

MISCHIEF

AT ITS BEST

by Bob Weller

The frolicking, fun-filled journey of a young boy growing up in small-town Alberta through the '40s and '50s

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Dedication

Mischief at its Best is dedicated to Jim Campbell. Jim was my buddy since we were four years old. For seventy years we stayed in touch. When living in different provinces and cities, we didn't see each other as often as we would have liked, but the bond was never broken. After we were both married, our families spent many good times together. Nine years ago, my wife Julie encouraged us to write a book about growing up in Oyen. After hearing so many of our stories, she said she didn't know why our Moms didn't drown us when we were nine. In 2010 Jim called me about writing a book. I wasn't in the right head space so Jim decided to write it himself. In 2013, Jim Published *To Oyen With Love*, a grand trilogy about a teenager growing up in the small Alberta town of Oyen.

Originally, our thoughts on the books content differed. Jim visualized a comprehensive book on teen life, while I thought more along the lines of short stories about escapades at an earlier age. Jim's book involved much more research while *Mischief at its Best* required a lot of reminiscing. Jim's stimulating book initiated a spark in me to start writing in 2014. He and I were together in many of my stories. Sadly, cancer took Jim away in early 2014 but I know its just a matter of time until we are together to embellish our stories even more.



Bob and Jim in their teen years: friends for life.

Preface

My thanks to my wife Julie who in 2006, prodded my friend Jim Campbell and me to put to writing some of the childhood adventures and escapades we went through during those happy '40s and '50s when we grew up in Oyen, Alberta. Nothing happened for two or three years, then one day Jim phoned to tell me he was going to write the book.

The path our stories took was the right course. Jim had the career skills and passion to do the detailed job he did with *To Oyen With Love*. His work inspired me to write the kind of stories I wanted to tell. I wanted to tell some of the little stories that hopefully convey to people the utter joy a kid experiences when growing up in a small town which is in fact a large family. I am blessed to be able to remember things that todays youth will never know.

I remember what it was like to savor the smells of harvest in the fall and the aroma of freshly turned soil during spring seeding. And to know the beautiful sound of a meadowlark singing on an absolutely still prairie day. How many people have watched the rare crocus as it is growing in a railroad bed? Few have ever seen the full power of an electrical storm on the prairies as I have. I wish I could fully explain what it is like to walk into a barn to do the evening milking during a 30 below winter. You would be greeted by a sweet warm atmosphere created by lowing milk cows, hay and farm cats waiting to have some milk, sparrows roosting in the rafters for the night, and the sharp clean smell of the kerosene lamp. In a nutshell you couldn't help but feel at peace, that the world was well.

As you read, you will probably visualize us kids as the town brats, the burgeoning athletes, the suspects of all mis-

chief, apprentice entrepreneurs, the choir boys and much more. We probably were a bit of all of these. What was really happening was that a town was grooming a new generation, treating them with tender loving care until it was time to gently nudge them out of the nest.

You see, many of the characters I will introduce you to have gone on to be successful business owners, policemen, teachers, doctors, authors, social workers, farmers, etc. I would bet most of them would credit a lot of their success to the town that tolerated them and molded them through adolescence.

My wife Julie says she doesn't understand why our Moms didn't drown us by the time we were nine. I for one am glad they didn't, and instead had the love, wisdom and patience to continually let us have more leash.

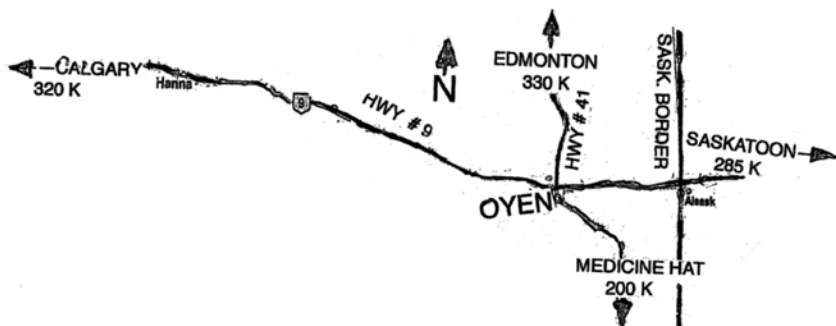
I shied away from using names although I tried to be as accurate as I could even with the goofiest of stories. Because of the difficulties in guaranteeing the accuracy of 70 years of memories, I could be guilty of over-embellishment. Oh well, what you sees is what you gets.

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Where the heck is Oyen?



Right where it was in 1913!

Can Life Get Any Better?

Wednesdays were special for a number of reasons, the first of which started at about 3:45 in the afternoon. As I arrived home from school, I would be greeted by my faithful dog, Toby. To some folks, it may have sounded like he was panting, but what he was really saying (in perfect sync with his tail wagging) was, “Pet me! Love me! Pet me! Love me!” (You would probably have had to be eleven years old to catch the lingo.)

When I opened the back door to the porch, the delectable smell of fresh bread would waft its way through the kitchen door and grab my taste buds. And when I opened the kitchen door, I was gobsmacked with the unforgettable, overwhelming aroma of potato soup laced with onions and celery. Yes, Wednesday was the day of the week when Mom made fresh bread and potato soup. By the time I checked in for my big soft hug from Mom, I had to have the drool of anticipation wiped off my chin. Then she would tease me — something about “the bread being too hot yet.” But I had already spotted the brand new jar of Squirrel Peanut Butter (complete with “the peanut on top”). I knew then that I was only short minutes away from a scrumptious piece of freshly baked bread smothered with peanut butter and Rogers Syrup from the can. Nothing tastes as good as that warm piece of bread on a cold winter’s day.

As soon as the bread was gone, it was off with my school clothes and on with my coveralls, sweater and felt boots. I was out the door pulling on my parka, toque and idiot-proof mittens (the ones with a string that ran through the sleeves, with

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