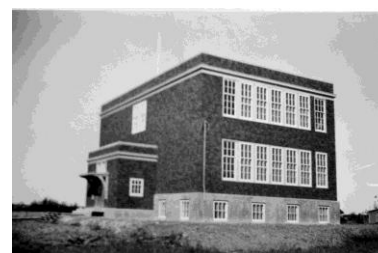




Escaping the Farm - Christmas, 1957 by Ernie Bies December 20, 2017

Farm life in Northern Ontario in the 1950s could be a very lonely existence for a young boy with a vivid imagination. I'm sure Mr. Bradford, who had the misfortune of trying to keep me in line in grade six, would have agreed at that time that I was not a model student. Being the seventh in line to pass through the hallowed halls of Hearst Public School I was determined to follow my own path. All of my older siblings were model students and perfectly disciplined. You might say I was lacking on both fronts and was a frequent visitor to the cloak room behind the class room for time outs or to be punished by the teacher. If my misdeed was serious enough, I'd be sent to see the Principal, which was a mortal sin for any other student, but a badge of honour for a few of us that broke the rules just because they were there. I can still see the anger in Principal Clayton Brown's face as he brought the strap down on my hand, on frequent occasions, muttering through clenched teeth, "I can't believe you are a Bies." Although I was holding back tears, I always managed a triumphant entrance back into the class room and was already planning my next indiscretion. Mr. Bradford used up a whole year's supply of yardsticks and pointers on my head, and then he resorted to a heavy atlas to try to get my attention. On one occasion he hung me out of the second story window of the school and threatened to drop me if I didn't behave. Through all this, as can be expected, my marks were just so-so but I always managed to pass, probably because the teacher just wanted me out of his classroom. Grade seven was kind of a holding pattern where I was better behaved but still did not apply myself to my studies. Mr. Brown, keeper of the strap, was my teacher.



That summer I had a life changing experience. My Aunt Catherine, Uncle Mike and Cousin Billy paid a visit to the farm where we lived. I suspect my parents filled them in about my behavioural problems and my Aunt asked me if I would like to go with them for a holiday to Toronto. My poor mother was probably worried that I was heading down the wrong path and she entrusted me to the mentoring of Aunt Catherine who was an experienced teacher. I jumped at the chance, as my only trips out of town to date were to Kapuskasing and to Cochrane for the music festivals. The next week was filled with new experiences, like walking down the street in North Bay and marvelling at the tall buildings. Some were three stories high! While gazing

upwards, I was almost knocked cold when I ran into a parking meter on the sidewalk. We didn't have them in Hearst. Luckily Mr Bradford had toughened me up so I could take a hit, but I learned quickly to watch for them. Next, we visited Santa's Village in Bracebridge where the mini train, the reindeer and Santa Claus in August did





impress me much. The city of Toronto and, in particular, the visit to Casa Loma convinced me that I had to get off the farm and see the world. The trip was over too quickly and we returned to their home in Garson, near Sudbury. Aunt Catherine asked if I would like to stay with them and go to



school and I couldn't say yes fast enough. My mother was heartbroken that her baby was leaving home.

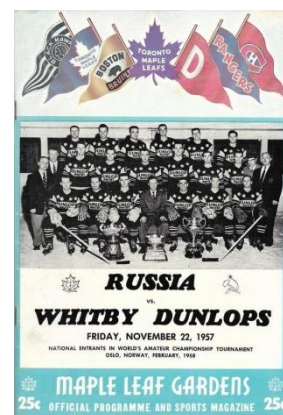
I started grade eight in Garson and after a couple of months we moved to Minnow Lake. My brother



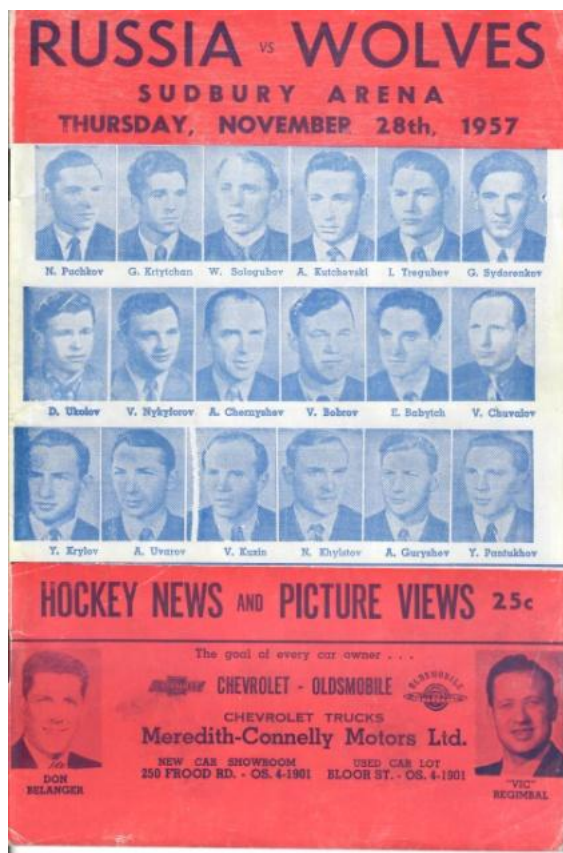
Rudy also spent the year with Aunt Catherine while he was attending Nickel District Collegiate before going on to Ryerson in Toronto. It was a whole new world. Aunt Catherine insisted that I do my homework and go to bed early every night, something that I had never done living on the farm. I went to school rested and being the new kid I behaved and listened to the teachers. To my great surprise I found out that there was a top student hiding under all those layers of mischief and I did very well in that term. I had perfect attendance, "A"s across the board, and an A+ in English composition – who knew? The teacher's remarks were "*An excellent pupil, interested and cooperative at all times.*" If Mr.

Bradford could see me now! Aunt Catherine also tried unsuccessfully to teach me to play the piano and she did send me to the dentist to fix up the work of Hearst's infamous Dr. S.H. (Stone Hands) Jones.

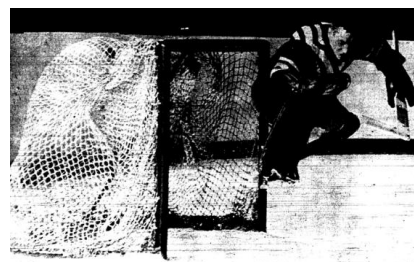
The highlight of that fall was going to see the travelling Russian hockey team play the Sudbury Wolves. The Russians had only been playing international hockey for ten years and were already winning Olympic and World Championship Gold medals. In November and December the Russians were coming to play in their first North American tour. Canada had always been represented by our best senior "A" amateur team, winners of the Allan Cup. Names like the Whitby Dunlops, Penticton Vees, and Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen were just as well known to Canadian kids as the Leafs and the Habs. The Sudbury Wolves, who played in the OHA Senior "A" league, were included in the original seven game Russian tour schedule. The North Bay Trappers were a late addition. The Moscow Dynamos were the basis for the Russian team and they were supplemented by other top players to become the "*Moscow Selects*". They had been defeated by the Whitby Dunlops and the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen and earned a draw with the Windsor Bulldogs the previous week and arrived to great fanfare in Sudbury for their game on November 28, 1957. My brother Rudy managed to get tickets and we were part of the 6,666 fans in the sold-out Sudbury Arena. The Russians put on a skating show and defeated the Wolves 7-4 for their first ever North American



win. However, they were intimidated by the Canadian slap-shot and big John Bailey blasted three of them past the nimble Russian goalie, Nikolai Puchkov, who was jumping high to protect his face in this pre-goalie mask era. Some of Bailey's goals were from outside the blue line. Sudbury scored first and



was leading 2-1 in the second but the Russians wore them down. Even as a twelve year old I was impressed with



their skating and passing as compared to the rough-house Canadian style. In frustration, the Canadians resorted to cross-checking and boarding in the third period. We were sitting behind the Russian bench and I timidly went down to ask the Russian Captain Nikolai Sologubov to autograph my program. He looked at me incredulously, probably wondering why this kid was holding out a pen to him. I guess they didn't have autograph hunters in Moscow. I stood 57 inches tall then so I don't think I intimidated him. Russia went on to defeat The North Bay Trappers and the Kingston CKLC's senior teams and the Hull-Ottawa Jr. Canadiens twice. Interestingly the junior teams had such future NHL stars as Bruce Gamble, J.C. and Gilles Tremblay, Ralph Backstrom, Billy Hicke, and Bobby Rousseau as

well as Carl Brewer and Bob Nevin, who were borrowed from the Toronto Marlies. The Russians served notice that they were here to stay as they went on to win 10 world championships and were unstoppable until the NHL players faced them in the Summit Series of 1972.

By Christmas I was homesick and anxious to go home. Things had changed as my parents had moved into town.



Rudy and I took train from Sudbury to Hearst. Starting out on the CNR, we had to over-night in Oba, since there was no same day connection with the Hearst bound ACR. We stayed in the Oba Hotel and Rudy bought a package of wieners, a loaf of bread and a couple of Pepsi's at the General Store for our supper. That was all that we could afford.



He found that there was a movie playing at a local church where we enjoyed seeing Randolph Scott in a



classic duster called “Rage at Dawn”. That experience was also memorable, since they had to turn the lights on and rewind each reel before showing the next one. This 1955 movie was a revisionist western loosely based on the real Reno Brothers gang who committed the first train robbery in the United States in the early 1860s. Ten members of the real gang, in total, were lynched by mobs on three separate occasions. Rage at Dawn featured Randolph Scott, a Peterson (Pinkerton) Detective agent who infiltrated and brought down the gang. Only one of the three lynchings was portrayed in the movie. That movie has always stayed with me. Interestingly, the Reno Brothers story was told again in 1956 as a vehicle for Elvis Presley’s film debut. The name was changed to “Love Me Tender” to promote his new song which was actually derived from a Civil War love song called “Aura Lea.” So much for trivial history.

The next morning we boarded the train for Hearst and my southern adventure was over. I was anxious to get back to my family and friends and my mother was overjoyed to get her baby back. Christmas of 1957 was the beginning of a new chapter in my life. Farm life was officially over and I couldn’t wait to start my new adventures as a townie.

In the past I had resorted to mischief to relieve the boredom and loneliness of the farm. I wonder which path I might have taken if not for my experiences during those few short months in Sudbury. Now I had a new standard to maintain and I became a model student, at least until High School, but that’s another story.

