

Uranium City Memories

My name is Peter Wilson. I first went to Uranium City in 1958 when I was 10 years old. I lived there until 1978 when I left for the oil patch in Alberta. I have only returned once to visit. That was in the summer of 2002, which I wrote about awhile back.

In that article, I said most of the town is gone but the memories are still there. For the last year or so I have been thinking of writing more about the trip, about what is still there, what is not and some of the things I remember about Uranium City.

My memories of the town started long before we got back there. They started at the airport waiting room in La Ronge Sask. where we flew north from.

My thoughts took me back to 1958 in Saskatoon Saskatchewan. My father Bill Wilson was already in Uranium City building a house for us to live in. He had originally gone up to work for a construction company calls Burns and Dutton, who were building the mine and mill sites. He decided to stay up there and hired on with the mine at Eldorado.

I couldn't wait for the house to be finished and bugged my mother until she agreed to send me up to see him. She put me on a plane with a fellow that was going back north and off I went by myself, to see my father.

The plane trip in 2002 brought back many memories. Now if you fly anywhere you go with a certain degree of comfort and security. It was a lot different back in 1958. The plane that I flew in was a DC3. Even back then, I don't think it was new. It was a tail dragger, so when it was sitting at rest the nose was way up in the air and when you got in it, you had to walk up hill to get to your seat. Where you sat depended on how much freight was on the flight and if you were the first or last person on the plane.

The fellow that was supposed to look after me was one of the guys building 1 of 3 houses with my father in Jackpine Crescent in Uranium City. It was all pretty scary because I didn't know him and had never been on an airplane before. I don't think he liked flying much either because he took a couple big drinks of something and was asleep in no time.

I can remember the seat belt light above the curtains that blocked our view of the cockpit but I don't remember anyone ever telling us to put them on. I can still remember the starting of the engines. I was looking out the window right at the propeller. First there were some whirring sounds, the prop started to turn ever so slowly, and reluctantly, eventually one of the cylinders on the radial engine fired with a loud puff of smoke. The prop spun faster, the other cylinders caught and the engine roared to life. Looking out the window across the aisle I could see the other engine go through the same laborious process until they were both roaring away with there props feathered so they had no thrust.

Eventually the plane began to move and sort of lumbered along until it got to the end of the runway where it made a U-turn to point in the right direction for takeoff.

Soon the engines were run up to full power and the plane strained against its brakes in preparation for takeoff. The brakes were released and the plane started down the runway, slowly at first then faster and faster. As it gathered speed, the tail

lifted off the ground and as we rushed toward the other end of the runway the tail dropped slightly, the ground fell away and we were in the air.

I remember looking out the window at the little farms and little cars driving on the roads below. Eventually the seatbelt light went out and we were free to move around a bit. Which was good because I could get away from the snoring person in the seat beside me.

I didn't know planes moved around so much and the first big air pocket came as quite a surprise. You know the ones where your butt is still on the seat but your stomach is against the roof! I don't know if they had airsickness pills back then but I sure could have used them. That first flight of mine had a very green 10-year-old kid sitting on one of those blue and brass steamer trunks, wishing he was somewhere else.

After getting sick in the little bouncing washroom in the tail of the plane, I felt better and went back to looking out the window. The scenery was starting to change. The checkerboard farmland was becoming mostly trees and lakes until that's all there was. It was at this point that I realized how far it was and scary thoughts started to enter the mind of this little kid. What if we went down? No one would ever find us in that bush. After what seemed like an eternity, the plane did start to go down and in my young mind, I thought, "oh my God were not going to make it". Fortunately, for me my sleeping escort came back to life and assured me that we were only going down to land at the Eldorado airport and that I would be home soon.

We came in over Ace Lake. You could see the beach below and the head frames of the three Eldorado mines, Ace, Verna, and Fay out the left window of the plane.

With a screech of tires, we were back on ground and so began the next 20 years of my life in Uranium City.

When we went back in the summer of 2002, the beach at Ace Lake was still being used but the mines were all gone. The PWA waiting room was still there and being used by TransWest Airlines. The Eldorado waiting room and buildings were being used by another plane company, Norcanair I think. It all looked the same as when I left in 1978.

The PWA terminal (sometimes known as PLEASE WAIT AWHILE) was still blue and white and I think it still had the original chrome and leatherette seats.

We had to wait at the airport for our luggage to come on another plane behind us. So we spent some time just wandering around daydreaming. It was a perfect day. Sitting on the steps there looking out at the runway I could still see in my mind's eye the big 4 engine plane with ELDORADO painted on its side coming in for a landing from the south over Beaverlodge Lake. If I closed my eyes for a moment I could still imagine the PWA plane sitting on the tarmac with the freight trucks backed up to it unloading everything from the mail to fresh vegetables and sides of beef.

The skies were blue, there was no wind and it was warm so Terry Bachmeier and I decided we would start walking toward Uranium City. The others in our group could pick us up along the way. The first thing I noticed as we started out down the airport hill was the quiet! When I left over 20 years ago, you could hear the roar of the ventilation fans and the sounds of the mine and the mill. Now it was quiet. Very quiet.

We had only gone a short distance before we could see Beaverlodge Lake. Remember how deep it was! It still looked black from up on the hill. Looking southeast, you could see Beaverlodge Island where a number of people had cottages, including Harvey Villeneuve who owned the bulk oil agency in Uranium City after Paul Vincent left.

As we continued down the road, we came to the site of one of the big two-storied bunkhouses where the single miners lived. I remember them being in the shape of an H with the centre part having the washrooms and sitting room. I stayed there for awhile during a summer out of school and remember some high stakes poker games played on a grey blanket on the floor, that were too rich for me and way over my head.

Do you remember nicknames? Lots of people in the north had nicknames and many guys in the bunkhouses did. That is how you knew whom someone was referring to. If someone mentioned Whiskey John you knew they were not talking about Rainbow John or if they said Hollywood Mike you knew they weren't talking about Million dollar Mike. It wasn't mean spirited. That's just the way it was.

Further down the road we turned left and walked up the hill into the Eldorado town site. There isn't much there anymore but there are still many memories. Some of the ones that came to mind standing there were the bus stop and Post Office where you waited for a bus to take you back to Uranium City. That's if you didn't live in Eldorado of course. From the walkway on the east side of the building, you could look down on the Cookery and the Rec. hall. The Cookery supplied meals for the men living in the bunkhouses and the Rec. hall provided entertainment with a café, poolroom, theatre, bowling alley, barbershop and curling rink. Later they added a gymnasium where we had many great New Year's Eve dances. If you walked down past the Rec. hall, it took you to the bachelor apartments for single men on staff at the mine. Further down and you got to the boat docks. I can still remember the varnished Peterborough boats, the white plywood boats and the green and chrome Mercury outboard motors. No fiberglass in those days.

A little further down the shore was the swimming area. It had a very good diving raft with high and low diving boards. In the summer, this was where I took my swimming lessons. It was great fun. I never remember the water being warm enough to be comfortable, but when you're a kid with your friends, you don't really care.

The Eldorado town site was the community for the people working at the mine who where on staff. The hourly paid employees either lived in the bunk houses or 7 miles away in Uranium City.

There was a ball diamond and a big open area on the north side of town. What I remember most about it were the July 1st activities.

Remember the foot races and the greasy pole fights! I also remember Norman Ewaschuk demonstrating his strength for the crowds by wrapping a 3 ½ inch nail in his handkerchief and then punching it through a pine board. If that wasn't amazing enough I believe he then pulled it out with his teeth!

With these thoughts in mind Terry and I turned around and because the others hadn't come along with the truck and our packs, we started walking toward Uranium City.

As you walk along the road, there are places where you can look down into the lake. Beaverlodge Lake is like no other lake I have seen since. It is so clear that you can see way down into it. Some people thought it was because the run off from the mine had killed all the algae but I prefer to believe that it's just a beautiful lake.

We continued on our way past the communication tower on the south side of the road and made our way down the road toward the bay where "Tired Inn" was. Do you remember Tired Inn? It was a cabin with a fence made of old tires! There used to be a prospector who lived there. I think his name was Ed but I'm not sure. I remember who ever lived there did Taxidermy (stuffed animals). He had stuffed Ptarmigans, grouse and ducks. He even had stuffed squirrels for bookends. I heard that eventually he died and is buried on the hill across the road.

Before you get to Tired Inn if you are coming from Eldorado you will come upon a small waterfall beside the road. Forty-five years ago, we had a family photo taken there and like the memories from forty-five years ago, it is still there and probably always will be.

We only walked a little past Tired Inn and stopped to wait for the others to come along, Terry wanted to keep going but my foot was hurting so we stopped to wait. It was a beautiful day. The sun was warm on the face and Beaverlodge was like glass. The only thing to distract from the beauty of it all were the horse flies, which we kept at bay with willow switches. Do you remember the horse flies? We used to say they were so big that they would rip a chunk out of you and fly up into a tree to eat it! Well maybe they weren't that big.

The other guys weren't coming yet and a vehicle was coming down the road from Uranium City. So we flagged it down. It was Dixie Parks. Remember her dad Roy? He had a building across the street from the hotel. We explained to Dixie what was happening and asked if she could take us back to the airport. She said that was where she was going so we hopped in. We told her who we were and she said she had heard that some "old timers" were coming back for a visit. Terry and I looked at each other in amusement. I didn't think we were old timers but maybe we were.

Just when we got back to the airport the second plane landed with our luggage. We loaded it all onto the truck we rented from Sonny Lepine and took off for Uranium City again. When you get to the bottom of the airport hill where you can turn left into Eldorado or continue on to Uranium City there is another road that goes off to the right. It takes you past the old rifle range and onto the mine site of Nesbitt Labine, which I believe was named after some of the pioneers in the uranium mining industry. The road is now closed. Marg Belanger later told us that it is going to be set aside as a world heritage site or something like that. If I remember there were other mine sites out that road called National Exploration and Eagle mine. It was also a spot for some of the high school grad parties.

About half way back to Uranium City the road crosses the Martin/ Beaverlodge portage. Just before you cross over the hill, there is a road off to the left. This is the site of the Martin Lake Mine, but we all knew it as Mile Ten. I believe it went through the hill from the Beaverlodge side to the narrows on Martin Lake. Shortly after crossing the portage there is a road that goes off to the right, this one takes you out to Melville Lake. I don't know why it went there, I think ABC mine might have been out there somewhere. I'm not sure but I think if you followed that road far

enough it looped back around to Nesbitt Labine and Eldorado. It could be difficult though because the road along side the lake was the same level as the lake in places and you had to drive in water if it was high.

Mr. Beavereye and his family lived somewhere around this road at one time. I'm sure all of you remember Mr. Beavereye. Everyone knew him because of his famous saying. Do you remember it?

There is now a bypass around what was originally called Moore Haven and later called Kennedy corner. The original road is blocked off on the Eldorado side and to get to Kennedy corner you must go over the bypass, turn left and drive back. My father built a summer cabin out there in the 60's. Eventually he sold it to Glen Sherman the radio operator, who sold it to Marg Belanger who rents it to Lazzare Beavereye. I think my father sold it because as my friends and I got older it became a bit of a party place and was known as the Sugar Shack. In later years before the mine closed Vince Puller also lived out that way.

As you continue toward Uranium City, the next road you come to is the one going out to Fredette Lake. Fredette Lake was the water supply for Uranium City. The road out there is still good. Pat Cardinal, my wife Pam and I drove out to the lake on one of the days when we were last there. I don't know when but a cement dam has been built at the outlet of the lake to raise the level and insure that Uranium City doesn't run out of water in the middle of the winter. When we got there, I was surprised to see that people still had boats at the lake. Later I was told that Archie and Mary Seggerts still kept a cabin out there.

When you are coming back out from Fredette Lake to the road going left to Eldorado and right to Uranium City you can still see a house on your left where Suzy Denago and his family lived. The only one of his kids whose name I can remember was a girl named Lorraine. On your right as you turn toward Uranium City there is a small flat-topped hill right beside the road. It used to have a cabin on it and I think this is where my friend Lucy's grandfather lived.

Joseph Seggert's cabin was at the end of a collection of houses and cabins known as SGA hill, that stretched from across the road at the floatplane docks to the turn off to Fredette Lake. It was where a lot of people lived when Uranium City was first getting started. It was about a mile or so from town. I don't know why that spot was picked but it was maybe because in the early days, Uranium City didn't have a water system yet and Martin Lake was close to SGA Hill. All the houses and cabins are now gone except for one small single room cabin quite a ways up from the road.

SGA hill got its name from the original floatplane company that was there. Saskatchewan Government Airways. Later it became M.A.S.L. for McMurray Air Services Limited and finally Norcanair, but the hill remained and always will be SGA hill.

When I first got to Uranium City my friends and I used to fish from the floatplane docks. I remember one American sportsman telling his friends that it was the best waiting room in the world, you could catch fish while you waited for your next flight. I remember fish being so plentiful that we took them for granted.

After the float plane terminal the next road to the left took you to Kiwanis beach. The summers were short in the north. So as kids that's were we spent almost every day during the holidays unless it was raining. It was the place to be. Swimming in

the creek began shortly after the ice went off the lake. Some braver souls would even try to swim across the creek before the ice on the lake was completely gone. I think we were supposed to do it to show the other kids how brave we were. Hypothermia hadn't been invented yet so we thought we were just really cold. It's a good thing we had strong hearts or we could have been in serious trouble. It was probably a dumb thing to do but we did it anyway. Kiwanis beach always had July 1st activities and still does. It's one of the few places left in the Uranium City area that is still maintained. Even though there were less than 200 hundred people left up there at the time of our visit, they still had a barbeque and a horseshoe tournament.

When I was up there last I just had to walk the beach trail one more time. It wouldn't have been right to leave and have not have done that. As kids, we hiked it almost everyday in the summer and it felt good to do it again. Only this time I wasn't loaded down with a wet towel, swim trunks, an old inner tube that I got from the dump and I had my shoes on. My wife Pam didn't walk it with me at 54 years old I only wanted to walk it in one direction and she picked me up with the truck at the old cement block plant behind the bulk oil station.

When you leave the beach and head up the hill on the road to Uranium City you will come to the turnoff to the hospital. I remember as a kid someone telling me that the hospital cost over a million dollars. At the time, I couldn't believe that anything could cost a million bucks!

It was great having a hospital. It seemed so professional; it offered a sense of security. You felt if you got sick or hurt that there was someone there to look after you. When I was a kid up there in the early days the nurses still looked like nurses with their white uniforms and strange little hats. Some how you just knew that if you were in their care you were going to be ok. When I first went to Uranium City, in 1958, there were no houses up by the hospital. Just the hospital, the nurses' residence and maybe one other house. In the late 1970's a housing subdivision was built up there and when I was there three years ago there were still a few houses being used.

There used to be a ski hill up there that went all the way down to Fredette creek, but it was so steep that not many people could get down it with out crashing. So a different spot was later picked over by Gilchrist School that wasn't so steep.

If you didn't turn up to the hospital but continued into Uranium City you crossed Fredette creek to get there. When I first went up there in 1958 there was an arched sign over the bridge that said "Welcome to Uranium City". I don't know why but in later years it was gone. I heard stories about what happened to it, but can't be sure so I will leave that to those who know.

I don't know what the attraction was but when we were last there we all had to go see the water falls on Fredette creek. Remember, there were three of them. One between Eldorado street and the hospital hill, one just down stream from the bridge going into town and one more just a 100 feet or so further down stream.

Obviously, they are still the same nothing has changed. There were also two trails down to Martin Lake, one that went to the beach and the other that was used by people coming and going from SGA Hill both are still there and they haven't changed either.

As you pull into town, Dusseault Transportation's truck garage is still there on your left. It was later taken over by Raven Transport. A little further on was and still is the bulk oil station that I used to work at. To the right were the Original RCMP station and the old government row that has since been replaced. I know nothing about the new buildings so for that part of my trip back down memory lane I have tried to remember what was originally there. When I first went to Uranium City the building next to the RCMP detachment was the DNR building, where you got your fishing license, chicken license (upland game bird), your wood cutting permits and just about any other outdoor license or permit you needed. I'm not sure but I think the radio operator's office was in the same building or very near by. In the early days that was the only way, you could get a message to the "outside" world. You had to send a telegram with the radio operator, and the man that did it for you was Glen Sherman I believe.

Do you remember the term "outside" it was unique to the north. It started as the "outside world", was shortened to "outside" and finally abbreviated to just "out". Strangely, Uranium City was never referred to as "in". "Out" just meant anywhere other than Uranium City. It never seemed odd to ask someone where they had been and get the reply "oh we were out for awhile". Out most likely meant Edmonton but it could have been anywhere and you had to ask.

Across the street from the RCMP was Simon Jutras's house and next to him was Gus Hawker's store. They're not there anymore but it's not hard to visualize them especially Hawker's. When I first went to Uranium City Gus's store was a pretty wild place. He still had groceries for sale along with all the things you needed for prospecting or trapping and laying on the floor and piled in the corners were thousands of dollars worth of fur pelts that he bought or traded for. Often in the spring you could see Gus at his door keeping an eye on what was happening around him. He might be watching who was coming and going from town or just waiting for someone to talk to, which happened often because Gus was an interesting guy.

Across the street from Gus was Triangle Motors one of the service stations in town. I think it was called Triangle Motors because three guys owned it at one time but the only one I can remember was Scotty. After I left it became Fluett Motors and ended that way. In the very early days in Uranium City, there was a power generating station between the bulk oil dealership and Triangle Motors but it was shut down after the town started getting hydroelectric power and I don't remember it running. It might have for a while when I first got there, but remember I was only 10 years old at the time and I just can't remember.

Further up Uranium Road was the Eagle Bakery and across the street the Uranium City Hotel. The hotel is gone but the bakery is still there. It's not hard to remember the smell of fresh bread that hit you when you entered. It was almost intoxicating. You just couldn't leave without buying something to take home. What a great place.

Even though the hotel is gone, you can stare at the spot where it was and have many memories come flooding back. I don't remember much about the first hotel. It burned shortly after I moved to Uranium City. One story I do remember circulating, is that there was reportedly a lot of free "smoky beer" in town after the fire.

I remember the second hotel well. It was the centre of activity in town, and it started right on the steps to the main entrance. There was always someone hanging around there just watching what was going on, especially in the summer. It might be a group of girls from Fond Du Lac or Stony Rapids with their bright red lipstick, snapping their chewing gum, laughing and carrying on about something only they knew about, or it could just be someone waiting for a friend to have a coffee with in the café.

When you first entered the hotel, you were in the lobby where you could rent a room, buy a magazine or get some cigarettes. In the early years there used to be a barbershop between the lobby and the café. I'm not completely positive who the barber was so I had better not give him a name. Maybe you can do that for me.

I think getting a hair cut at the hotel was one of my first experiences there. I can still remember it. The barber had a board you sat on if you were too small for the chair and magazines to look at while you waited. The most amazing thing about the place though was the barber himself. No matter who you were, what your station in life was or what you did for a living he always had something to talk to you about and treated you with the same dignity as everyone else, even if you were just a young boy. I think ever politician in the world should have to apprentice as a barber first, don't you?

Past the barbershop was the café. It was were we gathered just to be with friends. It had a long counter with stools running from the entrance all the way to the swinging doors going into the kitchen. It also had tables with chairs all along the windows looking out on to the street below. I don't remember the names of all the waitress but I think some of the Lafferty girls worked there. In the kitchen were Harriet MacDonald and Isabelle Mercredi. Isabelle used to look through the windows of the swinging doors going into the kitchen to see who was in the café. If she recognized you, there would be some extra fries on your plate. I really miss those sorts of things. Hamburger deluxe, fries and a coke \$1.25! Those were the days.

Next to the café was the dinning room but I never ate in there. The café was much more interesting. I think twice a month the Uranium City Chamber of Commerce had a lunch meeting in the dining room, usually with Mayor Dana Spence presiding.

Down the hall from the dinning room was the cocktail lounge known as "The Big Stope". Even when I was old enough I didn't go there much. The next room over, the beer parlor was where the action was! Many little towns have a local watering hole they refer to as the zoo, but I would have to say ours was more like a circus. There was almost always someone performing in there. It was great fun to just sit with your back to the wall and watch.

I can't name any names or be specific about anything that happened there. I have to leave that up to you. We now live in a world where you can get sued for sneezing on someone and I don't need the trouble.

The bar changed somewhat over the years. I wasn't old enough at the time to go in but I understand it used to be divided. An area for men and an area for ladies and escorts. It's a bit sad but sometimes I think we have lost something in our head long rush through time.

Up the hill from the hotel was Uranium Motors and it's still there. I always remember it being owned by the Frame family but I could be wrong. Some of the people that I remember working there were Tex Gordon and Bruce Holmgren. Bruce has told me he always had the highest regard for Tex and says he learned much from him. He said he always took his time and did his best. For example, my father had a 1958 Ford Fairlane and the work Bruce and Tex did on it was a testament to their expertise. Eventually the engine got tired and needed to be rebuilt. Tex and Bruce did the job. Unfortunately the car later got into an accident and was written off, (can't talk about that!) but that wasn't the end of the engine. Ed Bailey bought it from dad, put it into his 1959 Ford, put it on the barge and drove it all the way to Ontario and back without using any oil!

Across the road from the garage was one of the taxi stands. I don't remember if it was Northern Cabs or Uranium City Taxi maybe neither, there were a number of cab companies in town over the years so I could have the names wrong, but I do remember many of the drivers. In fact, because I went home in a cab from the airport in 1958 a cab driver was probably the first person I met. I think it was Bobby Morimoto if I'm not mistaken. Some of the other drivers that I remember were, Carl Strathee, George Michalow, Howard Shott, Ronny Davidson, David Holmgren, Danny Powder and Bill Holland. I'm sure there are more but they just don't come to mind right now. One thing I do remember is they didn't have meters in their cars. It was \$2.00 anywhere in town and \$7.00 to Eldorado.

Taxis were great. You didn't even have to tell the drivers where you lived, you just got in the car and said, "Home please". They knew where everyone lived. Another good thing about them is in the middle of the winter they were rarely shut off and were always warm. Which sure beat trying to get your own car going when it was 40 or 50 below.

Next door to Uranium Motors was the Imperial Bank of Canada building. I think it used to have a local radio station in it at one time but I'm not positive. The building is no longer there, but the new Legion Building behind it still is.

When I left Uranium City the New building only had its basement finished. It had a shuffleboard table, some dartboards and was used as a bar and cocktail lounge. When I think of the legion hall, I mostly remember the original one, brought over from Goldfields and the dances we had in there listening to all our favorite tunes played by the incredible "Ghost Riders". What a lot of fun that was even, if you didn't dance and just watched the antics of your friends.

Across the street from the Legion was the old Roxy Theater, which I think, was also brought over from Goldfield and was still in use when I first got to Uranium City. I remember they just had a black curtain for a door between the ticket booth and the seats. No ushers and no aisle lights, in fact it was so dark in there until the show started you had to be careful you didn't try to sit on someone. I remember watching movies there like The Mummy, The Fly and The Black Scorpion. As a kid, they used to scare the hell out of me. When they were over I'd run all the way home but was back next week for some more.

When we were in Uranium City in 2002 we drove up and down 1st street many times reminiscing about what used to be there. Most of the buildings are gone now but we talked about them as if they were still there. Mayor Dana Spence's original

hardware store is still there. I remember I helped a fellow named Len put a new roof and warehouse on it one year. It was one of those great small town hardware stores that had just about everything and if they didn't have it, you probably didn't need it anyway. Next to it was the Canadian Bank of Commerce. Once I was old enough to get a job, this is where I cashed my paychecks. No checking account for me and certainly no savings account. Just cash please, stuffed into my jeans and off to the hotel to see what was happening.

Behind the bank was the Aurora theatre. It was newer than the Roxy and eventual the only one in town showing movies. Remember all the windowed boxes on the front wall advertising upcoming shows. All the hokey Elvis Presley shows, the westerns and the war movies. Cheap too. I think 35 cents for kids and 50 cents for adults. The shows were great and generally had the same format. There were always cartoons, some world events which were always at least a week old and some previews of the next shows to hit town. The theatre was also used for bingo and other things like The Amazing Ravine, the hypnotist. Where you could go and laugh yourself silly at any of your friends that were willing to be part of his show.

Across the street was The Bay. Hudson Bay Northern Retail Store to be exact. It was a combined grocery, clothing, dry goods and hardware store. It had everything from bullets to fresh lettuce. It also had credit. Do you remember that? Credit! You could sign for your stuff and pay for it at the end of the month when you got your paycheck. I worked there when I was going to high school and saved enough money with the help of my parents to buy my first motorcycle from Bernie Assmus. I nearly killed myself on it but that's another story for another time.

I remember Len Kilbreath worked there also. Him and I, with a lot of help from David Dudar used to unload the freight trucks that came to the back door. There was a conveyor belt that went up to the main floor. It was on the conveyor belt that we had to get the quarters of beef that came for the butcher shop. I swear those chunks of beef were bigger than either Len or I but we fought with them anyway. David Dudar was bigger than we were and didn't seem to have as much trouble with them.

I remember there was this damned dog that would sneak in to the basement and you had a terrible time getting him out again. One day he got caught and had his backside turpented! The last seen of him he was heading toward Fredette creek as fast as he could go.

If you went back to Spence's Hardware and crossed the street, you would be at what was the pool hall and coffee shop. It was eventually owned by Bill Holland. It's not there either. It burned down before the mine closed. There were 5 beautiful full size pool tables in there. Wonderful thick slate tables that you just don't see anymore. I spent some of my youth and what little money I had in there. In the back was another barbershop and a card room that I was never in, I heard stories of big money changing hands in there, but I never saw it. There weren't that many places to hangout in town so there was a steady stream of people coming and going between the hotel and the poolroom. They were the two most likely places to find your friends, there and the arena in the wintertime, of course.

Down the hill on the same side of the street were more businesses. There was Robison's Rexall Drugs Store and very close to it the Sears Catalogue outlet. The

drug store was another of those small town “we have everything you need” stores. It was the only place in town where you could get a drug prescription filled and I can still see Roy at the back of the store in his white uniform filling them out. At the front of the store was his lovely wife Marian looking after the till. You just had to like her she always had a big smile for everyone.

The Sears outlet was one of the main ways you got what you needed for your home, which was the same in most isolated communities, but you never knew what condition it would be in when it arrived. Which was no fault of the agent because the stuff went through so many hands before it got there. It did lead to the anachronism for the town postal code though. S0J 2W0 “Same old junk two weeks old”.

Still we were all grateful for the agent. Who for years did a wonderful job of getting the things we needed and fixing the things that were wrong.

There were other buildings and business on that side of the street over the years including the hotel annex where my friend Robert Mercredi and his family lived for awhile, but the one that comes to mind and is still there is Abofskiy’s Variety Department store. It was a clothing store and the thing I remember most was he had this sign at his cash register. “Try our easy credit plan 100% down nothing to pay later”. If you crossed the street there used to be Embletons Transport Company, but it’s gone and I never knew much about it. There were also a number of cafes and offices on that side of the street including the Post office, which was spared in the big fire on 1st in the early years. It burned Embleton’s Café, Bartlett’s Café and Maciver’s General store. Do you remember your Post Office box number? Mine was 833.

I still remember the smoldering ruins of the fire. Later new businesses took their places in that spot. Two of them being the town offices and McIntyre’s clothing store. Ben and Hilda always treated you well when you went to their store even if you were a fussy kid that had to find just the right pair of jeans.

That pretty much takes care of the memories I can write about in down town Uranium City with out getting into too much trouble. There were other businesses like Gibb’s meat market, King’s insurance and others that I have forgotten over the years, but I’m sure you can fill in the blanks with your own memories.

In the five days we were there three years ago, we drove every street and road we could. We even went out past Eldorado to Donaldson Lake and a few of the smaller lakes out that way. The little Golf course is still at Ace Lake and if you walk the fairways, you will still find broken tees and the occasional old golf ball.

Some of the other places we visited were the schools, the churches, the arena, the Eldorado Store, the cemetery and of course the town dump.

Shannon School is gone, but the ball field is still there. Remember the ball games. At the last reunion people were still taking about the ball games in Uranium City and who some of the best players were.

Do you remember Bachmeier’s Chip wagon where you could get some fries and something to drink. Do you remember people inside their cars parked all along the fence because the flies were so bad? Do you remember the honking of horns if someone scored a run?

When I first went to Uranium City in 1958, I was in grade 5 at Shannon School. I have some fond memories of the place, like playing king of the castle on the snow piled up in front of the school. Billy Hallet was always the King. All the other kids would try to get him off the pile, but he was biggest kid in school and it never happened until the bell rang. Even though Billy was bigger than we were he never hurt anyone and we had great fun trying to dislodge him from his throne.

Next to Shannon School was Santa Barbara Parish, the Catholic Church. Being Catholic, have first communion and confirmation there as well as getting married there for the first time are all part of the memories I have of it. I remember most of the priests starting with Father Lhelgouach and Father Perron. I thought Father Perron was a saint. He was so meek and pious, he talked so quietly that you could hardly hear him. Father Lhelgouach on the other hand scared the hell out of us. He would catch us down town at the Bay on Saturday and ask us if we were going to be in church on Sunday. The only acceptable answer was "Yes Father Lhelgouach".

I remember going to church with my mother and seeing the people from SGA coming up the hill on Fredette Road to go to church, usually with Joseph Seggerts in the lead. The church is still there and in remarkable condition. As I have said before, I hope it remains that way. The Evangelical Church is also there but we didn't go into it, I still remember the big yellow school bus they used to gather their flock for the next service. If I'm not mistaken, I think it was Stan Rose who drove it. The United Church has been moved to Beacon Bible Camp at Ace Lake and is still being used by Pastor Jim Phafenroth in the summer. There used to be a short cut through the United Church parking lot to get down town, and may times while passing it I wondered what was going on in there but never went in because I was Catholic.

Do you remember the division between Catholics and Protestants? I think it began with the firing of one of the high school principles who I believe was Catholic. It had the students so upset that they went on strike and walked out of the school. The poor RCMP were trying to act as truant officers but as fast as they hauled the kids back to school, they just left again. I don't remember the out come but it seemed to divide the community for awhile.

Because all of us who went on this trip in 2002, Terry, Pat, Wayne and I all lived up toward the end of Fredette road we spent some time up there. Everyone's childhood home is gone, but like always the memories are still there. Like the toboggan run we used in the winter, the big gully behind Terry's house and the shortcut to the arena behind my fathers house.

How many of you remember that the first hockey arena burned to the ground? There are lots of stories about that.

The second hockey arena and curling rink are still standing though. Pam and I went there by ourselves, the other guys were doing something else. For some reason all the lights were still on and we went in. It was deathly quiet in there. It was almost like entering a sacred place. We went in through one of the side doors, walked around under the scoreboard and sat down in the bleachers. Some of the infrared heaters were even on. I closed my eyes and it was almost like a religious experience. So many memories came rushing back in rapid fire. I could see things like Mike Field cruising in front of the net waiting for the puck and the chance to

score with a quick backhand shot. I could see Walter Goetz tending the players' gate. I could see a break away with defenseman Wayne MacDonald skating backwards, his stick low to the ice defying the other player to get around him. I could see Denis Ewaschuk pacing back and forth on the first level of the stands bantering at the crowd and the players. I could still see Dana Spence with his striped referee sweater dropping the puck at centre ice and trying to get out of the way as the game began. In a quieter scene, I remembered Hap Cave making ice in his rubber boots and checkered wool coat. I could see families out for general skating, the young boys trying to impress the young girls and them doing their best to appear like they didn't care. We went into the players' dressing rooms and with a little imagination, you could still hear the joking that went on in there before and after the games. Down the hall you could look into the little room where Norbert Piesinger sharpened skates. We then walked out into the lobby where Hap's wife Slim sold coffee and other refreshments I always remember her smiling eyes. She seemed to really like kids, no matter how noisy we got. As we stood in front of the curling rink, it was easy to remember the shout of one of the skips to sweep and the loud whump whump whump of the corn brooms as the sweepers tried to coax the rock further down the ice. For me the arena had to have the strongest memories of the trip. Uranium City was a great sports town but that tended to diminish a bit after we got TV and glued ourselves to the boob tube.

From the Arena, we went to the High school. The school I went to is now only part of the new school. I guess that all changed when they had a fire. Some of it is still the way it was when I went though. Most of the lower classrooms are the same. Some of the hallways are the same and the gym is the same except the stage was removed. When I walked through it I couldn't help wonder why everything in it that could be broken was. It just seemed such a terrible waste. I didn't stay there long because I really didn't know much about the new school. In the older version of the Uranium City High school the Library was one of my favorite places, maybe that's why I like books so much. Some memories I have are hiding behind the flip top desks because some one brought a sling shot to school and we were trying not to get hit with a piece of flying chalk. I remember the springboard and horse that we did flips and dives over. I got to wondering if that's why my neck sometimes bothers me. I know I crashed a few times. I remember as soon as the bell rang all the kids headed straight for the gym if it was wintertime, which it was for most of the school year, to play basketball, badminton or floor hockey. The gym was also used for dances like the legion hall and the Eldorado gym was. I thought I would have had more memories of the place but so far, they haven't come back. Maybe they will if I get together with some of my old class mates, hopefully at the next reunion. One thing I do remember was something that happened at one of the ball games, after the new diamond and bleachers were built. Someone got a bit out of hand it seems and the RCMP locked him in the back of the paddy wagon. They then went back to watch the game but didn't empty his pockets. So with one thin dime he took apart the back door of the vehicle, let himself out and went back to the ball game too! Some of you will know whom I'm talking about and if he comes to the next reunion I'm sure he will tell you all about it himself. Thinking about the

high school, if any of you reading this have photos of events at the schools, it would be nice if you could bring them to the next reunion and share them.

The Hi-spot Café is gone and so is Gilchrist School. I spent quite a bit of time at the Hi-Spot, it's where I got together with many of my friends. After I went to work for Northern Oil Distributors, I used to stop for lunch there frequently. I was single and just didn't like to cook.

I went to grade 5 at Shannon, grade 6 in Prince Albert Sask. and when I came back, I went to the high school. I never went to Gilchrist School. So I don't know much about it. The only names that come to mind are Sam Gittermann and Denis Ewaschkuk. You will have to tell your own stories about Gilchrist School.

Like I said before, we just had to go to the town dump. When we were kids, we used to go there in the summer. Mostly to read comic books. The stores used to rip the outside cover off the unsold magazines and they went to the dump where we would go to read them. We also dug up some other publications that we shouldn't have been looking at, but we did if we could find them, if you know what I mean. It was also a great place to go with your 22-caliber rifle for target practice. There was no shortage of things to shoot at. It was against the law to shoot seagulls and ravens so there were hundreds of them all fighting over food scraps that were thrown out and the noise was never ending. The ravens were tougher but the seagulls could out fly them. Still if one seagull found a choice morsel, 5 of his buddies were all over him until he dropped it. When I stood at the dump looking over the edge at Frank Lake I couldn't help but think of Joe Albas. For years, Joe was the town garbage man. When I first went to Uranium City, we had garbage stands. Do you remember them? They were about 4 feet high and that is where you put your trash cans. The reason being was that Joe didn't have one of the modern low loading compactor trucks used today. He had a dark blue 3-ton GMC truck with a regular wooden box on it and the garbage had to be lifted over the side, which was quite high. I don't remember if Joe had a hired hand or not, maybe someone could help me with that, but I do know he often had his boys with him and if it was summer time, he might have a bunch of other kids riding in the back and helping too. You would never see that now a day. If a mother were to see her kid doing that now day, she would have a fit. She'd be scrubbing the kid with Lysol, but you know I never heard of anyone ever getting sick or getting hurt. I don't know if the kids now a day are over protected or if times have just changed. One thing I know about Joe Albas is the kids sure liked him. He was a very kindly man. Joe did a lot to keep the town clean. It's a shame he didn't get more thanks for what he did. How many "Sanitary Engineers" today would clean up your garbage stand if the dogs messed it up? Joe did!

One other place we spent quite a bit of time at during our visit was the cemetery.

The place is just over running with memories. It is still being looked after to a certain extent, the bush is kept out and the weeds mowed. Just about every gravesite brought back memories. Buried there are many of the people who made Uranium City the unique place it was. They added color and a certain spirit to the town. Men like Gus Hawker, Andy Fossen, Emil Mercredi. Fred Powder, Norbert Piesinger and Joey Chile just to name a very few that come to mind. We took photos and cleaned up some of the graves for friends who were unable to get there.

Terry replaced the grave marker on his Brother Anthony's grave. We spent a fairly long time just remembering friends and acquaintances who had gone on before us. It was a special time.

From there we headed for Bushell.

In the early years, before the bypass around the town was built and a sub division put in down by Cinch Lake, you got to Bushell from the very south end of Uranium road and still do.

Where they built the sub division was an area known as TMC. I'm only guessing but I think it stood for Technical Mines Corp. or something like that. We just called it TMC. There were a few old buildings, racks of core samples and a ball diamond there when I was a kid. There was just a narrow dirt road to get in there, but what always struck me as interesting was the park like setting. There was very little underbrush and the trees were far apart with a bed of low bush cranberries for a carpet. There was a place to launch a small boat or canoe, but no real boat launch. There was also a trail that lead to the creek, which joined Martin Lake to Cinch Lake. It was not very far and if you didn't mind getting a bit wet you could get across it. From the other side you could hike up to a high grade spot blasted into the side of the hill. If I remember right the Assmus boys and their friends boarded it up and used it as a cabin in the summer when they were young. The down stream side of the creek was a pretty good place to catch pike. Nothing really big, but a nice size to eat. I still remember how good that cold water pike was to eat, especially if you knew how to get rid of the Y bones when you filleted them.

Many things changed when the housing sub division went in, but the lake and creek remained the same.

If you stayed to the right at the TMC turn off you were on your way to Bushell. About ½ mile down the road on your right hand side was another road. This road went into Saint Michaels mine site. I remember there was a head frame there and some other building but I don't every remember it being in operation. Many of the smaller mines and high grade operations were all connected by common roads, and if I'm correct, they all took their ore to the Lorado mill for processing until that facility closed.

As you were approaching St. Mikes if you stayed to the right the road took you to Cazor Mines, which I think, was just closing when I got there in 1958. If it wasn't 1958, it could have been 1960. Maybe someone can help me with this. Cazor Mine was actually called Cazor Athabasca Mines but as kids, we only knew it as Cazor.

Myself, the Bachmeier boys, and many of the other kids living in the Jackpine Crescent area made many fishing trips there, either on foot or by bicycle. If you remember, you could get there from that end of town if you went past the DOT houses. Getting there by bike was OK but getting home was tough because of the infamous Cazor hill. It was long, steep and you had to push your bike up it.

If you were at Cazor and continued North West, you eventually got to a Mine site called Beta Gamma. It was another small operation but did have a small head frame and hoist. The road was very rough and not many people went out there by the time I got there in 1958. The Cazor mine dump and powder magazine were out on that road also.

Back to St. Mikes. If you turned left which I think was south, the road took you to Rix Mine and St Leonards adit, two more smaller mining operations. On the road between St Mikes and Rix were a number of high grade operations. From what I have been told, in the early years when Lorado was buying ore from the smaller mines it was profitable to find a pocket of high grade ore, hand pick it and haul it by truck to the mill. Like I said, a common road joined all these operations and as kids, we could get to them on our bicycles. What I remember about the High Grade operations was that in many cases you could still find discarded dynamite, caps and fuses. Pretty dangerous stuff to be playing with but we did!

From Rix and St Leonards the road connected up with the main road going to Bushell and Lorado Mill, but before we get there lets go back to the turn off to St. Mikes just after leaving Uranium City. If you were to continue toward Bushell the next turn off would be on your left. It would take you into Cinch Mine at the south end of Cinch Lake. To get to the mine you had to cross Crackingstone creek which flowed all the way to Lake Athabasca. Cinch Mine also had a head frame, and there was a back road that went to the Lorado Mill site which was shorter than going back out to the main road to Bushell. I don't know for sure but again I'm assuming that the ore from Cinch Mine went to the Lorado mill.

Back on the road to Bushell and just past the turn off to Cinch was Gut Lake. It was really just a wide spot in Crackingstone creek but had some huge Pike. I only knew a summer camp there as Fly camp. I remember a guy was living there one summer and I saw him dragging home a Pike that was from his shoulder to the ground. I can't remember his first name but I think his last was Macdonald. Pat Cardinal would remember.

Just past Gut lake on the right was the road into Rix mine, St. Leonards adit, and the high grade camps.

If you continued on your way toward Bushell, the next turn off to the left took you down across Crackingstone Creek and up a hill to the Lorado Mill site. In the early days, the road only continued on to Lorado mine I think. Later it followed the power lines that went from Wellington power station to Goldfields, with another road going south into Millikin Lake.

At the Lorado mill site was a large area where the mill tailings were dumped. It is now considered a huge environmental hazard. When I was young, no one gave it any thought! We just thought it was a good place to ride our dirt bikes! It's now posted with signs warning about the radiation danger.

Eventually the road went all the way to the Beaverlodge / Athabasca portage and on to Goldfields. When I was about 15 years old a friend of mine, Pat Cardinal and I went on a camping trip to Goldfields. Now a days camping seems to have changed. For the most part it's loading up the motor home and spending the weekend in a crowded RV park some where next to people you don't know. Back then it meant going somewhere remote. Somewhere where you wouldn't see anyone else.

The road to Goldfields hadn't been built yet when Pat and I went there so many years ago, so the best way to get there was by boat, if you had one big enough to risk the long trip around Crackingstone point, Gunnar mine and St Mary's channel. If you didn't have a big boat you could still get there by canoe if you were willing to

pack everything over the portage at the south end of Beaverlodge Lake. Remember the cemetery on the portage? It's still there and easy to find.

Picture this if you will 2 skinny kids with one waterlogged old prospector canoe, sleeping bags, groceries, 5 gallons of mixed gas, an axe a couple guns, hats, coats, fishing rods and an old 5 hp Hiawatha outboard motor that only ran with the throttle wide open. That's what we hauled across the Goldfields portage. Then motored out onto Athabasca Lake and around the point to Box mine.

To get to the portage in the first place we had to go from Kiwanis Beach through the narrows on Martin Lake, up the short creek between Martin Lake and Beaverlodge Lake. Thankfully the board walk built by the boat club was still there, and then across Beaverlodge to the portage over to Athabasca Lake. Having been back to the portage in 2002, I still don't know how two skinny kids managed to do it. It is a long way across and it's not flat. We had to carry all that stuff across the portage and back again. We could have bust bush from the portage to box mine but we wanted to use the canoe to get to the old town site of Goldfields.

In 2002, it was much easier we just drove out there. When Pat and I went in 1963 most of the buildings were still standing at Goldfields. You could climb up the head frame and see for miles in every direction. The ovens for melting the gold were still there. Not much is left now. Everything has been burned, but the steel framework for the old head frame still refuses to fall down. In 1963, the shaft was still open, the ladders were still there, there was air flowing through from an adit in the side of the hill and you could go down into it if you had a mine lamp. We looked for the old adit again and some of the ventilation raises in 2002 but didn't have time to find them again.

Back to the main road going out to Bushell. If you continued past the turn off to Lorado, you went up a hill to a flat spot on the right hand side of the road. If you looked very carefully, you would see a narrow road leading off into the bush. If you followed it, you would come to the Uranium City car cemetery! I don't know why it's there. I have been told when the bypass road went around Uranium City that Norbert Piesinger had to move his used cars and this is the place they got moved to. This may or may not be true because there seemed to be many more cars there than I remember Norbert having. There were even the old town buses there. Remember them! They were red and white and used to take the miners from Uranium City to the mines at Eldorado. They were also used as school buses for the students of Shannon School, Gilchrist School and the Uranium City High School before it was renamed Cando High School.

It appears that most of the cars abandoned in Uranium City when the mine closed ended up in this place. I know the very first car I owned was there, a 1960 Plymouth Fury.

After the car cemetery, it was only a mile or so to Bushell but before you got there and just past the power lines was the turnoff to Crackingstone Creek. It was only about ¼ of a mile in and across an old bridge to get to the spot where it flowed into Athabasca Lake. It's where the Arctic Graying came to spawn and were everyone went to catch them! The last place on the main road is Bushell itself but just before you got there, you came to the public docks and Percy Heron's cabin. Percy's place is gone and the docks have all fallen apart, but there are still a couple of other

cabins with people living in them. I think one might be Gilbert Powders but again I'm not sure.

At Bushell, there were 2 tank farms. The one that you could see from the road and another that most people didn't know about. It was on the left side of the road behind the hill, before you went around the corner to the big Imperial oil tank farm. I don't know for sure but I think I remember being told that the old tank farm was for Lorado mine and mill. Maybe someone else knows for sure?

Once you got to Bushell, the IOL tank farm and truck loading station were on the left and the NTCL bunkhouse and other buildings were on the right.

NTCL meaning Northern Transportation Company Limited, who owned and operated the tug boats and barges out of Fort McMurray. Remember the Tug boats. The Radium Miner, Radium Prospector, and the Radium Trader! In the early days, there was also the Radium Queen but it was wrecked in a storm on the big lake.

Remember Barge Tickets! It was a lottery were you tried to guess when the first Tug boat got to Bushell in the spring. I think first prize was something like \$200.00, which was quite a bit of money back then.

NTCL had a large Butler Bldg and docks at Bushell. Almost all the non perishable goods to the communities and the mines came to Uranium City by way of Bushell and NTCL. I guess in the really early years some stuff came by cat train, but that was before I got there.

I only remember one very small car that came to Uranium City on one of the airplanes. If it was too big for an airplane, it came either over the winter road or on the barges.

All the gasoline and heating oil came in the hulls of the barges. All the bunker fuel for the mine came in the hulls of the barges. They were big and could carry 600 tons of stuff. "Stuff" being anything the mines and the communities needed from booze to baby bottles. It all came on the barges. Of course, almost all of the perishable stuff was flown in by either Eldorado or PWA airlines but just about everything else came by boat until the lake froze over. Which meant the beer was pretty skunky by spring. Do you remember Skunky beer? Awful stuff!

I worked as a Warehouse checker for a couple of summers at Bushell and then worked for Duessault Transport and Raven for a number of years hauling freight to the mines and the other businesses in the area.

I stayed in the bunkhouse when I worked for NTCL and remember the fabulous meals we were served in the cookery.

Almost everything is gone now. The butler building is still there, some of the tanks and some of the docks, but I don't think the Tug boats ever stop there any more, maybe to deliver fuels for the bulk station, but again I don't know for sure. Since the mine closed, there just is not any need anymore and that pretty well says it all for the rest of the Uranium City Story. No mine, no nothing. Period.

Some people hung on for years afterward and the hospital stayed open but when it closed that was just about the end of Uranium City. The last I heard there were only about 50 people left. Sometimes I look back at what it was and I am saddened by what it has become.

In the fall of 1978, I was hauling the bunker fuel from Bushell to the tank farm at the Eldorado mine site. A job that “Bunker Fred” did for years. Everyone should remember Fred. All summer long you could see him in that red tanker truck going back and forth from Bushell to Eldorado. He was the first person on the road in the morning and the last person at night. He did that every summer for years. For some reason he didn’t return in 78 and I was doing the job. I was unloading at the tank farm when one of the mine supervisors came to see how I was doing and chat for awhile. We talked about the mine, of course, when it started and how long it had operated and how long it would continue to operate. Sometimes I wondered what would happen if it closed? It had been in operation for about 25 years! We thought it was probably good for another 25 though. It seemed so secure, so permanent.

That fall I moved to Alberta. I was working for Alberta Natural Gas in Calgary. It was in the early 80’s. We were in a recession here in Alberta. Interest rates were sky high and the price of housing was out of reach. We had heard there was a housing boom in Uranium City and that the mine was spending money like it grew on trees. It sure looked good from Calgary and I was going to return when we heard the mine was closing.

It was a sad day. Even for those who no longer lived there, but still continued to call it their hometown.

I apologize for any mistakes I have made in writing this. It all happened a very long time ago. I don’t claim to be completely correct about the things I have written here. They are just the way I remember them.

If I see you at the next reunion, I would be happy to have you correct some of my mistakes and fill in many of the things I have left out. I have only touched the surface of the picture that was Uranium City. It would be impossible to talk about everything. I have left out things, like working in the mine, at the mill or living in Eldorado. I have to leave those things to someone who knows more about them than I do.

There is so much that could be written about Uranium City, by so many other people. I hope some of you consider doing this. It’s easy, just type it out on your computer, email it to Len and he will post it on the Friends of Uranium City website.

My only intent in writing this story was to stimulate your own memories and hope that we can share them with one and other on the website or at the next reunion.

For many people Uranium City was the best place in the world to live and they look back at it with fond memories. Keep those memories alive. See you at the next reunion.

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PS. Because of the size of this story I have not included photos, but I will bring what I have to the reunion.

