

SOME
BIOGRAPHICAL
REMINISCING

by

Richard Armfelt

May, 2008

In December 2007, my granddaughter Kaylan, as a school project, picked me as an ancestor to write a report on. I wrote the following to try and set the record straight, and clear up any misconceptions.

My parent's names were Hans Merdin Armfelt and Helen Martha Armfelt (née Lynk) My dad was born in Hellerup July 29, 1905. This was where he grew up. Hellerup at that time was an independent Municipality to the north of Copenhagen, but now I think it's all Copenhagen. At that time, the family's surname was Andersen. By 1913, there were so many people living in that particular area with that same last name, that the Post Office had a difficult time keeping their mail sorted correctly. So the Post Office put up a list of acceptable surnames on the wall, and asked if some of the Andersen families would mind changing their surname to one of those on the list. My grandmother decided she liked the name Armfelt, so that's what our surname became.

My mother was born December 30, 1913 at home on the farm near the community of Sweet Valley, which was near Lomond, Alberta. There were 7 kids born in my mom's family – 4 were born in the U.S. – Harold, Madeline (Madge), Nadine, and Donald. The family then moved to south-eastern Alberta in 1910. They moved from near Tracy, Minnesota, while other members of the family moved up from around Eldora, Iowa. After moving to Alberta, 3 more children were born – Glenn, mom, and Bernard (Johnny), and one died (Donald). He died at the age of 2 yrs. and just over 8 mos. of a burst appendix.

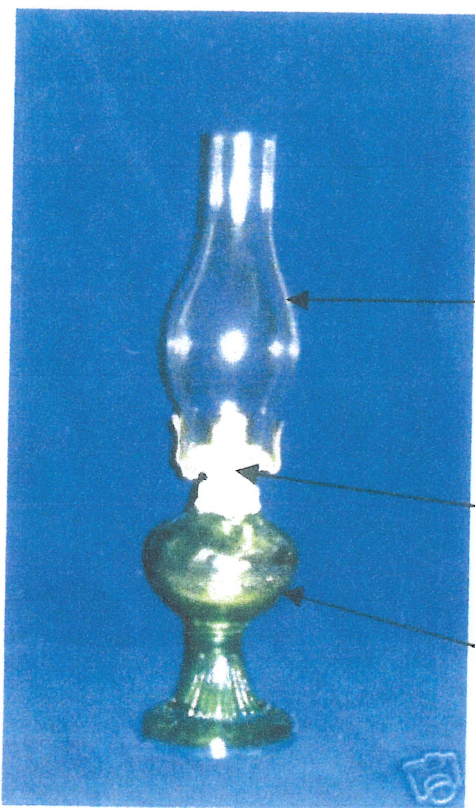
My mother and her family moved to the Athabasca area in 1931. My dad was already there, having come over from Copenhagen in 1928, and moving to the Athabasca area in 1929.

My parents were married October 11, 1933, in the Anglican Church in Athabasca. They had planned to get married on the 1st. of October, but the weather was bad, so they postponed it 'til the 11th. So on that day, my mother's brother, Glenn, drove my parents, and Omar McDonald (the bachelor that was living with dad) to Athabasca with a wagon and a team of horses. They were married, with my uncle Glenn and Omar as witnesses. Glenn and Omar were also the only guests at the wedding. My uncle then drove my parents back to their home – a 12'x12' log cabin in the middle of the bush 14 miles west of Athabasca. Dad had already acquired the quarter – section (160 acres) with the cabin on it in the fall of 1932. He bought it from a couple of Swedish brothers by the name of Fernstrom, who were then planning to go trapping in northern Saskatchewan.

It is difficult nowadays to imagine a man and wife living in a one-room 12'x12' log shack. The present-day average – sized smaller bedroom is about 10'x12'. In this one-room cabin was: a double bed (41/2'x6'), crib (2'x3'), cook stove (2'x3'), table, chairs, a home-made linen closet (11/2'x3') in one

corner, and room in another corner to pile wood for the stove. There would also have been a stand for a water-bucket and washbasin to sit on, another stand for the milk separator, and a small cupboard for dishes, cutlery, and pots and pans. So there wasn't too much spare floor space.

As can be seen in the following photo (page 3) the original old log cabin had only one window in it, measuring about 2ft. x 3ft., on the east wall. And in the dead of winter, it wouldn't be light 'til about 9:00 in the morning, and it would be getting dark again by 3:30 in the afternoon. So it made for a rather dark interior in the cabin. There was no such thing as electricity (meaning no lights, plugs, running water, flush toilet, or electric heat), so the only light in the place was from a kerosene lamp, much like the one below.



Glass globe. This would have to be cleaned quite regularly with a cloth or a wad of paper.

Bracket to hold globe. The wick was turned up and down through here, and the whole thing would be unscrewed to refill the lamp.

The part of the lamp that held the kerosene, or coal oil. During the winter, this would have to be re-filled almost daily.

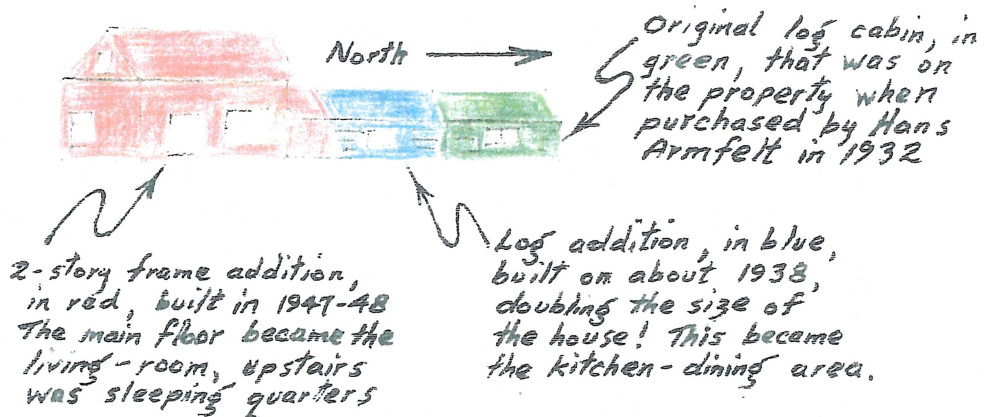
This lamp didn't give off much light – it would still be rather dark if you were any distance from it. But you could read by it, if you were close enough to it. I know we even put quite complicated jig saw puzzles together, working on the table, with the lamp right beside the puzzle.

Things I Remember Before I Turned Four Years Old

I remember lying in my crib, at the foot of my parents' bed, and my mother reaching down with her foot, rocking the crib, while she sang "The Wreck of the Old Number Nine". I wouldn't have been more than a year old, then.



Residence of Hans & Helen Armfelt, & family, possibly taken in the spring of 1959. The nearest small outbuilding visible behind the house was the coal shed; the farthest one, back in the trees, was the old smoke-house, where many a pig was cured, and became ham and bacon.



From Ole's slide collection

Front and back of an old photo

I remember lying in my crib watching my dad build a linen closet in the north-west corner of the cabin. I'm sure I wasn't more than two years old, at the time.

I remember my mom and I blowing kisses to the moon for dad, who was working up at the tie camp. I was only about 13 or 14 months old. It was during the winter of 1935-36, and dad cooked for three weeks for a crew cutting railroad ties six miles west of the north end of Baptiste Lake. They worked there from about Dec. 18/35 to Jan. 8/36, then gave up. There was just no money in it, and the weather was too cold. During that time, Athabasca became officially known as the coldest place on the planet, with temperatures around -75 degrees Fahrenheit. I remember my mom had to scratch a hole in the layer of frost on the inside of the window, so we could look out and see the moon.

I remember playing, with the neighbour boy, Ron Woodford, on the big logs that were laid as a foundation when my dad built the log addition to the original house in the fall of 1938. I would have been close to four years old, then.

I remember a ride on my sled that went out of control. It was after a winter ice storm that turned all the road surfaces into a sheet of glare ice. It was impossible to walk on the road. For some reason Henry Piché, one of the kids that lived in the Metis settlement down along the north west side of Baptiste Lake, was up at our house, and he and I decided to go for a ride on my sled. Henry was about five years older than I, so he lay on his stomach on the sled, and I lay on top of him, and tried to hang on. There was quite a hill dropping down from the house for about 250 meters along the old road, and I'm sure we must have been going about 30 miles/hour when we tipped over. I slid on the ice for some distance on my face. When I got back up to the house, my face was a bloody mess, and looked like raw hamburger. I think I was about four years old when this occurred.

I'll give you an idea of what the roads were like during the 1930's and 40's. The road coming up to our place from Baptiste Lake was simply a one-lane wagon trail that wound around across the creek and up the hills, hence the name Winding Trail School. In those days, many of the roads to farms and homesteads were cut out and built by the settlers themselves. I can remember when the road was first cut through the bush south along the east side of the ¼ section that my parents occupied. I can remember my dad, my uncle Glenn, Julius Katona Sr., and a funny bachelor by the name of John Labovich all cutting the road through. I remember one particularly hot summer day that I had the job of carrying fresh cold drinking water to the crew. I brought the water to them in a glass jar that held about 1 ½ liters. The problem was, I never seemed to get past John Labovich. He always seemed to position himself so that he was first in line when I arrived with the water. By the time he was satisfied, there was just a bit left for the others, and I would have to trudge back for another jar. I must have been about five years old at that time.

During a hot dry summer and fall, the roads would be quite passable, even for a car. But in the spring, and during and after a good rain in the summer or fall, there would be stretches of mud – lovely blue gumbo – and the ruts that resulted would quite often be 1 – 1 ½ feet deep. My mom told of the time that she was riding on the wagon seat, with me on her lap, and my dad driving the horses. They were about 200 meters east of the house on the old trail. It was in the spring, and the trail at that spot was very muddy. The wagon ruts in the mud were deep, but suddenly the wagon wheel on my mom's side dropped into a particularly deep hole, and lurched back up again. I flew out of my mom's lap, and landed face down in the muddy rut directly in front of the oncoming front wheel of the wagon. My dad hollered "Whoa" and the horses stopped immediately, with the wheel inches from my head. The horses didn't move – they knew they didn't dare, with my dad at the reins – and my mom got down and rescued me.

Most cars were not used in the winter – the side roads were not snowplowed. So the radiators and gas tanks were drained, the cars were jacked up, blocks were put under the axles, and the wheels were removed to take the strain off the tires and tubes. Then during the winter, most farmers drove a sleigh with a team of horses. I can remember riding to town with my dad one winter, and him putting the horses in the livery stable while doing whatever he had to do in town. I can remember almost exactly

where that livery stable was – there was a Dane working there as hostler, whose name was John Defries. He was known as “Little John”, because he was quite a short fellow.

The main highway wasn't paved – from Clyde to Athabasca it went through all the little towns, and most of it wasn't even gravelled. During W.W. 2, after Pearl Harbour, the Americans started worrying about the Japanese invading Alaska. So they hurried and built a highway from Edmonton, through Athabasca, to Dawson Creek, and on up to Alaska. This at least improved the highway portion of the drive from our house to Athabasca.

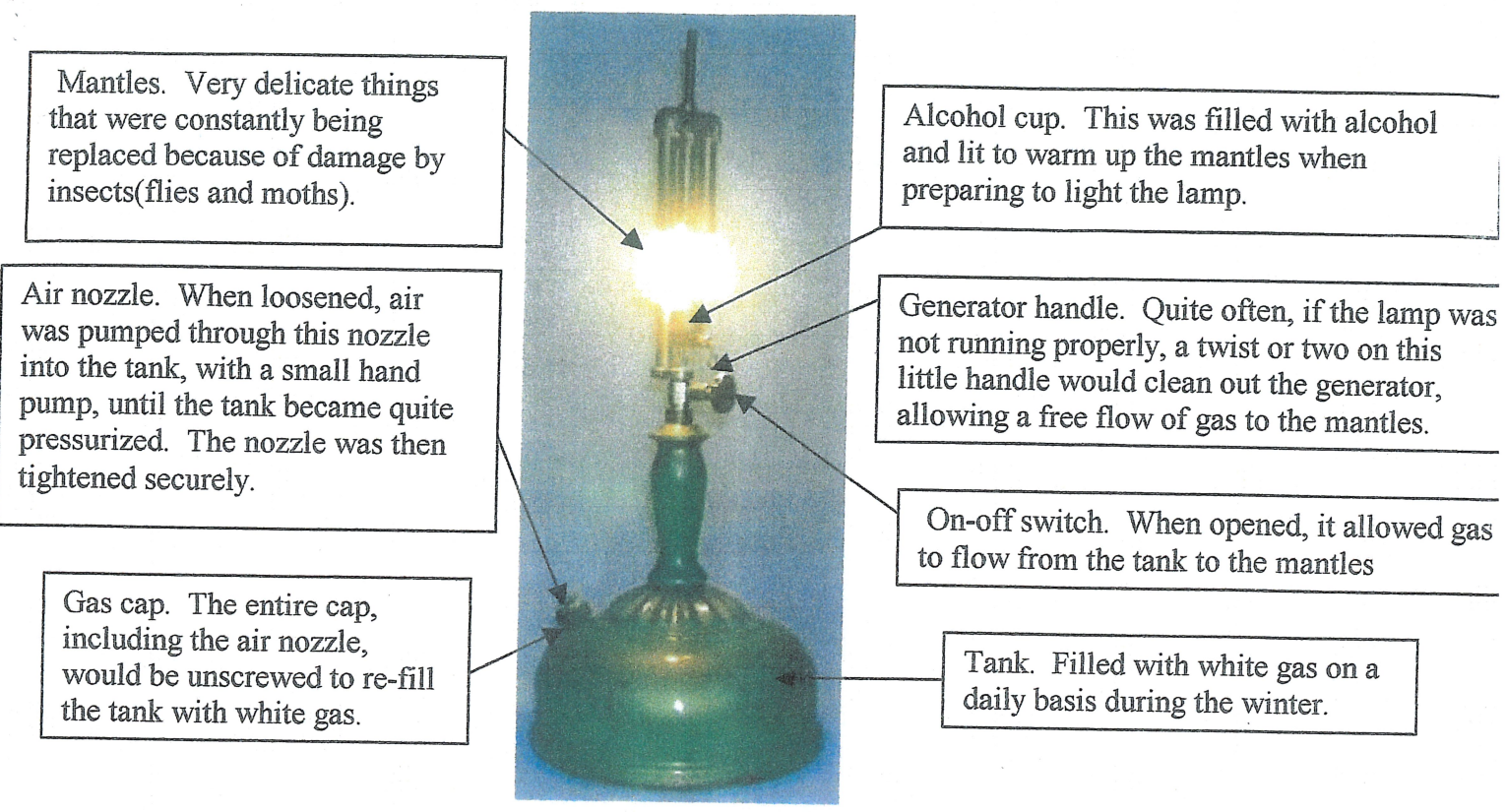
When I was quite young, I was plagued with bronchitis. Because of this, my parents decided I shouldn't start school 'til September, 1941. I was close to seven years old. Even then, I can remember running around at recess and noon, and playing myself out. I would have to stop and lean up against the outside of the school while I literally gasped for air. However, I must have been a fast learner – I know by Christmas of 1941 I was reading the comic books. Later on that same winter, I was passed into Grade 2, and started into Grade 3 the following September, and I was still only 7 years old. This was why I was still only 13 when I started Grade 9.

I always quite enjoyed reading – and it seemed I was always picked on to read in front of the class. I also enjoyed vocabulary and spelling. I recall one incident that emphasized this. It was during recess one school day – I must have been about 8 years old. Julius Katona, who is about 5 years older than I, was splitting up some larger blocks for firewood, as part of his duties as janitor. This was being done, as usual, inside the schoolroom near the woodpile adjacent to the stove. Some of us younger kids were standing around watching, and horsing around amongst ourselves at the same time. Somehow, I got pushed – stumbled out, and put my hand down on the block to catch my balance just as Julius brought the axe down on the block. The blade of the axe made contact with the finger next to my index finger on my left hand. Because the blade was quite dull, my finger was not chopped off – the blade just sort of smashed the bone, and made an ugly tear in my finger. The teacher cleaned it up, put a bandage on it, and wanted me to go home so my mother could look after it. However, I knew there was a spelling test coming up right away, and I didn't want to go home until after I'd written it. The teacher relented and let me write the test – then I walked home.

As I mentioned before, the original log cabin was 12ft.x12ft. which is 144 square feet of living space. Jack was born in February, 1938, and we started to use the new 12x16 log addition that my dad built on about November, 1938. So for about 10 months after Jack was born, all the four of us had for living quarters was the old original log cabin. After November of 1938, we had $144+192=336$ sq. ft. of living space. Larry, the 5th child, was born in 1944, so all 7 of us, parents and kids, lived in that 336 sq.ft. until 1948. Nowadays, the average family with a couple of kids wouldn't think of living in a house with less than 1500 sq.ft.

Sometime during the mid-'40's, we acquired a lamp that gave a much better light than the old kerosene lamp. It burnt naphtha, or white gas and gave a light roughly equivalent to a 100-watt bulb. It looked much like the one on the next page.

While growing up, all us kids had certain chores to do – there was coal, wood and water to be brought in, and ashes to be taken out of the stove. There were cows to be milked twice a day, barn to clean, horses, pigs and cows to feed and water. At times there were eggs to gather and chickens to look after. The milk had to be separated, supper dishes done, and lunches made for school the next day. It kept us all quite busy. I can remember carrying firewood in when I was barely old enough to walk. I also remember my parents deciding, when I was about 6 years old, that I should learn to milk a cow. It was summertime, and this gentle old cow was standing outside, so I sort of sneaked up with a bucket, and, without letting her know what was happening, grabbed one of her teats and started pulling. I was immediately kicked over backwards, and the cow trotted off.



During the summer, insects were always a problem. Mosquitos started in the early summer, and there were literally clouds of them. Then there were black flies, sand flies, noseums, and the big horse flies. During the evenings in the summer we always kept a bucket with a smudge in it, just outside the screen door (someone would start a fire in a bucket, keep it going, and, to make it smoke good, throw green grass, leaves, or sawdust on it. Sawdust worked best), otherwise the sand flies and noseums would come right through the screen.

When I was young, we had no car, so I became quite familiar with riding horseback at an early age. We only had one saddle, and my dad used that, so I learned to ride bareback. The first time I ever rode a horse, I was about 5 years old. My dad lifted me up on the horse, then he rode alongside on another horse. We rode down to the gate at a sedate walk, but coming back he got both horses trotting, then galloping. There was a tree that had fallen across the trail on the way to the barn, and it lay suspended about 1 1/2 feet above the trail. When my horse came to the tree, she went from a gallop to a dead stop in a split second. I didn't stop. I went sailing over her head, winding up on the ground just in front of her. She calmly jumped over me and the log, and went on up to the barn.

In 1944, my dad traded a cow for a 1929 Chevrolet sedan. It was our first car. Before he brought the car home, he cut off the back half, and replaced it with a wooden box, making a sort of pick-up out of it, for more room. I remember my first driving lesson. I was 11 years old. My dad drove out in the middle of the field, stopped, and told me to get in and drive. After getting it in gear and moving, I completely froze at the wheel. My dad got it stopped before I went straight into the bush at the edge of the field, and we started over. This time I managed o.k. I was promptly assigned the task of hauling barrels and cream-cans of water, for household use, first from the well, later from the creek down by the school.

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I attended Winding Trail School from Grades 1 to 8 inclusive. It was a one-room school, with one teacher teaching the kids in all eight grades at once. There might be anywhere from fifteen to twenty-five kids at the school in any one year. There was no electricity in the school, therefore school was taught during daylight hours only. So in the dead of winter, the school days were necessarily shorter. Toilets were two backhouses (one for boys, one for girls) a couple of hundred feet south of the school. Heat was provided by a big barrel heater, laying flat. It was at least five feet long, and two feet in diameter. It would hold a lot of wood. There was a sort of sheet-metal fence standing on each side of the stove to stop the kids from getting too close to it.

We only lived one-half a mile from the school, so I took on the duties as janitor in September, 1946. My duties were –

After school was over for the day, I would sweep the floor (the floor was oiled wooden boards), empty any water left in the water pail and the drinking cooler, haul in enough firewood for the next day, and chop kindling for starting the fire the next morning. In the morning I would go down to the school about 7:15, start a roaring fire, bank it well so it would keep going, and return home. I would then do a few chores, have breakfast, and head back to the school. On my way down I would pick up a pail of water at a spring that we had a trail to. It still meant carrying the water ½ mile. I would get back to the school early to make sure it was warm enough for the class. Then, all during the day, I would occasionally stoke the fire to keep the room warm. The people in the community decided if the temperature was colder than -50 degrees F. (-45 C.) on any given morning, there would be no school that day. Some of the kids had to walk more than two miles one way to the school. I did this janitor work for 10 months – the school year of 1946-47 – and received \$8.00 per month as payment, which my parents promptly confiscated. The following year I split the duties with one of the other kids. I don't remember what I got for doing that.

Upon completing Grade 8 at Winding Trail School (or any of the rural schools at that time) a good percentage of the kids did not go any further with their education. It was too far to Athabasca, with no way to get in and out, and in Athabasca there wasn't much in the way of hostels or dorms for the kids to stay in. I had quite a time getting in and out myself. I think for most of Grade 9, I walked down to Applebys' (just over 2 miles) and caught a ride in with Jack Appleby, who was teaching Gr. 9 in Athabasca. His son Ted, who was also in Grade 9, rode in also.

Then about a year later, Mike Kwasny put a piece of canvas over the back of a 3/4 ton truck, with a bench down each side to sit on, and called it a school bus. He ferried all the kids in every day from Forfar to Athabasca that were in Grades 9-12. He also drove down to Applebys' and picked me up. Ted continued riding in with his dad. Mike quit running his "school bus" after a while, so I was left either catching a ride with Jack Appleby again, or with my dad, who by then had a job working out of an office in Athabasca as Field Supervisor for the County. Then Mark Christiansen purchased a van, and ran it as a school bus from Forfar to Athabasca. He also came down, well out of his way, and picked me up at Applebys'. But he decided, one day, that he wasn't going to pick me up any more – it was just too far out of his way. So again I was left to get in and out of Athabasca with either Jack Appleby or my dad. It was quite a hit and miss arrangement. If I rode in with my dad, I was often a few minutes late. It was hard to get him mobile in the mornings. And I can remember walking down to Applebys', on two different bitterly cold mornings, only to find they had left early. They didn't know I was coming down. There were no 'phones in those days. Getting back home was just as uncertain. I know of three or four occasions when I missed both rides, and walked home from Athabasca (14 miles). I remember doing that on my last day of Grade 12. It was a short school day – we were out by noon, and somehow I missed Jack Appleby, so I walked home. This was in 1952.

In the three full years I attended Athabasca High School, the temperature, during the coldest part of the winter, never failed to get down to -72 degrees Fahrenheit at least once each winter. On mornings like that, the tires on the car would be frozen flat on the bottom. If and when you did get the car running, you would have to drive slowly at first, thumping along, until the tires got warm enough to resume their original shape.

In August of 1952, I got a job with a survey crew working for the Technical Division, Dep't. of Lands and Forests (Alberta Gov't.). I quite enjoyed surveying, so in September of 1954 I attended the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (now SAIT, there was no NAIT then) in Calgary to take the first of a two-year course in Surveying and Drafting. Tuition, books, room and board, etc. – the whole works cost me about \$900.00 that first year (room and board was \$45.00 per month, and there was lots to eat). I had saved that much from working on the survey crew. I signed on as an articling pupil to an Alberta Land Surveyor (G. Palsen) in 1955, went back to P.I.T.A. in September, 1955, graduating in May, 1956. I then started studying and writing exams for my Alberta Land Surveyors commission – meanwhile working, as well. At that time, there was no Degree course in any University by which you could obtain a Land Surveyors commission – you had to do it on your own. Exams were written at the University in Edmonton once a year, in April. The time I put in at the P.I.T.A. in Calgary didn't count for anything toward my Land Surveyors commission, other than familiarizing me with surveying as a career, and some things I might come up against as a surveyor. I finally got my A.L.S. commission on June 5, 1961. I added it all up one time, and after getting out of High School, I think I wrote a total of 57 three-hour exams until getting my A.L.S. commission.

In March of 1959 I bought the house in Edmonton, at 9202-90 st. I paid \$13,500.00 for it. Also that same March I met Kayla Park. At the time, she was working in the Athabasca Hospital as a Certified Nursing Aide. Kayla and I were married June 10, 1961, in her home town of Lethbridge. We then moved into the house I had bought in Edmonton, where we lived until 1973. During those twelve years, I was employed by the Technical Division, Dep't. of Lands and Forests as an Alberta Land Surveyor, doing legal survey work for them. They also had me doing horizontal and vertical control work for mapping from aerial photos.

Our first son, David, was born Sept. 20, 1962, then Russell was born Oct. 23, 1963.

In 1973 we bought Long Beach Resort on Shuswap Lake, near Sorrento, B.C. It was a lovely spot to live, but a lot of hard work for very little return. I had to learn, in a big hurry, how to install, maintain and repair sewage lines, water lines, septic tanks, plumbing, floor and ceiling tile, electric stoves, etc., etc. just to keep the place maintained. I also had to work out to make ends meet. The first job I had, in the fall of 1973, was working on a green chain at a local sawmill (Tappen Valley Timber). Then, in January, 1974 I got a job working for a surveyor in Kamloops (Stan Legget). It meant driving to Kamloops and back every day – 100 mile round trip. I stuck with that for about six months ('til the tourist season was in full swing). Then in the fall of 1974 I got a job with a surveyor in Salmon Arm (M.D. Browne). I worked for him for about four years. Then, in the early part of 1980 I got a job working for a local contractor in Blind Bay, building and renovating houses (Shel Herrick). I worked for him for about five years. I quit working out after the tourist season ended in the fall of 1985. We were finally making enough from the resort to scrape by 'til the next tourist season..

Our son, David, died in a traffic accident June 27, 1981. He was 18. Kayla passed away of cirrhosis of the liver April 28, 2002. I managed to finally sell the resort to a developer on July 30, 2004. I then moved to Salmon Arm, B.C., where I now rent a very comfortable apartment - #202, 531 – 1st. Ave. S.E.

By the way - - Kaylan got an "A" on her report.