

Robinson, James

Robinson, William & Alice

Children: James, Bill, Len

Robinson, James and Mildred

Children: Kathleen, Ivan, Evelyn

Hearst Relatives: Bill Robinson, Al Wilson

Fun, Friends and First Job in the Thirties by Ivan (Robbie) Robinson

Father, James Robinson, was born in Brockville, Ontario, in 1900. He had two brothers, Bill and Len. Grandfather, I understand, was a coal contractor for the railway. I don't know where my grandparents were born or how they arrived in Brockville, but, somehow, the family ended up in Hearst just before or during World War I. My first memory of my grandparents was my frequent visits to them as a preschooler, via our backyard to their well-established house, horse stable and outbuildings behind us on George Street—she always gave me cookies! I first remember Uncle Len and his wife and their two girls, Iris and Eileen, in Hazel, before they moved to Timmins, where he worked for Hollinger Gold Mines. My Uncle Bill and Aunt Edith lived twenty miles east in Mattice with my cousins, Bill, Madeline and Marjorie. Marjorie (Robinson) Chartrand now lives in Kapuskasing.

Mother, Mildred (Anderson) Robinson, was born in Brantford, Ontario, in 1900. Grandfather Tom Anderson was born near Aberdeen,

Scotland, and Grandmother Elizabeth (Parker) Anderson in Scaisbrick, Lancashire, in 1877. (I have her last passport.) Tom Anderson was an engineer and, having worked on the construction of the Firth of Forth bridge, came to Canada to work on the new Halifax Bridge. (I still have his draughting instruments.) Later, he became a Crown Land agent in Northern Ontario, which is where Mother and Father most probably met. My grandparents later moved to Waterford, Ontario. It was a treat to for me to be sent from Hearst down to Waterford via train as a young child, under “conductor supervision,” for a month's holiday in the summer. She was a nurse and travelled back and forth to England many times.

We were a family of three children, my older sister Kathleen, myself (Ivan) and my younger sister Evelyn. We had a happy, carefree childhood. I remember in the very early days (preschool) we had a Ford touring car, and when we went out for a drive in the country, we

always tied on two wooden planks to get us out of the muskeg holes on the road. Alas, I also remember getting flats every twenty miles or so and having to stop, patch, pump and replace them. We weathered the Depression years of the '30s quite well, since Father had a secure job with the CNR. I remember Mother handing out lots of sandwiches for men, "riding the rods."

We had good friends and neighbours and grew up with, among others, the West, Trowsse, Wilson and Koski families. School was so much more enjoyable and rewarding with outstanding teachers like Miss Nancekieville, Una Harris and, especially, Jim Parkhill. I was fortunate to have such role models as Roddy Chalykoff, Dr. Frank Kinnaird, Don Elmslie, Jim Parkhill and Harvey West Sr., who were, among other things, Sunday School teachers, Boy Scout and Trail Ranger leaders. St. Paul's United Church and their Young People's Group (sparked by the St. Paul's Hospital nurses) were strong influences on we youngsters. They put on a lot of fantastic concerts and box lunches in the church basement that I still remember, fanning my determination to get to Sunday school each Sunday. Christmas concerts were a big event in Hearst with Harvey West Sr. keeping we youngsters posted as to the arrival of Santa. I recall the many times when Winnifred Wilson and I were recruited and coached by Dr. Margaret Arkinstall to sing duets. The West family, one of my favourites,

lived diagonally across the street from us and had a large tent with a wooden floor. We spent many wonderful hours playing there with Gwennie, Jackie and Howard. Harvey was older, more the age of Kathleen. Grace and Terry hadn't arrived on the scene, as yet. We also were often invited to their summer cottage for a week or so up at the "Big Lake." What a time we had.



Kathleen Robinson -1938



Ivan Robinson -1940 Evelyn Robinson -1940

I remember the long cold winters riding around town on Grandfather's horse-drawn sleigh with my pet chicken under my arm. Was it to keep me warm? I don't know how or why I chose a chicken. We kids also would hitch onto sleighs to go back and forth through town. I remember skiing, snowshoeing, skating, hockey, frozen toes and heels and the pain of thawing out. Saturday matinee movies for 10¢, with the film breaking every twenty minutes, were also impressive. We would often drive to Kapuskasing with our Sunday school teacher, Dr. Kinnaird, to see a special movie. Another big event was driving to Mattice to see Uncle Bill and family in our Graham Paige car and

sounding our klaxon-like horn as we crossed the long bridge over the Missinaibi River to warn them that we were coming. So many memories!

I recall cutting Fred Smith's (our immediate neighbour) lawn for 10¢ a week. It took me all morning with a hand mower, but put me first in line for a job at his Variety Store beside the Queen's Hotel. I worked there on weekends and summer holidays as a young teenager. What a treat when he opened a soda bar and I became a soda jerk, and at sixteen, started driving his pickup truck, delivering pop around town and to the outlying villages.

Fred Smith married Mary Knipprath, the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Knipprath, who owned the Queen's Hotel adjoining and connected to Fred's Variety Store. Mr. Knipprath was to later provide the town with its first electricity via diesel generators. Mrs. Knipprath was special. She had the biggest heart in town. Before Fred Smith started his Variety Store, she ran a candy store on the premises. Each Saturday I remember running up there with my weekly allowance of 2¢ and spending about a good fifteen minutes deciding what to buy. All the time Mrs. K would be beside me suggesting and describing. When finished, she always gave us a little extra. A few years later came a horrible catastrophe! Fire broke out one night and gutted the place. It was rebuilt and Fred Smith took it over. Each and every Sunday, for

as long as I worked in the store, Mrs. K would load up two of the largest paper bags with oranges, apples, bananas, etc, call a cab and head over to the hospital to hand out fruit to the patients. What a dear soul!

After Grade 9, I went to Kapuskasing to finish high school, since it wasn't available in Hearst. Francis Flood and I commuted to Kapuskasing by train each week, and I later came back to Hearst for Grade 12, as a new high school had been built across from St. Paul's Hospital. After high school, I joined the army and applied for the paratroops.

My two sisters started to work at the hospital shortly after I went off to Kapuskasing, and then Kay met and married Clarence McArthur, an Algoma Central Railway policeman. He shortly went off to war in the Provost Corps, and she went to work in Toronto for the duration of the war. My dad joined the Armies' Railroad Battalion and was soon off to the war, also. At this point, my mother and Evelyn moved to Stratford for the duration and worked in a meat packing plant. Here Evelyn met and married William (Bill) Slater, who soon joined the navy and was off to sea. In the meantime, I was sent off for basic and advanced army training, then to Brockville for officer training and my commission. After graduation, I was posted to Simcoe as a training platoon commander. The army must have lost me, for I was in Simcoe

training troops for about nine months until I asked our adjutant why I was there so long. After his enquiry, I was finally posted to the First Canadian Paratroop Battalion in Shilo, Manitoba. After my paratroop training, I waited for my overseas posting, but VE Day came along first and I was discharged.

Out of the army, I enrolled in the veterinary program at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph, where I was smitten by a lecturer (Mary Boake), whom I married the following year. We have been married for sixty years. Our path has taken us to Cornell University, where I did two years post-grad work, Toronto, where we started the Downsview Veterinary Hospital and, finally, in retirement to Victoria, B.C. Along the way we raised four wonderful children: Douglas, Julie, Peter and Bonnie.

My parents settled in Palmerston after Dad came back from overseas and he resumed his work with the CNR. Mom died in 1955 and Dad in 1959. Kathleen and Clarence moved to Sault Ste. Marie when he returned and became a conductor for the ACR. Kay worked at the local hospital until she retired at sixty-five. She accidentally drowned in 1989. They had three children: Duncan, Lynne and Cheryl. Evelyn and Bill bought a house in Stratford after leaving the navy and they had three children, Barbara, Garry and Joseph. Bill died in 2000 and Evelyn in 2001, both from cancer.

