

Bies

Bies, Jan & Anna

Children: Olga, Anne, John, Rudy, William, Martha, Ernest

Hearst Relations: Siska (Anne)

Finding Bradlo by Anna (Hucko) Bies and Jan Bies

Editor's Note: This is a compilation of two family stories, one written by Anna Hucko Bies in 1978 and the other by Jan Bies in a taped interview with his grandson Russell Siska in about 1975.

Anna (Hucko) Bies' Story:

This is the story of my life from the time that I married Jan Bies. I am from the Hucko family, Martin Hucko's daughter. My mother Eva was from the Stancik family. I lived at Hodulov Vrch (Slovakia) and my husband was from Hrasne.



Anna and Jan Bies Wedding, -Feb.8,1932

After our wedding we were together until April 3, 1932, when my husband went back to Canada. I remained with his mother, Judita Bies. My life was

neither that of a married person nor a single person, and I was now carrying my first child, Olga.



Anna and Olga Bies -Slovakia -1933

In June 1933, my father gave me money for passage to Canada. Olga and I left on the ocean liner *Montrose*, and we stepped on Canadian soil on July 22, 1933, in Quebec City. We went by train to Hearst, and by car to the Slovak colony south of town, and walked two miles to the farm. This was not really a farm, but a forest. I had \$70 left from my

passage money to Canada that my husband used to buy a horse.

I was in those forests for nine months before I went to the nearby town by horse and wagon. In town, I felt stupid because I could not speak English, only Slovak. It was a real hardship for me.



Anna and Olga Bies –Bradlo 1935

The people who lived on the farms all came from Slovakia. They had to cut the trees and clear the land. They pulled out the tree stumps by horse. The stumps were piled and burned. We began to cultivate the fields that we cleared. Everyone was doing this. There were large fires on every farm. In 1934, the church and the home next to it burned down. I hurt myself drawing water from the well. We were pouring water on this huge fire. The flames were burning under our feet. There was smoke everywhere. We could not see. These were our beginnings in Canada as pioneers.

We lived from the money that we made by cutting wood. The amount of wood that we were allowed to cut was determined by our marital status. Those who had wives and children were allowed to cut 100 cords of wood. They had to cut, peel and deliver it from the forest to the railroad siding, where they loaded it onto train cars and were paid \$4.20 a cord. The company gave you a contract for your wood, after you got a permit from the government for your quota. The general store would take your contract and advance you food, clothing and other staples. When you received your money, you went to the store to pay your bills. The money usually did not cover your costs and you had to pay the difference. There was nowhere to get this money from. Our life was hard, but God helped us. We worked hard, but we were young then. We did not have electricity, gas stoves, or automobiles. We would go to town by horse and wagon. If you had no horse, you walked eight miles and you brought your supplies home on your back.

My husband, Jan Bies, came to Canada the first time in 1927 as an immigrant. He arrived in Quebec City on May 13, on the ship *Montnairn*. Canada was looking for agricultural settlers for Western Canada. Then you could only come to Canada if you agreed to work on the farms. He worked on the farms until 1930 and then went back east looking for work.

Jan Bies Story: (*dictated to his Grandson, Russell Siska, in 1975*)

In the 1930s it was the worst because of the Depression. I was out west on the farms. I left the west hopping freight trains. There were 200 or 300 men riding on top of the boxcars. The railway police always tried to kick us off, but some of us got

through. Sometimes the conductor was kind and warned us that there would be a big force of police waiting for us at the next stop. He would slow the train down to let us off, and we walked through the town and got back on the train on the other side.

It was November and very cold and one sympathetic conductor let us ride in an empty boxcar near Sioux Lookout. When we came to Hearst, we were sound asleep and didn't realize they had unhooked our car in the yard. That's the first time I was in Hearst. There was a tough CNR cop here in Hearst who chased us off the train and wouldn't let us back on. We tried for two days and we couldn't get on. I met some people from Bradlo in Chalykoff's or West's store, who were speaking Slovak. That's how I first heard about the Slovak colony at Bradlo. Since we couldn't get back on the train, we walked down the tracks to Mattice. We were planning to hop the train when we saw a bunch of policemen approaching, so we ran to the ticket counter and bought tickets to Kapuskasing.

In Kapuskasing we went to Spruce Falls and got jobs cutting logs, but the pay was poor, only four cents for a sixteen-foot log. It was very difficult work, and you needed to work together with friends to get anything done. Spruce Falls at that time took advantage of men, charging \$1.05 a day for lodging, and you had to buy your own bucksaw blade, axe and files, so most of the boys lost money. We worked there for about six weeks, up to Christmastime, when we were laid off. Then we heard about the Fraserdale hydro construction project near Cochrane.

There were thousands of men in Cochrane looking for work. We heard that the job was pretty

dangerous, and many people got hurt and even killed during construction, so we were scared off. Finally in February, after camping in the bush in freezing weather, sometimes fifty below, we decided to go and see for ourselves, but it was hard getting in. They had armed police and security stationed around the camp. I managed to sneak in, but was stopped in the yard where a guy in plainclothes asked for my badge. I managed to convince him that I was just looking for a job and had been living in the bush waiting for a chance for a month. He helped me get a job that same day. My brother was still waiting in the bush, and after a few days, I was able to sneak him into the bunkhouse and hid him under my bed. I would sneak food for him from the cook shack. He would sleep in my bed, and I would sleep in other workers' beds when they were on shift. After about a week, he also got a job there.

I got a job in the mixing plant unloading the cement. The cement came loose in the boxcars, sixty tons to the car. Four men unloaded each car and we were paid ten cents a ton. We tried to make one boxcar each, and it was really hard work, but we kept on for three weeks. Finally we got fed up and quit. They couldn't find anyone to unload the cement. Men would start, but quit after a few hours because they couldn't get used to it. The superintendent tracked me down and asked me to come back to the cement crew. I had a few days' rest and was feeling better, so I accepted. He said I would be the foreman and could choose my men. I chose ten big men and looked after them. We were getting time-and-a-half, so the money was good. We went to the machine shop and rigged up a scoop-and-pulley system for unloading the cement. We could clean out a boxcar in fifteen

minutes. They needed a lot of cement on that job, and we were in demand. We were the highest paid crew on the project.

Anna's Story Continues:

In November 1931, Jan returned to Czechoslovakia to visit his mother and met me in December. We were married on the 8th of February, 1932. He came back to Canada on April 19, 1932, on the ship *Ausonia* and went back to Fraserdale, but found the job was not there. He found work on a new highway construction project being built from North Bay to Ottawa. After he paid for his room and board, he had five dollars left in his pocket. That was a hard life for him. He was afraid to write to me to say how bad things were. He went to Hearst in 1932 to the Slovak colony in Bradlo and bought two farms of seventy-five acres each: one for his brother Michael, and the other for himself. There was no house on the farm, only a wooden log cabin.

In 1933, I arrived in July with our daughter, Olga. In 1935, when Anne was born, my husband was so poor that he had only twenty cents in his pocket, and with the help of some neighbours, was able to buy a gallon of wine and toasted the visitors who came to see our new daughter. Dr. Kinnaird, who came to see me, did not want any money from us. He saw that we were poor. The years 1936 and 1937 were the same. My husband got a construction job building a new road at the colony. He was the crew foreman. John and Rudy were born in Hearst.

My husband sold our house and one acre of land for the new school. He kept the rest of the farm, and in 1939, we left for the mining town of Dobie [near Kirkland Lake]. In 1941, we went back to the farm in Bradlo, where William was born. My husband bought a truck and worked on the Trans-Canada Highway. I looked after the children and the cattle alone, as my husband was away much of the time at work with the truck. I brought my firewood and water home on a sleigh, and we heated the house and cooked with a wood stove.



Ernie, Martha, Bill, Rudy, John, Anne, and Olga Bies

Martha was born in Hearst, and we moved to Geraldton in 1944, where Ernest was born. My husband worked at the Little Long Lac Gold Mine, but was badly injured in a mine accident. He quit his job and we returned to the farm in Bradlo in 1946. He worked in the bush camps in the winters, hauling wood with the horses, only coming home at Christmas and in the spring.

My husband got a job with the Department of Highways in 1951, and we moved from the farm to live in Hearst in 1957. He worked there until he was sixty-five-years-old and then retired. We enjoyed our retirement working around our house and gardening. On July 2, 1976, he went to Toronto for a checkup and the doctors discovered that he had inoperable lung cancer. He returned to Hearst and died in the Hospital on September 28.



Jan and Anna Bies in Bradlo -1955

We had a post office named Bradlo via Hearst. The community even built a church, a dance hall and a store. The colony was five kilometres long. On each lot there was a settler, a pioneer. Now there is nothing. The people have left. When there were not enough children, the school was closed. It is very scary there now. Only bears and wolves live there and there are also some moose.

Editor's Note: Anna Hucko Bies, born November 8, 1906, passed away on May 25, 1991, after almost sixty years in Canada. While the family homestead has completely reverted to wilderness, our parents' contribution to Canada lives on in their children, grandchildren and

great-grandchildren. A brave twenty-two-year-old man left his parents and siblings behind to seek a better future. Our mother followed a few years later. Their adventurous spirit allowed their own family to avoid the oppression of Nazi and Communist rule and to experience freedom and opportunity unheard of in the Old Country. With fifteen grandchildren and twenty-one great-grandchildren, an extended family reunion would now require a hall accommodating more than sixty people. We younger siblings are indebted to our oldest sister, Olga, who opened doors for us and provided support so we could succeed on our own career paths.

Big Eyes and Short Legs, Childhood Memories : by Ernie Bies

As the last remaining family in Bradlo we had to travel to town to attend church, school and to shop.

In the late 1940s, my father would drive us to the Zion United Church in Stavert. Visiting student ministers would provide services as part of their training. The Fleshers, Dahlines and the Killicks were regular churchgoers there and I can still hear their stirring renditions of the hymns.

When I was called on to carry the collection plate I would stand before the Minister with the offering, while he gave thanks. Never had I seen so much money; silver dollars, half dollars and some paper money, too. When I think of it now, there was probably only about \$20 on the plate and it would have to serve the Minister for a week.

The photo below depicts one of these Sunday services, attended by the Bies and Dahlin families, as well as Ruby Walper and Nora Taylor, nurses at the hospital in Hearst. They frequently accompanied the

student Minister, Rev. Howard Pentland to the church in Stavert where Ruby played the piano.



Zion United Church in Stavert -1950

back: Nellie Dahlin , Nora Taylor , Rev. Howie Pentland , Erik Dahlin , Anna Bies , Ruby Walper

front: Liz Dahlin , Ingrid Dahlin , Bill Bies , Ernie Bies , Martha Bies

The Minister in Hearst was responsible for several outlying communities holding services in any available facility. They would often have to rely on townspeople to drive them to the remote services, or they would cycle or walk. The Zion United Church was built in 1942 when Rev. G.G.D. Kilpatrick, along with Rev. G. Watt Smith, undertook to raise the money and the volunteer labour required to fill the need for a new church to serve that area.

Attending school was also an adventure. When the Bradlo School was closed in 1949 the children from concessions 2, 3 and 4 were transported to Hearst by bus, when the roads were open, and by Bombardier in winter, along the now abandoned Speeder Track

(the same one that Stella Drajanoff used to ski into town in the 30s). The Bombardier run was done in darkness both morning and evening. There were several areas flooded by beaver dams that were frozen in winter, but became unpredictable in the spring. One mid fifties day, about half way between Hearst and Bradlo, the Bombardier broke through the ice and the back end was submerged. The driver got all the panicked kids out the front end, most with soaked feet and trousers, and tried to extricate the vehicle to no avail. He had no choice but to walk back to Hearst to get equipment to do the job. He entrusted the older Bies boys to get their younger siblings and Bernier kids home along the dark road. Considering the below freezing temperatures, this involved a lot of coaxing and carrying, but they all arrived a few hours late at the Bies farm, where a worried Mrs. Bies sprang into action warming toes, drying footwear and clothes and feeding the extra mouths. Then the older boys had to walk and carry the Bernier kids another two miles to their home further up Bradlo Road.

Eventually with only Rudy, Bill, Martha and Ernie left to transport, the bus service was cancelled. Rudy was enlisted to provide the family taxi service. The Bradlo road was not plowed in the winter, so he stayed in town at our sister Anne's and drove out every morning to the Highway 583 junction to pick us up and then back at night. We often had to break a trail through one and a half miles of fresh snow each way, imagining that all the sounds around us were wild animals waiting for one of us to fall behind. We survived, and surprisingly, to this day, I still prefer cold weather over hot.

