

Gray, Alex (Sandy)

by Janette (Gray) Lewis

The Autumn of 1924 saw the closing of the Railway Terminal at Lucerne, B.C., and the exodus of CN employees began. A few families ventured as far as Kamloops and on to Port Mann near Vancouver. Others went west to Blue River which was made the first terminal in B.C. The remainder, the greatest number, travelled east to Jasper. The Sliters, Bollis, Youngs, Seagers, Fellows, Jacobsons, Weavers, Reillys, Blackstocks, Watkins, Griffiths, Grays, Kramers and others, most arriving in Jasper 31 October 1924.

Some of these families purchased houses in the east end of the town. These houses were built by the CNR specifically for these families and could be purchased for the grand sum of \$3,000.00 (a great deal of money in those days). The inside of these homes were exactly alike, but the exterior had to be unique. Of course, the home owners were not allowed to purchase the land since Jasper, being a National Park, only allowed them to draw a lease for 99 years for same.

The Gray family purchased one of the four houses on the front street (now 110 Connaught Drive), a great transformation from the box car made home in Lucerne. My father, Alex (Sandy) Gray, was the Car Foreman and responsible for keeping the rolling stock

in good repair. My older brother Alex was a machinist in the Shops, and my sister, Elizabeth Gray-Rimmer, was secretary to the Locomotive Foreman. She later left the railway and then became employed by Mr. Jackman at the Post Office. She and her good friend, Cathy Lewis-Barrow, spent many years there.

The people of Jasper were very sports-minded and each year the Elks had their Winter Carnivals including competitions for the Carnival Queen. My sister Elizabeth (Bessie) had the honour of being chosen Queen for the year 1925, with the other contestants being Joan Robson and Myrtle Berry.

In November 1928, Bessie married Golf Professional James Rimmer, and they travelled to Jamaica where they spent the winter months, returning to the Jasper Park Lodge for the summer season. Their home was a cottage on the Golf Course between the 16th and 17th holes. At that time, Mr. Purdy was in charge of the Golf Course, and after he left, Charles Duncan and Mr. Brinkworth took over as Manager and Greenskeeper. On 8th April 1930, my nephew Ted Rimmer was born, the fourth baby born at the then new Seton Hospital. They moved to Halifax in 1934 where Jimmy was employed at Ashburn Golf & Country Club, again as Golf Pro. He was known to have many "holes-in-one" on the Jasper course. My nephew Ted kept his family tradition alive by working for the Greenskeeper during the summer months.

My brother Jim attended school in Jasper and then



Ted Rimmer with Grandma Gray, 1930.

worked at the Club House with our brother-in-law Jimmy Rimmer. He later worked for the CN in Edmonton with the Electrical Department before moving back to Jasper as a CN Constable in the company's Police Department. In 1943, Jim joined the Air Force and went overseas to serve his country, as did so many other young men. After the war, he returned to Jasper and joined the running trades, and then moved to Edmonton with his wife Ethel until he retired in 1974. They moved to Victoria for several years before both passed away.

My brother Alex, as already mentioned, also worked for CN for many years before retiring in 1955 and moving to Victoria where he and his wife Ivy still reside. Both, presently in their 90's, have enjoyed many happy years together.

A little background about **my early days**. I attended Jasper School where I had such fine teachers as both Miss Ethelyn and Miss Hilda Austin, Miss Pinchbeck, Miss McMahan, Mr. Hollingshead, Mr. Conway, Miss Tory, Miss Christie, Mrs. McNaughten, and Miss Mathieson. Miss Mathieson was Principal and she eventually moved to Winnipeg where once again our paths did cross. Some of my friends were Rita Sliter, Phyllis Webb and Robena McCulloch. I also worked with Noni Jones for a few years and we became good friends.

The summers in Jasper were filled with sports activities at the old ball grounds. Each spring, a "May Queen" was chosen. I believe Mollie Routledge was chosen Queen in 1933, and then yours truly in 1934.

In the summer of 1936, I went to work at Jasper Park Lodge doing office work as well as waiting tables. Then in 1942, keeping with the family tradition, I began my career with CN in the Yardmaster's Office. Later, I moved to the Ticket Office where I first met my future husband. John Lewis was with the Passenger Department, stationed at the Lodge, working under Tom McDonough, better known as the "man with the big hat."

In the late 1930's and 1940's, many an enjoyable Saturday evening was spent at the Lodge. For years, Mark Kenny and his Band of Renown was the well known Lodge Orchestra. In the winter, the band would move on to Winnipeg, and play at the Royal Alex Hotel (A CP Hotel).

After a whirlwind courtship, in January, 1947, I gave up my career with CN to begin my new life as Mrs. John Lewis. We were married in Jasper, a small intimate ceremony at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Jones, after which we hopped on the "Honeymoon Train" bound for Winnipeg as my husband had just been transferred. Although Winnipeg was considered home, my husband was



Janette and Jimmy with Dad (Sandy Gray). First vehicle, 1925.

transferred several more times (Edmonton, 1953-56; Winnipeg, 1956-64; Saskatoon, 1964-67; Winnipeg, 1967-70) before retiring as Area Passenger Sales Manager in Winnipeg in 1970 after 45 years of service. We enjoyed more than 43 years together before he passed away in 1990. CN is still in the family. My daughter Janet now has 22 years of service with CN in Winnipeg.

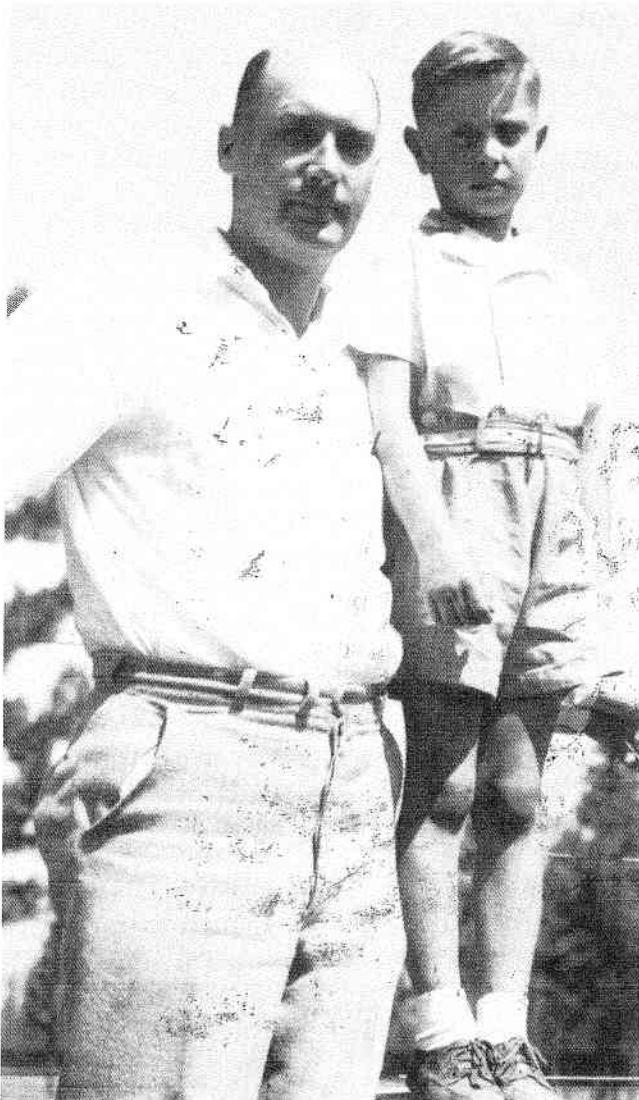
In 1926, the Gray family became the proud owners of their first vehicle, an open air Dodge Touring Car. Driving in the Jasper area could prove to be quite interesting or perhaps hair raising would be a better description. Also in 1926, the residents of the town held the first service in memory of Nurse Edith Cavell. The journey to the foot of Mt. Edith Cavell was very treacherous and parts of the road winding up to the mountain narrowed to a single lane including six hair-pin turns in all. Many cars had to be parked about one and a half miles from where the service was held. There was also the naming of magnificent Angel Glacier, Mount Sorrow and Lake Forgiveness at its base.

The Seton Hospital was built in 1929 and my father, along with many dignitaries, was invited to attend the "turning of the sod" ceremony when building of this hospital began. Dr. O'Hagan, the attending physician, was a very fine gentleman and was greatly respected by everyone. He had two small terrier dogs that went everywhere with him, house calls, hospital visits, etc. Pepper and Peter were well known in the community.

Being a railroad town, the residents of Jasper showed great community spirit when faced with the tragedy of train wrecks, rallying together when the dreaded "Emergency Whistle" blew. My father, being Car Foreman, had to immediately make his way to the site of the wreck. Other Jasper residents also did their part by immediately opening shop to fill the

much needed grocery and supply orders for the men who had to attend the wreck. These included such fine people as the Jefferys, Webbs, Seagers, Robinsons and Newmans. Naturally the Doctor, nurses and first aid people were also there to render immediate service. Other helpers included Mr. Woodcock, McConnell, Watson, Harrison, Davies and many more who made up the work crew. They would sometimes be away from home for up to 10 days during the clean up.

One of the most tragic wrecks that I recall was a head-on collision four miles west of Jasper near the siding Wynd. It happened early afternoon on a Fall day in 1929 involving two freight trains, one carrying lumber and the other carrying cattle. There were dead and dying cattle strewn all over. Engineer Drag Watkins was killed instantly while one of the Brakemen, Eddy Bragg, died in hospital a few days later as a result of his injuries.



Alex Gray Jr., with Ted Rimmer, 1934.

The depression of the early 1930s saw many changes and unemployment in Jasper. Some residents had to seek employment elsewhere and many of the younger people from Eastern Canada “rode the rods” to get to B.C. to a warmer climate with the hopes of finding some form of work. For some however, it was novelty; many young people such as my brother Jim, along with his friends Ches Bowen and John Buckham, rode the rods to Vancouver and back. Living close to the main line, my mother often fed four to five transients each day. Some would offer to do some small chores, such as chopping wood as a way to earn their lunch. Sometimes, there would be entire families at the door seeking food. They never went away hungry from our door.

The Government eventually stepped in and gave employment to many as part of road construction gangs on some of the highways around the park area. My brother Jim, like so many others, obtained work driving Government trucks at these camps earning a whopping \$5.00 per month including their room and board.

In the early part of 1939, the then reigning Monarchs, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, toured Canada travelling from coast to coast aboard the Royal Train. There was much fanfare for this tour. Naturally, security was strong and the equipment in A1 condition. It was a once in a lifetime experience for those dedicated subjects of the Crown. All were on constant alert and each employee personally involved with this special train received a gold sovereign from the Royal Family.

Other special trains included the Silk Trains in the early 1920's. The coaches on the trains were completely sealed to protect the raw silk and no one



Tom McDonnough, Sandy Gray, Jasper 1941.

was allowed near them. During refuelling stops, guards with rifles could be seen everywhere. These trains travelled at the extraordinary speed of 60 miles per hour -a great speed in those days.

On other occasions, train loads of Chinese people would pass though town. They too were highly guarded as they were travelling "In Bond." My father would at times have to accompany these trains while under his jurisdiction. These trains were carrying these men to different areas that were in need of a great deal of manual labour.