

The following transcript of
Gerald “Gerry” Smith’s interview

on

Memories and Music

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Your grandmother and her family. She is a widow at this time.

G.S. That's right.

D.. Just packed up in Parrsboro, Nova Scotia and went out to Edmonton. Is that the way it happened? Would she have her sisters with her too, or what was that story?

G.S. Well that's a kind of an interesting part too. There were ten girls in that family and one boy. Most of the girls became either nurses, graduate nurses, or school teachers and this whole flock of young gals came out to make their future in the west.

D.M. I think that shows a real spirit of adventure and this would be about, around about 1895. Is that right.

G.S. Around 1895, and I would say pretty close to it.

D.M. Now this would be, now when does this fit in ~~th~~ with the Riel Rebellion, this north-west rebellion out there?

G.S. Well I would say ~~that~~ they got here just after the Riel Rebellion and ~~started to become~~ Stratcona then was starting to become a stable town in itself. I might say, that the home that they built, is straight in the woods and the road pass it was ~~just~~ a straight dirt road for wagons only, and at present that area is a part of () place for the University of Alberta.

D.M. You know, do you Mr. Smith, see a group of women today, this is entirely hypothetical, it's hard to imagine ~~it~~ them getting together, a group of, say two or three sisters and a bunch of children and going out into what would be wilderness and starting up a home and starting a new life. I think that was an amazing pioneer spirit. Would you agree with that?

G.S. I would say so, but I think that their mother was a pioneer herself, coming from England and settling in Nova Scotia on approximately the same conditions as these people came out west with.

D.M. Yeah, yeah, but ^{5/11} I think it's very much to be admired and to be commended. Now we have your mother then, starting teaching school, which you said she did in Sweet Grass, Saskatchewan, and I believe she went on to Olds, Alberta and then your father came into the ~~picture~~ picture. Now what was that story?

G.S. Well the school she had in Olds, Alberta is in the foot hills of the Rockies. My dad, he came from Lemmon,

South Dakota, from a big family of boys and they had their log cabin in the foot hills and were busy breaking wild horses. My mother was a teacher there and she kind of ~~threw~~ threw a noose around him and dragged him up to Edmonton or Stratcona at that time, and he became a plumber and that () him as a proffesion up until he went overseas in the first world war.

- D.M. That's a story in itself too. You know breaking wild ~~horses~~ horses. These are things that we see on television and we think somebody is making it up, but ~~this~~ really happened ^{pic} in the early days. Now, getting back to you Mr. Smith, you would ~~be~~ then be born, about what year?
- G.S. 1909. June the ~~twentiet-~~ twenty-third.
- D.M. And, then you start, you would start school around about, when 1914 or thereabouts.
- G.S. Roughly ~~141~~ '14. Just prior to the first world war.
- D.M. Now, your, as you say, your father went overseas then with the royal engineers, your mother, you, and the rest of the family had to hustle on and keep going eh? To earn a few dollars to keep the land?
- G.S. That right. Six on a sergeants pay, was darn little to, to have to live on, so consequently we had a cow, we had chickens, a pig, and a garden, and it was our responsibility to look after these and provide the, what we could to help make up the difference.
- D.M. Great. Now none the less, I believe that you, at least you told me, that you had a happy childhood.
- G.S. We had a very happy childhood. We were knit together because we had ~~lots~~ lots in the way of games etc. If we wanted to, to enjoy a better sport, we made our own merry-go-rounds or ferris wheels. We would build our own tree-houses, our log cabins or caves. We had the banks of the North Saskatchewan River to play on but we had a line of cabins a little bit later in life right up the Saskatchewan River. Swimming, we learned to ~~n~~ swim in the river there. It's lucky we weren't drowned.
- D.M. Speaking of swimming, you have some pretty vivid memories of a flood about that time. Or was that a little later?
- G.S. No, that flood, came around, I would say back in 1913, or '14 when the Saskatchewan ~~ent~~ went into flood. The high level bridge went across the river in 1911,

and this flood came just after that bridge was built, and on the south side of the river was called Water Flats. It is a straight lumber mill and a lot of these small houses that didn't have basements or properly tied down, floated down the river, and I recall a barn coming down, and ~~the~~ ^{my} cow ^{was} in it.

D.M. ha ha, these are other things that really happened.

G.S. Yeah, and it, I remember the cow had its head out the window and the barn hit one of the piers of this bridge as they went by.

D.M. I guess the cow could have swam ashore and probably did somewhere along the line eh?

G.S. Well, either that or someone's going to have a cheap meet down the row in the river.

D.M. Well now speaking of that Mr. Smith, you told a story, a good story I thought, before, while we were chatting before this broadcast, about, it may have become a little later than this, but about how there wasn't too much money in the family and how your father had an arrangement ~~with~~ ^{with a} the Butcher in that area.

G.S. Oh yes. In Edmonton, there was a butcher by the name of Knock, a German chap, that did rank ~~in~~ seventh of all the meat business for the city of Edmonton, and his theory was, that to sell meat it had to be fresh. ~~See~~ So every Saturday, he would have an auction, and auction off all his meat and start off Monday with a brand new, fresh, clean, kill of meat, and dad got to know this butcher very well. We were squeezing nickels in those days, and he was one of the ~~one~~ come-on men you might say, to improve the bidding on the meat, and this Mr. Knock would have him go and select the piece of meat that he would like and then when the bidding became dull, he would wink at my dad and my dad would hold this piece of meat up and say, I would bid twenty-five cents for this and this ~~Knock~~ Mr. Knock would say, it's your for twenty-five cents just to get the business coming a little bit better. And dad would come home at the end of the day with a box full of meat that would last us for the rest of the week. And I might also say, he had two very good Jewish people on the southside end that ran a fruit store....

D.M. Right.

G.S.and dad would grind up his Model T Ford on a Saturday night and go down to visit these two lads that had this store and of course a fruit store, you'd have fruit that would not last over the weekend and the first thing that

Fred and John Morely would do is, Roy, we've got some fruit here we have to get rid of, we'll sell you the apples for twenty-five cents a case or a string of bananas for a dollar. Well again dad would come home with his car of his full of all these goodies and we would spend the next two or three hours sorting out the good from the bad and the bad we would probably make applesauce out of. But it was a very good part of our childhood days.

D.M. ha ha ha, Mr. Smith, I think you have a great admiration and love for your father. I can tell when you tell me this story. He is quite a man.

G.S. I would say yes. A fine fellow.

D.M. Well now....

G.S. He was a terrific fellow. He was always, ~~with~~^a pride for his children to go downtown and be identified as Roy Smith.

D.M. Marvellous. Mr. Smith, when your father came back from the war, he ran into some problems with his plumbing business I understand.

G.S. Yes. He had a partner in the business and the partner sold all the tools so he was ~~about~~ out the necessary tools to carry out his trade. At that time, cars were coming in, the ModelT Ford, and dad became a mechanic in fixing up these cars, and he also ran a service station which was one of the first in the city of, in the south-side of the city Edmonton.

D.M. Now, as for you, you had to hustle around about this time, about this time, when you started school, high school, as you did in the twenties, some more harvesting things like that?

G.S. Yes, we had quite a varied experience when it came to work. First we had a paper route. I think we had it in the family for about ten years, the Edmonton Journal, and we also had, I had jobs ⁱⁿ thrashing out in the harvest fields, working as a construction labour, general stores in northern Alberta. Any number of jobs, they didn't pay well, but the food was good.

D.M. Well, this was a pretty common ~~experinee~~ experience through out the west, and this brings up another point Mr. Smith. This would right up, we're getting into the late twenties, around twenty~~en~~ish or thereabouts. Household credit, it seems to me, that was, became quite a thing out there. What are your memories of social credit?

G.S. Well prior to social credit, we had other forms of government I won't go into, and they got into a certain amount of disgrace either politically or socially and (~~Aberhart~~ ^{Aberhart}) came out of Calgary with a new philosophy called social credit, and with this he had what is called his hot money. You wouldn't recall this type of an endeavor but it was a piece of paper and every day you held that piece of paper you had a little, fix a stamp to it, so that as, the longer you held it, the less that money, was less value, there wasn't that money. Somewhat like our money today you might say, where a dollar is only worth about fifty cents.

D.M. Thats, what was the point of it. I mean, did you get paid in Alberta, Government of Alberta social credit money. Or how did that work out?

G.S. Yes you got paid a certain percentage of this, in this hot ~~money~~ money, and the first thing you did was pay the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker and get rid of this money before you had to put stamps on it because it certainly wasn't something you'd want to hold, and money ^{changed} changed hands very rapidly in those days.

D.M. Well that kept things moving, to get the wheels of business turning once more.

G.S. Yes, but the people in Ottawa decided that it wasn't up to the provinces to make their own money. That was their juristicition.

D.M. Interesting Mr. Smith. That's the sidelife that certainly some of our younger listeners probably never even heard of. Now when did the Aberhart money sort of stop or cease or go out of existense?

G.P. Well it lost its popularity, you might say, very rapidly with the people, but something did come out of that social credit. Under Manning who came after Aberhart, was very good government of people of all walks of life, they were sincerely inicent in the welfare of the province.

D.M. Well it's good to hear that too. Now, Bennett Buggies or something you were telling us about earlier.

G.P. Oh, ~~that~~ Bennett Buggies, that was back when Harvy Bennett was ~~outtin~~ coming up for election in 1935. At that time, he had put in one stint of government, and the depression had hit, and people could no longer afford to drive cars so he took the motors out of these cars, and he hitched, changed them over to a two horse-power deal, and they were horse-drawn. They were called

Bennett Buggies. It's kind of interesting and with this man Stanfield coming up with his underwear, I do hope he puts a little wool in them.

- D.M. ha ha ha, well we can assume that he will Mr. Smith. Now you had told us earlier that you went to, that you *did* manage ~~to~~ to go to the University of Alberta. Studied chemical engineering and then went on I think, to Regina. Now there were some interesting circumstances about when you arrived in Saskatchewan or Regina.
- G.S. Well just going back to the University, the pressure was on and I think there were two things that put me through University. One was my mother and father, and secondly was the depression. You began work in the summer time but the winter was another problem. Consequently, we earned enough money to put ourselves through with the help of our parents. Now, Don mentioned the, after I graduated, my first job was on a geological ~~party~~ survey party in southern Saskatchewan and I landed in Regina the day after the R.C.M.P. broke up the () to Ottawa....
- D.M. March or something.
- G.S.March that's right, and the city was really devastated. One policeman was killed, and the thing was, that here was a group of ~~pe-e-~~ people that were gathering into this one main central area and through transportation on cattle trains or freight trains, they were on their way to Ottawa to ask for and demand work. Not hand-outs but work.
- D.M. Yes those, it seems a very different time now in many ways now, Mr. Smith.
- G.S. Very much so. They have their ~~hands~~ *raise?* now with their hands out and they certainly don't want to get them dirty.
- D.M. ha ha ha ha, well we won't go into that on our show here, but we now, after completing this geological survey in and around southern Saskatchewan, you did a little, you hopped ~~a-be-~~ aboard a freight train yourself. Is that not fight sir?
- G.S. Well that's right. I was very fortunate. I had this job on this survey party and I was able to master the fortune, I think it's three hundred and sixty dollars for my summer's work, and without any future in the west as far as my profession or soon profession I decided to leave with another chap by the name Jack Cammeron, and we got a passage on a cattle train out of Edmonton and my mother made me up a great big pail

full of sandwiches and chicken and etc., and we away we went to beat the world. It ~~took~~ took us a week to work our way to Toronto. I remember going across the Dawn Valley there, and adding to the pollution in the ~~see~~ area, by dropping this pail over the side of the bridge and into the Dawn Valley.

D.M. Well, what kind of reception did you get in Toronto?

G.S. Toronto, I never ran into such a bunch of stiff-neck people in my life. When you're ~~in~~ going () from the job and you stand there with your hands in front of you, more or less pleading for a job, they look up, and I would swear they saw straw coming out the back of my neck or something, because the reception wasn't good.

D.M. Well you moved on from Toronto?

G.S. Went over to Montreal for a week and looked around there and favoured a French family and the atmosphere and the work in that particular area was terrific. I might say that E. A. Collins was up here in Copper Cliff, and he had an administrative position, the top administrative position with the company. My brother was here also working in the mines and he suggested that I write a letter to this Mr. Collins with the idea of getting an appointment, which I did, and I met Mr. Collins and found him a terrific man. He didn't offer me a job in the executive position but suggested that ~~I-h-~~ he had a job for me out at Frood Mine on the end of a muck stage. I didn't know what that was but I ~~fugue-~~ figured it must be pretty good and I had my first introduction to the hard knocks of mining.

D.M. ha ha, very good. And how long were you at that? sir?

G.S. One month. I mean they didn't fire me at the end of that month but they gave me an opportunity to get into the engineering department where I stayed for quite a number of years.

D.M. Now Mr. Smith, we have you in Sudbury, you have left Edmonton, and you have sort of worked the cattle train to ~~from~~ Toronto and Montreal. You've come to Sudbury. You started to work on a muck state. Now tell us your memories of Sudbury of that era when you're a young fellow first just here?

G.S. Well Sudbury was a mining town and ^a mining town was a very voistrous place to be in. They had their gambling joints their blind pigs and their houses had been repute. It's kind of interesting. I got a room, a board and room over on eighty-nine Pine Street. A

woman by the name of Mrs. Lewis ran it, and quite a number of my new associates came there for the meals. I was lucky, I had half a bed in that apartment and I shared with a chap but it was not () for the whole week that he was there. At the end of the week there's a decision to whether he was going to stay or I. So he left because I was the more popular one.

D.M. Alright, Mr. Smith, we're into the middle '30's in Sudbury. We've got you settled in here. You, got you working at your trade as it were in the engineering end of it, and something very interesting happened around about 1940 I am told. Now what was that story?

G.S. Well I think travelling is in my blood and this particular holiday I decided to take a trip down into the Carribean on a banana boat and we visited Cuba, Jamaica, and (Hon Duras) and picked up a big load of ~~land~~ banadas in Hon Duras. On this boat there were about forty passengers. One, ~~of~~ was this beautiful young lady who was working with the Woman's Day magazine in New York and her possession was testing the recipes prior to publishing them in this particular magazine. I am kind of fond of food and a good young lady, so we became very good friends and once we landed back in New York, she invited me up to the house for a steak dinner, and of course, that just fell right in line with my thinking and appetite. ~~en~~ She also took me to the world fair that was going on at that time and to recipitate, I invited her up to Sudbury in August and at that time we became engaged and later married on payday on November the eighth, 1940.

D.M. Mr. Smith, I think that you keep your wits about you too through the years. Now what, you told me earlier that you wife's first impression of Sudbury, at least come winter, wasn't the best but that she's since become of it up here.

G.S. That's right. I remember the first winter we put in at ninety-nine Douglas Street and of course you had to walk downtown and it was kind of a windy walk there, and she didn't think that it was the same in the winter time as it was ~~in~~ the summer when I sold her the idea ~~to come~~ of coming up here to live. But as time went on, and our friendship grew, I think now that she is one of the greatest promoters for northern Ontario.

D.M. Well said sir. Now have you any family Mr. Smith?

G.S. Yes, we have three children?

D.M. What are their ages? Where are they? What are they doing?

- G.S. Well my wife says I can never keep a birthday or a ~~birthdey~~ name in my head so I'm just guessing that my oldest Ken is around thirty-one years of age. He is now in Toronto, successfully in the advertising business and living in a new home in Oakville. He himself has, he and his wife have, are blessed with three children and they are doing very well in this new area. Doug, the next one, is around about twenty-six, twenty-seven, and after his formal education in Sheraton Tech and also out 4- in Marbury, Calgary, he decided he wanted to expand his field and spent two and a half years over in London and trips to Soo or western Europe and into the north Africa. He's back in Sudbury now and working as a daycare worker in the Algoma Sanitorium working with children which he likes the best.
- D.M. And the daughter, what's her name and what's she doing?
- G.S. Heather is the daughter and she is now about twenty-three, twenty-four years if age. Graduated from McMaster University in social service work and psychology. She's now working for the children's aid society and is a () in her own rights.
- D.M. Well now, about yourself Mr. Smith, what, have you any hobbies or anything like that?
- G.S. Yes I have developed several hobbies. One is photography which I enjoy very much and another one was working with the Y.M.C.A. and I found children and growing children have a lot to offer. ~~and~~ Anyone that will take the time with them. I had a group of high why students during the war. I had thirty-five in number and I would say that practically everyone of them is successful either in their own trade or in their own professional and it is certainly very gratifying to run into these chaps on the streets and talk about the old times.
- D.M. Very good to have....
- G.S. I also had a hockey team called the Tiger Hockey Club and I think I had around about forty or fifty young lads in this group from grade one up to grade eight. We just taught them the rudaments of hockey and I might say that we would have ~~eighty-arene~~ around about eighty-five to ninety percent attendance at all these get togethers.
- D.M. Very, very good sir. You're, it would appear and it certainly is a fact...
- G.S. Right now....

D.M.are community minded.

G.S. Yeah.

D.M. Alright, what were you going to say?

G.S. Right now sailing is my hobby. We built, I built this ~~the~~ boat, it's a twenty-one foot sloop, back quite a number of years, and taught the children how to sail, or they taught me, but I know that I got wet quite a number of times. Right now, I'm trying to get this thing back in the water for the summer. It kind of reminds me of last summer when I decided to take two other retirees out, George Burwahn and Carl Hideman, and the wind was kind of dull this particular day, and they weren't too good sailors themselves, but I thought I taught them fairly well. Coming into dock, the wind had died, had died down and decided that I could bring the boat in with the ~~de~~ sails up but a gust of wind came and started to drive us to, onto the dock. I grabbed a hold of a post to stop it, and it pulled me out into the lake, and here I was swimming around trying to explain to these two () how to launch the boat, how to move the boat, and it was most embarrassing.

D.M. How did it work out? Did they get it lowered?

G.S. No, but I'm still patching the front of the boat.

D.M. If they're listening to this broadcast, they may have some comments to make. I hope they call you.

G.S. Yes.

D.M. Now friends, as you may have gathered, we have being quite a chat today with Mr. Gerry Smith who retired in September '72 after thirty-seven years with International Nickel. Age sixty-three at the time, he was the area engineer for the Levack area. Now Mr. Smith has told us a story dating way back to childhood in Strathcona just in the village of Stratcona, what is now the city of Edmonton and you will recall he told us a most interesting story about his mother and grandmother coming west as they did in a pioneer sort of way to start a new life in building their own house and creating that new life out in the west. Now, Mr. Smith, you're a man who has seen a good deal of life, You have pretty definite opinions in many areas. You've been able to adapt, you've seen good times and bad times. Have you got a philosophy? Anything you would tell a young fellow?

G.S. Well a philosophy is something ~~ou~~ you can ()

on, but there are two things that developed a philosophy in my life, and that is the Robert Simpson's poems and also Reggie Kipling's poem called "If". Now if you want my philosophy, kindly read them.

D.M. ha ha ha, we can't ask better than that. Now one other thought sir, we often ask, I take it that having seen Bermuda and Cuba and the Edmonton and you're a pretty dedicated northerner now. Is that right sir?

G.S. Very much so. I think that Sudbury has, over the years, with our family growing up here, has contributed a great deal to their success. And I think that Sudbury has all ~~it~~ that's required to bring up a good healthy family.

(END OF TAPE)