

Olive Pearl Surring nee Watson (1921-

Submitted by Pearl O. Surring (nee Watson) and daughter Iris E. Johnson

Pearl was born April 19, 1921 on the family farm east of Weyburn, SW 114 of Section 19-843-W2nd. She was fifth in a family of six children. Her parents were Robert and Olive (Tatton) Watson. Her siblings were Louise, Jean, Ruth, Norman and Elwood.

They lived in a small three room house four miles east and one half mile south from Weyburn. There was a kitchen, living room, bedroom and porch. The bedroom had two double beds. Many times three children slept in one bed. There was a fold out couch in the living room. A tanned, dark brown horsehide robe was put on the floor between the couch and the sideboard (a piece of furniture for holding dishes). The children argued about who would sleep here. The living room also had a table and chairs. There was little spare time to make use of the living room. The kitchen was the main room used in the house. There was a dirt cellar which was entered through a trap door in the kitchen floor. Fruit and vegetables were stored here in winter.



Pearl's mother taught her to kneel and pray before going to bed. The prayer was
"Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my soul to keep
If I should die before I wake
I pray the Lord my soul to take"

This prayer was taught to Pearl's children in a similar manner. They gave thanks to God for every meal. The children were taught to do right and believe in God.

The Stoughton branch of the CPR railway ran through the Watson farm just south of the buildings. Frequent visitors were the men who rode the rails who were looking for food and water. Many times this was a frightening experience. There are memories of the "jigger" or "speeder", a small, low rail vehicle with gasoline engine which was used to transport work crews. The earliest ones moved when one or two men physically hand pumped them along. Then of course there was the never to be forgotten whistle of the train to announce its arrival at road crossings.

Pearl's grandparents lived in Ontario She visited them there only once (after her grandfather Tatton died) She (five) and Elwood (six months) travelled by train with their mother Olive to visit Grandmother Tatton. She remembers her mother being sick on the trip. The Tatton home was large, two stories. She disliked playing hide and seek with her cousins because she would get lost and scared. Grandfather Watson came to see them. Grandmother Tatton knit mitts and sent them to the children every Christmas.

Marmora School was one and one half miles north east from the farm. The children walked there in summer and drove a horse and cutter in winter. Brother Norman lit the morning fire (to heat the school) in the wood and coal furnace. The fire was banked (coals and ash raked up together to burn low) at night so that there would be some hot embers left to start a fire the next morning. They were paid ten cents to haul a five gallon can of water daily for drinking. There was a dipper from which everyone drank. School lunches were sandwiches, cookies/cake and an apple or orange carried in a lard pail. Pearl's favorite subjects were reading and spelling. Marmora played ball against Schneider and East Weyburn Schools. On February 14 homemade Valentine's would be exchanged with classmates. There were Christmas concerts. A stage was built. Pupils had recitations, drills and plays in which they performed. Santa Claus came. Sister Ruth was the one who told Pearl that there wasn't a Santa Claus. Pearl remembers one year dancing a highland fling and a sword dance. The teacher provided costumes for the children. Pearl took grades one to eight at Marmora and grades nine and ten by correspondence. Her dad had to pay a fifteen dollar tuition fee so she could take grade eleven at the Weyburn Collegiate. She rode a horse to school and was laughed at for doing so. A special memory is the time she won first at Farm Girl's Camp and received a gold watch.

After school clothes were changed. There were chores to do.... getting eggs, bringing in wood chips and wood with which to start the morning fires, bringing in the cows to be milked. One summer Pearl and Ruth milked fourteen cows morning and night. A memorable occasion was the time Ruth and Pearl were riding double on the horse, bringing the cattle from the pasture. Pearl was carrying a pitch fork (for protection from the bull) and it accidently touched the horse. She was thrown off breaking her arm. Barns were cleaned daily and straw was hauled from the stacks for fresh bedding. Water was pumped from a well for the cattle. The cattle would always be pushing each other to get in closer for a drink. A child's arms grew weary from the pumping. There were lots of horses. They grazed north of the school in the winter. Many times Pearl rode horseback to check on them. She felt very important to be able to do this. Another daily chore was cleaning and refilling the lamps. The coal oil lamps had glass chimneys which had to be washed and polished and wicks trimmed. Mantles on gas lamps had to be checked and air pumped into the base chamber. Clothes were washed on a scrub board. In later years there was a gas powered washing machine. It had to be cranked to start. Sometimes it wouldn't go.

Mother drove horse and buggy to Weyburn three times a week to sell a five gallon can of cream to the creamery. It was worth more if it was sweet.

Mother was a good cook. There was usually porridge for breakfast, Cream of Wheat, oatmeal or Sunny Boy with milk, cream and brown sugar. The family didn't drink coffee. They drank Postum and tea. Sunday dinner was special with dad carving the roast chicken. Plates were passed to him and he filled them. There would be pie or milk pudding for dessert. Sometimes her mother asked her to make a bread pudding dessert for supper. Well remembered is the smell of freshly baked homemade bread.

Birthdays were celebrated with a cake. A ring, button, penny and perhaps a nickel were baked in the cake. The children would eat a lot of cake for a chance to get one

of these treasures in their piece. There weren't any candles in those days.

There was always spring and fall housecleaning. The stove pipes were taken apart and the black soot cleaned out. The chimney was also cleaned. Calcimine was used on the walls. This was a wash with whiting as a base which was painted on. It also came in tints and was cheap. In later years paint was available.

May 24 was a school holiday so that's when they usually planted potatoes. During the summer the garden had to be weeded and hoed and vegetables picked. Pearl rode the horse while her dad guided the little cultivator between the rows. They called it scuffling. In the fall they hauled potatoes in a wagon box and sold them door to door in Weyburn. Vegetables, fruit and meat were canned in glass sealers in boiling water to preserve them for winter use. Pearl remembers bananas and strawberries being canned with rhubarb which added a little variety. At Christmas time turkeys were plucked, drawn and sold door to door. During winter, because of the cold, hens didn't lay many eggs. Mother would start saving them up for winter baking by storing them in waterglass in a stoneware crock in the dirt cellar. Pearl didn't like putting her hand down into that cold liquid to fish out some eggs. When she was very young she followed her dad as he did chores and felt very comforted when he said that he would always look after her.

The family didn't have much company and they didn't go anywhere at night. Once in a while Pearl would walk the half mile to Number 13 highway and catch a ride to Weyburn with Meyers on a Saturday night. The stores were open until 9:00 pm. It would be dark but she doesn't remember being afraid.

They didn't have a telephone or radio. Pearl would be asked to ride horseback to a neighbour's to use their phone for a business call.

Mr. and Mrs. McConachie were family friends. On occasion Olive would leave the children with them for a short time. They were very kind. Neil McKinnon's were related to Robert Watson. They had a big, beautiful home that was special to visit. Visits were exchanged with the Vandendriessche's. Pearl remembers staying with her friend Jean McCormick. She was allowed to go to barn dances for a short time as long as she was in a group.

Pearl would have liked to design clothing but there was no money for further education. After grade eleven Pearl did housework for different people. She worked for her sister, Louise and Gordon Trudgeon for five dollars a month. At this time you could buy a dress for three dollars. Pearl rode a bicycle nine miles to their home. Louise, being the eldest in the family, was the one who "fought" the battles for freedom as a teenager. This paved the way so that it was easier for the younger siblings.

The children attended Calvary Baptist Church in Weyburn. Sometimes her parents went to church on a Sunday night and Pearl would accompany them. The minister, Tommy Douglas, came to their farm to visit, the only minister to ever do so. He and his wife Irma were very friendly and helpful. In winter sometimes they would go to a

service held in the Relne home. One of the sons, George, was studying to be a minister. He would conduct Sunday School classes for the children at Marmora school. Usually after breakfast on a Sunday during the winter the family would gather in the living room and dad would read the Bible lesson from the Free Press Weekly newspaper. The family took turns reading Bible verses, then discussing them. Pearl's first bible was given to her by Calvary Baptist Church. Her Sunday school teacher, Bertie Cowan, printed verses in it.

Pearl met her husband Gilbert Surring at a "jitney" dance on Railway Avenue on a Saturday night. It was love at first sight. Mrs. Williamson played the piano by ear. Sherman Thumb accompanied her on the violin. The music was free. (A jitney was a slang term for a nickel. Each man would pay a nickel to dance with a girl.) They would tie the horses they had ridden behind McKinnon's store.

They were married December 14 1939 at the United Church manse by Reverend Homer Lane with Jean Watson and Bill Roome as their attendants. Pearl's dress was a royal blue color. A supper for a few family members was held at Pearl's parents' home. Gilbert's parents were leaving for the US the next morning so they honeymooned at the farm. They lived with Gilbert's parents on the farm nine miles southwest of Weyburn to begin with and helped his Dad farm. Pearl helped her father-in-law milk the cows.

The story is told about the night Gilbert was up walking the floor with their first born crying daughter, Iris. His mother got up, gave Iris a little brandy and covered up her cold feet which were sticking out of the blanket. That solved the problem and everyone was able to get some sleep. One winter they lived In Weyburn while Gilbert drayed coal with a team and sleigh. The horses were kept in the livery barn. They had to be fed, watered and harnessed each morning before breakfast. When the noon whistle (at the city Power House) blew, the horses headed back to the barn on their own. They knew it was break time. Coal had to be carried upstairs at the Leader Store. Gilbert and brother Elmer later bought this team from Rick Smith. Their names were Nell and Luce. They each had their own side of the whipple tree to which they could be hitched. If not done properly the horses would not stand still but would twist and turn entangling themselves and the harness.

A granary was hauled east across the road from Gilbert's parents. In this new home they painted the walls a light blue. Gilbert made a table and they bought four chairs for a dollar each. It was very cold in winter. Pearl adapted to a very different style of cooking. Surring's loved homemade noodle soup so she learned how to make this. They also ate a lot of fried food such as potatoes which were then cooked in cream. She fried pork and stored it in lard in stoneware crocks. Pearl's English parents were more used to boiling/roasting their food. Countless sealers of chicken and beef were canned. If company came she could get a meal together in a short time. The story is told that their first born daughter Iris(1940) as a toddler fell into a washtub of cold water, eyes wide open underwater. What a shock! Fortunately Pearl was right there and quickly snatched Iris out. No harm done except for a frightening experience.

Gilbert's parents helped supply them with groceries. Son Nevin was born in 1943 and

daughter Valorie in 1948.

Pearl sewed clothing for herself & her children. She was self-taught. In later years when she and Gilbert round and square danced, she made matching dresses, shirts and vests as this type of clothing wasn't available otherwise. She also learned to knit and crochet. She made many socks, mitts, scarves and toques.

Gilbert's mother, Ethel, passed away in March 1942 and his Dad, Edward, moved to Alberta. Brother Elmer and Fanny moved back to the farm. The brothers farmed together. The house was partitioned so that they shared living quarters. This was a two story house heated with coal and wood and in later years by oil. Grain was grown. Cattle, pigs, chickens and turkeys were raised. Water was hauled by barrel for both house and barn by horses pulling a stoneboat. In the winter snow was melted in a boiler on the cookstove. Horses pulled implements in the field and were used for transportation. Pearl and Fanny drove teams for the bundle wagons during harvest. There were two elevators (opened in 1929) to which grain could be hauled, Grassdale (2 1/2 miles west) and Union Jack (2 miles north). Initially US custom combiners were hired to harvest the fields as Gilbert didn't own a combine. One year Fanny and Pearl set out 100 cabbage plants. Elmer was disking, forgot about them and disked them out. The women gardened together and shared doing the chores. Pearl was the one to ride horse back to get the cows as this was something she had done all her life. Chickens were killed and eaten the same day. Fanny would hold the legs and Pearl would chop off the head. Then together they would scald, pluck, singe (burn off excess hair), and gut the birds, followed by careful washing and soaking in cold water with further removal of any pin feathers.

Because there was a shortage of pasture each spring, cattle were herded to the Laurier Community Pasture. They were brought home in October.

In 1946 Elmer and Fanny bought the R. H. Guest farm and moved there to live.

Weyburn Dairy (1948-1960) was operated by Charles Ferguson. Gilbert & Elmer sold milk there sharing duties with the neighbors to deliver it. During winter it was taken by horse and sleigh to Grassdale to be put on the train for delivery. The incoming train with its shrill whistle would at times spook the horses and it took a great deal of effort to prevent a runaway. Passengers could also board the train if they had business or needed something from Weyburn.

Iris, Nevin and Valerie attended Weyburn Plains School which was two miles south of the farm. Iris walked to school during the fall and spring of her first year. In the winter Gilbert drove her with a team and sleigh. Later a two-wheeled one horse cart was built and was the means of travelling to school for the children. Sunday school/church was also held at the school with different denominations attending. Local mothers taught the children. Anyone absent was very much missed. It took the effort of everyone to make this a success. There was an annual sport's day for all the district schools each spring. Students competed in races, jumping (standing, broad, and high jump), and ball throw. Competitive ball games ended the day. At the end of June there was always a school picnic. Ice cream was purchased in five

gallon insulated containers as a special treat. The Wheat Pool also put on an annual picnic at which they showed films with a movie projector. This was done outside the school.

The annual Christmas concert was a community affair. The teacher put great effort into this production with each child given parts in recitations, songs, costume drills, plays and a final nativity scene. Then a stomping of hoofs on the roof and a jingle of bells announced the arrival of Santa Claus to the very excited pupils. Gifts from the teacher and parents and bags of candy with an orange and nuts (from the school board) were handed out. The school room was a magical place with the scent of the decorated Christmas tree, gas lantern lighting, many people, the aroma of coffee and anticipation of lunch.

Roads were not graveled so when it rained or when winter came horses were used to get around. In the winter a trail was broke across country to make the trip to Weyburn with team and sleigh

Christmas, New Year's and Thanksgiving were celebrated with Elmer, Fanny and family. Our two families alternated cooking the meals. It was always fun. We got together to celebrate birthdays with a special meal, birthday cake and ice cream. Gilbert and Pearl shared April 19 as a birth date although Gilbert was a year older.

Saturday nights the family went to Weyburn to get groceries and supplies. In later years the trip was made in the afternoon and the children would have lunch at Snelgrove's café, then attend the afternoon show at the movie theatre.

In the late 1940s and 1950's before rural electrification, butchered meat was stored at Weyburn Quick Freeze operated by Russ Blood. This was a locker plant on Main Street which rented space to store frozen food.

Iris boarded with Gilbert's sister Beatrice in Weyburn for grade nine. The next year a panel van picked up students over a large area travelling fifty miles one way to take them to the Weyburn Collegiate. Iris got on the bus at seven o'clock each morning.

Once year a trip was taken to Weekes, SK to visit friends (Wolstenholmes). Only three could ride in the Fargo 1/2 ton truck so a tarp was brought along for the box of the truck where the other children rode. It was quite comfortable with blankets and pillows. They were able to purchase a car in the mid 50's and a trip was taken to visit relatives in the USA. In 1987 Pearl and Gilbert took an enjoyable 18 day bus trip to Nashville, TN. USA.

In 1978 they bought a house in Weyburn and farmed from there for the next three years. That winter Pearl worked in the kitchen at the curling rink. They delivered Meals on Wheels, danced and exchanged visits with many friends.

There weren't any musical instruments in the Watson home but music played a big part in the Surring home. Gilbert's sisters played the piano. He played the banjo and his brothers played the violin. After their marriage Gilbert and Elmer played for many

school house dances. Often they received little or no pay. Years later their sister Ethel joined them to play at Senior Centres and nursing homes, Souris Valley Special Care Home and the Communithons in Weyburn. They sometimes played at the silver and golden wedding anniversaries of people for whom they had played at their weddings. They all played by ear, not by note.

Iris became a teacher. She married Walter Johnson from Pangman, SK. They had three children, Marion, Reid and Chara.

Nevin took training in Weyburn as a psychiatric nurse. He married Diane Zimmer (1944-2001). They had one daughter, Shanda (1964-2006). Two daughters, Naomi and Tanya were born to Nevin and his second wife, Jean Munro (1945-2002).

Valorie took a secretarial course. She married Murray Charlton (1946-1988). They had three sons, Barclay, Ryan, and Chad. She is presently married to Rod McLeod, Maxim, SK

Beef cattle were raised 1963-1978. Land was rented from Fletcher's 1964-1986. Gilbert's health was failing in the early 1980's. In 1989 the farm was rented to Don Payak. Iris and Walter rented it 1991-1997. Valorie and Rod rented it in 1998 and are still farming it. Gilbert passed away February 18, 1992. Pearl sold the house in 2000 and moved into a suite. In 2011 she moved to Crocus Villa.

Some of the most important lessons learned from life which guided Pearl were: take one day at a time, always do your best, accept what life deals you, work is a great healer, try to be there for your family. A small plaque hung in their home for years which read "Happiness lies in liking things you have to do, not in doing things you like to do".

Pearl has 9 grandchildren (one deceased) and 13 great grandchildren.

Thank you Mother for being such a positive influence in our lives. We are celebrating your 94th birthday in 2015. We are all grateful for your love, understanding and patience throughout the years.

Our thanks to God for a wonderful mother.



Gilbert & Pearl Surring Family on their 50th Wedding Anniversary in 1989. Back row – Iris & Valorie Front Row, Gilbert, Pearl and Nevin