Sylvan Lake on a visitation to another club. The next morning I wasn't quite in good shape to open up the store. My Lions friends were very sympathetic and brought me flowers. But the next day I found out that the flowers they brought they had charged to my account. We had many happy incidents over the years, and I always enjoyed jokes and a good laugh.

Through many years the Grand Hotel was the coffee meeting place with friends and businessmen. We still meet every morning; I'm one of the group of Rimbey Coffee Senators. Some meet as early as 8:00 A.M., but the most exciting part takes place at 9:00 sharp, when we share our wealth in a game. We also share all the news and solve all the problems. Of course, you can't believe everything you hear, but you *can* repeat it.

As for Helen and myself, we have been married a happy 58 years. We continue in our own home, and thankfully are doing reasonably well health-wise. I'm the worrying kind and I worry about things. But happily, often I worry about things that never happen. We are glad and thankful to say that our kids are also doing well. They are still all in Red Deer. Loretta is nursing part-time, and Fred is keeping busy in the oil patch doing wireline testing. Patrick is working in the hospital in computer technology, and Leona works part-time as an accountant at Nova Chemicals. Teresa also worked at Nova Chemicals for many years, and now she occasionally helps at Shannon's business, Central Alberta Tile. Our grandkids are involved in different sports and dancing, and we often go to watch their events and performances. We are very proud of them and they give us a lot of joy. Our whole extended family is so caring and helpful, and we are so thankful and appreciate them all. In particular, our kids are very thoughtful and generous to us.

As I near the end of my story, something exciting happened in March 2012: a trip to Palm Springs. Fred and Loretta planned to go for a few days to

join friends, and Fred invited me to come along. "Bring your clubs," he said. I was thrilled, and away we went. The weather was fantastic and we enjoyed seeing the beautiful residences of Rod and his family, and Jed and Alison. As a stranger to them, I was warmly welcomed. Jed even let me drive his unique and expensive car a couple of times. With his encouragement to step on the gas, it didn't take very long and I was driving his Bentley at over 120 km-per-hour through Palm Springs.

We golfed on very nice courses, but having been away from the sport all winter, my golfing wasn't up to standard. But I improved by the time of my final game with Fred and Jed at the beautiful Palm Willows.

With Fred and Loretta and Jed and Alison, we also enjoyed a few great dining places. It was fun being there and in such good company. The final evening we went to a very well known fish place, in downtown Palm Springs. The food was great and the margaritas even better. It ended up with me dancing to the acknowledgment of the crowd. As we parted, I was thankful to Fred and Loretta and their friends for this marvelous trip.

It is pleasant to be alive, golfing and dancing at 88, and I had a wonderful time. So maybe I'll make it to 89. Maybe.

My journey from Poland to Rimbey was a long one. I lost my home and country and was separated from my family. I experienced many troubles – loss, danger, hardship, grief, horror – and was lucky to survive. Eventually I found myself in Canada – a happy ending for the journey.

Rimbey was my first official stop in Canada, and I'm still here. I've seen Rimbey grow to a wonderful community with all the necessary facilities, for which we were all working through the years, and proud of it. Although I didn't find gold on the streets as I was taught about America in school in the Old Country, I found wonderful people here who accepted me as one of their own. Rimbey has been good to me through my years in business and raising a family, and I enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, friendships with many wonderful people. I

am very proud of my Polish heritage, and I am also proud to be in Rimbey and to be Canadian. It's a great country. I always will be thankful to be here.

To my wife I say, "Thanks for being a wonderful companion." And to my kids I say, "Keep your faith and love for one another." Thank you, God, for a long life and guidance.