

Wilhelm and Wanda Schwentke

Foreword (by Mervin Weiss)



William Schwentke, 1980.

Wilhelm (William) Schwentke and Wanda Jesske were born into German families in Poland. William was born in 1898 in a village across the Vistula River from old Warsaw, while Wanda was born in 1901 in eastern Poland. While they spoke their native German at home, they grew up interacting with a mixture of eastern European ethnic groups. Consequently, both could converse in multiple languages, even if their ability to read and write in those languages was limited. William had very little formal education while Wanda went to school for about six years and was able to read and write fluently in German.

William and Wanda married in Poland in 1918, a very turbulent time¹ for the Polish people. After his two-year stint in the Polish Army, William and Wanda with several other family members were forcibly re-located to Leningrad. After serving there briefly as a fireman, William and Wanda were eventually allowed to return to Poland. They barely survived the long return trip in winter by rail in cattle cars. They returned to their village, re-claimed their land, and began again to farm. To supplement the farm income, William also served with the Warsaw Fire Department, worked for a sausage factory for a while, and also worked as a gardener at the Warsaw Parliament buildings.

In 1924, their son Otto was born in the village of Markowszczyzna in the county of Bialystok. A daughter, Jenny was born about 1928. In 1929, William made the impulsive decision that he was going to emigrate, that is, to leave Poland. Within three days, he was able to sell the farm (land and buildings), obtain his passport in Warsaw, and in another three days, he was gone! He landed in Halifax in March 1929. Wanda and the two children followed the next year. William immigrated



Otto and Larry in the 1950s.

¹ In 1795 the rulers of Russia, Prussia and Austria partitioned Poland and the name disappeared from the map of Europe. But the outbreak of World War I resulted in the breakdown of all three Empires – Russian, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian. On 11 November 1918 Poland again became a sovereign state of Europe after a 123-year absence. Almost immediately Poland went to war with the new Bolshevik regime in Moscow, invading Ukraine as far as Kiev. A Red Army counter-offensive pushed the Poles back as far as Warsaw. Hostilities stalemated after the Poles were victorious at the Battle of Warsaw in 1920. Poland remained a turbulent state throughout the 1920s.

with seven other men from his village in Poland. Several of these men had contacts in Canada. Catching the train first for Winnipeg, they worked for a farmer there before moving to Nokomis, Saskatchewan, in time for threshing season. Next stop was Drake, Saskatchewan where William again found work as a year-round farm laborer. Borrowing \$300 from his employer, William arranged for passage of his wife Wanda and their two children, who landed in Quebec City on 30 October 1930.

The Schwentke family arrived in Canada just as a worldwide recession was taking hold, and in Saskatchewan just as a crippling drought would devastate agricultural production for several years.

Following is the transcript of an audio tape recorded by Otto Schwentke about 1985, and addressed to his grandson, Einar Schwentke. In an easy and informal manner, Otto tells Einar some family stories about his (Otto's) parents. The tone is that of a grandfather talking to his grandson, and like any grandfather, he may be forgiven for any embellishments to the story! Nevertheless, William Schwentke was obviously a larger-than-life character, an energetic and ambitious man, capable of anything he set his mind to.

Transcript provided by Otto's son Larry Schwentke of Edenwold, Saskatchewan.

Einar, this is the story about my father, or your great-grandfather. It's just stories over the years that they told me, and so I'll put them on this tape, and you can enjoy them, or your father can make them into a book form.

I will say that your great-grandma and great-granddad were both born in Poland, in a German speaking district. And therefore, they had to know both German and Polish. Of course, over the many years they learned that they had to learn other languages. Both Mom and Dad knew 8 different languages and could speak to them fluently. Mom had education. I remember Dad telling me that when he was young, he used to make cigarettes for his brother who was in the army at that time. And he hated the job, so to get out of it, he put gunpowder in the cigarettes. His brother never got him to make cigarettes for him again, needless to say. When they exploded in his face. Mom's education was: went to school for about 6 years and could read and write. My dad's education, your great grandpa, his education consisted of two days of school, and then they presented the schoolteacher with a great big duck for Christmas. And that was the end of his schooling, he never went back to school after that. So that's the only education he had. He did eventually learn to read and write, but very, very little. He could sign his own name, and he could read the headlines in the newspaper in English. I never knew him to be able to read any other language. All he could do was speak to them.

But they got married in or around 1918, in Poland. And just shortly after they were married, the Polish, well he had to go into the army, first of all. It was compulsory to go into the army and serve two years. He served his two years, and then he came out. And then there was a big purge, when Poland was part of the Soviet Union, at that time, and they were shipped to Siberia. Now this is where the story gets quite interesting. They were shipped there. And it was your great-grandma, your great-grandpa, their two parents, and their grandfather, were all shipped to Siberia, and they



Otto Schwentke, 1972.

ended up in Leningrad. Well, when they ended up and landed at Leningrad, they didn't know where to stay or what to do, or anything. And so, Dad left them all at the station and said, "Look I'm gonna go downtown, and see what I can see, and I'll be back." Well, he came back about 4 hours later, in full uniform with a horse and buggy, and told them all to "Get in, we got a place to live." And their mother and father then said "What did you do? Join the army?" Dad says, "No, I joined the fire department." Because he had a bit of firefighting experience, and two years in the Polish army, and they took him right away into the fire department. And that supplied them with a house to live in. It was just three rooms-- a kitchen and two bedrooms. Large kitchen of course. And that's where they lived for quite a few years until all hostilities were over. This was during the Bolshevik Regime. And my mom still remembers that they took-- Bolsheviks came

in and they figured that her grandpa was some sort of a spy. And they took him out in the garden, asked him to confess. And he says, "I've got nothing to confess to." So, they told him they'd shoot him. So, he says, "Can I say my prayers first?" While he knelt down to say his prayers, they blew his head off.

When the Bolshevik Revolution finally ended, they were allowed to go back to Poland. But the trip was very uneventful. They fired Dad from the fire department and left him with absolutely nothing. Just forgot about it. In fact, Dad says his last payday, he knew that the money was worthless at that time. He got 325 Rubles for the month, and with that he couldn't buy anything. It came in great big sheets, and what he did was wallpaper the inside of the house with the money, because it was absolutely worthless. Well, they were put on a freight car in cattle cars. And it was during the wintertime, and you know cattle cars just have slots in them, there's no actual walls or anything like that. So, they had to try and keep warm. And it took them three months to get back to the Polish border. And I'll just give you an idea of what they had to endure.

They had to find their own food. There was no way that anybody supplied food. And whenever they put them on a side track, sometimes they'd stay for a week or two weeks at one place. I remember Mom saying at one place they were almost starving, and she went to beg at various houses around there. And she came across a whole bunch of tents, and she thought it was piled high with wood. Until she looked in, and all it was, was filled with frozen bodies, waiting for the spring thaw to be buried. And that has stayed with her for most of her life, I am sure. And she never went begging again. Dad went begging. During that trip, they traded the last bit of cutlery, like forks and knives, off for a bit of horse meat. And they were able to eat. At one station they got off, the trainmen ordered. They had a lot of Ukrainians on the train too, and they had wooden barrels full of sauerkraut. And at one place the trainmen made them dump all their sauerkraut outside. And Dad says there was a mad rush, some people even got killed. And they rushed out to get some of the sauerkraut so they could have something to eat. And this went on various other trips, they couldn't have flour, they couldn't have anything. It was a freezing situation.

When they got to the border of Poland, finally after three months, Dad noticed that there was a lineup of about a mile long. Anyways, Dad asked a few of the people along the line "How long have you been here?" and a guy says "Three months. Trying to get in to get the passport stamped to get through the border. Dad says to heck with this. But he was fortunate enough, he knew Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, all the various languages. And he went right up to the very front of the line, jumped over the big high cement gate, was pounded by the guards with blackjacks. But he made so much noise that the guy inside says, "Well bring him in, let's see what he's got to say." And then he said that he wanted his passport stamped so that he could go across the border. Well, he got his passport stamped all right, and he came out, and he says to the guard, he says, "Thank you for hitting me with the blackjack," but he says, "I got what I wanted, I got my passport stamped." Of course, during this time, I must tell you that Dad's father died en route in one of these cattle cars, and they had no time to bury him. And dad gave his last great coat, it was a great big topcoat, very heavy topcoat for Russia. And he gave that to the station master while the train was stopped there for a few moments, if he would bury him. And the station master said yes, for the topcoat, he would see that he was buried. So, his father was buried. His mother died as soon as they arrived at the Polish border, and she was buried there. And my mom and dad arrived at the Polish border alone.

There, the first thing that was done to them-- they were de-loused. Powder was poured in all over their clothes. By this time, they had no clothes except what was on their back. No food. And the first thing the Polish government did was give them food. Each family was given a large ten-liter pot of hot stew. And Dad says was it ever good stew. He says I've never seen meat for ages. And he says it had real great big hunks of meat in it. Well anyways, as the story goes, they sat down, and they ate. And dad was smart enough, he said, "Don't eat too much. Just eat a little bit and then we'll go for a walk." I remember Mom saying, "Well what are we gonna do with all that stew that's left over?" Dad says, "Just leave it there. Nobody's going to take it." "No, somebody will steal it." He says, "Who's gonna steal it? Everybody's got a pot full of stew." And they were smart enough that at this time their stomach couldn't take too much, so they went out for a walk. And when they came back, ate a little more stew. Went out for a walk, and they finally finished all their stew. Even though that's all they got though. No more.

After that they were on their own. And by this time, Mom, and Dad all they owned was on their back, nothing else. And they had to find a way to go to their own little village, which was numerous miles away. Well, all they owned was one feather pillow in a wicker basket. And between the two of them, they could not lift this wicker basket with one feather pillow in it. And so, dad devised and found some string, and he put a string through the handle of the wicker basket. And he put the string through the handle, tied some to Mom, and some to Dad, and it took them four days of walking without food, well they got water from the ditches or sloughs or whatever, until they got back to their own village, where their friends greeted them. And it took them a few years to get back to normal. Because Dad and Mom when they got back to their own village, their land was still theirs, and they owned (which over in Poland at that time) was a fantastic amount of land. They owned six acres of land. Which out west here would be equivalent to a person owning, say, 1,000 acres, or two sections of land, 1,200 acres. Anyways, and then they started farming and they had a little building on there that they put up, and the building that was there. And they lived in there, and they started to get along by this time it was about 1921.

I was born in 1924. And they always figured that I would never walk, because I was a little bit too, what would you say, emaciated. I was never very healthy. Until some doctors said that I should live on goat's milk. So, they bought a goat, and we had a dog, and we had a cat. And there's six acres of land around. I started to grow and grow very fast. And gained weight. And they thought I'd never be able to walk because I was getting too fat, because of this goat's milk that I lived on. Anyways when I did learn to walk, Mom she never knew where I was, she always managed to find me because the goat had a big string around its neck, or a rope around its neck, with a big knot tied into it. And all she'd have to do is go around the house and find where this knot started to drag out and make a furrow across the field. And she'd follow that and there she'd find me. And the goat was happily grazing away there. And I'd be throwing little bits of dirt, and the cat would run after the little bits of dirt, and the dog would run after the cat. And I was always happy, a little fat baby.

Anyways, Mom says she took me one time into Warsaw and there I got lost. I wandered away and she was running up and down the streets calling for me. But I had my dog with me. I guess I was about three years old, maybe not even that. And some lady had taken me in and given me a bun and a glass of milk. And the first thing the lady said I did; I broke the bun in half and gave half to the dog. And I only drank half the milk, and I gave the other half to the dog. And she thought that was just beautiful, that I was looking after the dog, just as well as myself. Well then Mom came in. Mom was all up and down the streets, and the lady finally heard her. So, they called her in and said, "Is this your little boy?" And she says, "Yes, yes" and so naturally we reunited there.

Anyways, as things went along, Dad then decided that he was gonna -- he was, in the meantime I should say, he was working for a fire department. And he was a chief and a "strażak" as they called them, or the fire marshal. They made him a fire chief after a few years. He was the best in the gymnasium, and he was the best at everything, and they wanted to make him chief. And he says, "Yeah but I can't read or write." He says, "Don't worry about that, we'll supply you with a secretary." And in those days, it was all male secretaries. And they supplied him with a male secretary that could read and write. And Dad would just give him the instructions and that was it. He was chief of the Warsaw Fire Department for the industrial section. He held that job for quite a few years. Then they closed that fire department, and he was let off.

Then he worked for a sausage factory, and he made sausage. And the nice thing about that was that right across the road from them was a brewery. So, the two of them made an arrangement. At noon when the whistle blew, everybody would go to the sausage factory and get sausage (and the company gave it away for free), then they would all go over to the brewery across the street and get a big mug full of beer. And that was your lunch - sausage and beer. And if you wanted you could get, as they called it in those days, "schnapps" or hard liquor. Unfortunately, the brewery and distillery burned down. And Dad still talks about this, he says the big vats of brew were running down the street in the gutters. And he says many a person was laying on the sidewalk drinking his fill right from the gutter, and they never got up from there, because they were too drunk to get up. He says it was funny. And he says because of that fire, the sausage factory burnt down too.

Then he worked for the government as a gardener, at the Parliament buildings I guess you might say. And he ended up as a chief gardener too. He knew all about planting trees and he was the best at the whole works. So that is why he became the chief gardener.

Well anyways, by this time he had enough money from his little farm and so on, that -- oh by this time my sister was born, Jenny. She was born in what, 1928. Anyways, by this time Dad had enough money and he was building a new house. A brand-new house. And I remember I was about 4 years old, and I was with Dad, and I still remember him building the house. And in those days, you built the oven out of brick into the corner of the house or into the kitchen area. And I was playing in the oven, or in the stove-like, built out of brick. I was playing in the oven. And all of a sudden -- and Dad was up on the roof, and he was shingling the place, as you would know it. In those days it was something else again. -- Anyways, he came down, he picked me up in his arms, and he says, "Otto, let's go home. I think I'm going to emigrate." Well, we came home, he talked to Mom, and we were going to emigrate. Well, he wanted to go to Argentine. Well Mom didn't let him go to Argentine because a neighbor of ours had gone to Argentine and they had wrote back that they had a little child when they left, and when they got there, a snake bit the little child and the child died. So, she says, "I'm not going to Argentine." So, he says, "Okay, I'll go to Canada." "Okay," she says, "there's no snakes there." "Okay, we'll go to Canada."

Well anyways, there was seven from the village that decided to go to Canada. And then they all went to the capital of Warsaw, to get their passports and their immigration visa, immigration passports, and so on. And Dad could still speak his eight different languages. All the other people they couldn't speak all the different languages, all they knew was German and Polish. And so they went to lawyers, and lawyers said, "Well you have to put 50 zlotych (that's like 50 dollars) down, and I'll work out your papers." Dad says, "I'm not giving needless money to nobody." And the lawyer told him, he says, "Well you'll never get to Canada." Okay. Dad walked across the street and he happened to notice that there was a Canadian embassy there. And he went in there and he says, "What would it cost me to go to Canada?" He says, "About 325 zlotych (or dollars). That's for your passage and everything there." And he says, "How much do you want?" And he says, "Nothing." He says, "Okay." Then he had to go to get his birth certificate and everything. The other six guys came back and they were telling Mom that "there was no way that your husband is going to Canada because he didn't put any money down." And so next day Dad came home after walking another 30 miles to the place where he was born and getting his birth certificate. So, he came home anyways and by then he had his passport, everything was okay. He walked into the house and there was Mom, sitting and bawling, crying I should say. Anyways, he says, "What are you crying for?" "Well, all these other people told me that you're not going to Canada now, and you can't emigrate because you didn't put your 50 dollars down." He says, "What the heck are they worried about." He says, "Here's my passport, here's everything. I got everything OK-ed. I leave in three days." And well she was quite happy about that, but of course she hated to see him go.

Then they had to sell the farm. The six acres, which in Poland was a farm, and the new building, which was incomplete, that was all parcel package. But he got it sold within three days, and the guy that bought it said that he would let Mom and us two children stay on it for a year. So that was fine. Anyways, within three days Dad was gone. And he was coming over to Canada. Well, the trip over here, he had a few stories to tell about that. Mostly he met some friends on the ship

that they came over in. Anyways they landed in Halifax, this was in 1929, say in March. And he says that when he got off the boat, they played one of the songs (that the big band played at that time) was the Polish anthem. And he says, "I was ready to get back on the boat and go back." But anyways, the guys talked him into staying with them.

So, he didn't know a single soul in the whole of Canada. And the two guys said that they were going to take the train from there to Winnipeg, Manitoba. So that was fine, and he says, "All right I'll go along with you." Well, they got to Winnipeg, and there a farmer picked them up, kept them for two days. One of the fellows that he made friends with, it was his relative, and he hired him right then and there. But he didn't have any use for the other two men. So, the other man says, "Well I've got a friend in Nokomis, Saskatchewan, I'm gonna go there." "Okay," Dad says, "I'll go with you." So he went to Nokomis, Saskatchewan. When they arrived at Nokomis, Saskatchewan, a farmer -- his friend there they made on board ship -- a farmer met them, and he introduced his dad to him, and saw him, and says, "Okay, I'll hire the both of you to work." It was just about threshing time by then, well harvest time. So anyways he hired them both. And the wages at that time were 5 dollars a month. So, they took it.

Well anyways, they worked there all through harvest time. Dad says the first time he sat down for a meal with the farmer, he says the meals were exceptionally good, except that the farmer had 12 children. And most of them were all grown. Some of the older boys were 18, the oldest boy was 18 I should say. And he says it was strange to sit down at a table with about 15 people. But he says he got used to it. Anyways, when harvest time was over, the farmer said, "Well look, I'll keep you on for the wintertime, but I can't pay you any money. I will buy you one suit of clothes, and I'll give you free room, and that's all I can pay you." Dad says, "No, I've never worked for nothing for anybody, and I won't work for nothing for you."

So anyways in the meantime he had heard of a place about 30 miles away from Nokomis, a place called Drake, Saskatchewan. And he heard that a cousin of his lived there. So, he thought he'd go over and see her. So, when he didn't work for this farmer anymore, then he took off one morning, the farmer gave him some sandwiches and so on, and he walked the 30 miles to Drake, Saskatchewan and found the farm. And there he introduced himself, he was welcomed then. The guy had just said that -- he was a, well I wouldn't say he was a rich farmer, but a well-to-do farmer -- and he said that his hired man had just got hurt and couldn't work anymore. He could use a hired man around the farm. And he would pay him, would give him free board and room, a set of clothes, and pay him 5 dollars a month. Dad says, "I'll take it." And so he worked for him for over a year. During the summertime, of course, he was paid a little extra, during harvest time, and so on. He was paid extra I think, they got then 10 dollars a month. Anyways the farmer, after about 3 years, didn't have much use for him. He says he was going broke, and so he says, "I can't afford to keep you any longer. But a Mr. Bartel further down here needs a hired man year-round. Could you go and work for him?" Anyways in the meantime Dad says, "Well can you lend me 300 dollars?" Because that's what it cost to bring Mom and us two children over to Canada. Well, he says, "Yeah okay I'll lend you 300 dollars, and you pay me back when you can." Anyways he got the 300 dollars, he booked passage for us, and we landed in Quebec City on October the 30th, 1930.

And from there on he worked for a Mr. Bartel. One quarter of a mile away from Mr. Bartel's place was a house and a barn, and he owned it because it was a part of his land. But he told Dad, "All right, you can stay in the house, and when your family comes over, you can have this house and the barn. I'll give you one pig, ten chickens, a couple of horses, and that's it, and 115 dollars a year. And that was the wage that my dad got.

Then I'll say, I'll go back. And we arrived at Quebec City. From there the passage was paid to Regina, and from Regina to Drake, Saskatchewan. Anyways, en route -- I must say this, when we came over, we had to -- from Poland we took the train over to Danzig, Germany. From there we got a boat and got into London, England. I remember that because, I've discovered since then, it was called the Windsor Station. I remember the station because it was glass, a curved glass all the way around, and it was from top to bottom. The whole station was glass. And from there we got a train that took us to Glasgow, Scotland. And at Glasgow, Scotland we caught our boat. And I remember we got on the boat, and when I walked onto the boat (we were naturally in third class, that means at the bottom of the boat), and we were walking down the stairs and I found a quarter. Mom says, "Oh that's very lucky." She didn't know what a quarter was, neither did I. But I kept it, and I kept it for a long, long time. Anyways, the first four days out on the boat, I was so sick that she thought I was going to die. Seasick that is. But I got over it and we went to, after that -- I used to call him a rich boy -- always came down and liked to get me up on deck. And we'd play with all the playthings that were up on deck. They had a little place for kids to play, we had horseback rides and everything. But everyday that I came down, Mom would always check my pockets, and sure enough, the little rich boy (as I called him) -- I don't think he was that wealthy, his mother sort of felt sorry for us, the poor woman traveling all by herself two kids, one being very sick. Jenny was quite sick for about two days, more than I was, seasick. And she always found money in my pocket that the little boy put in. Little bits of change. And this helped us out quite a bit because we didn't have that much money, and so a little bit of change, even though we didn't know what it was or what it represented or how much money it was. It was just little change. Pennies, nickels, and dimes, that's all.

Anyways, when we landed, we got on a train and Mom until the day she died one of her favorite sayings was from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Regina by train took us eight days. And none of us knew a word of English. But Mom got along all right because she knew a lot of other languages. And always managed when the train stopped, it was like the old milk one you know, it would stop at every little station. And we'd buy sausages and bread and so on, in those days, and get back on the train. And that was what we ate. But anyways it took eight days to get to Regina. And she says, "There is no country on earth that is that big when it takes eight days to travel steady night and day to get to another place. How can a country be that big?" Anyways at Regina we stayed a few hours at the Regina station, and there we had to change trains. They told us that to get to Drake. All right. She called Drake (the way it is spelled d-r-a-k-e) she pronounced that "Drahkey." We didn't know English, we didn't know what it was, or she didn't, naturally us kids didn't. And anyways she was waiting for the conductor to tell her when "Drahkey" would come up. She never heard that. All she heard was "Drake". So anyways the conductor finally told her, he couldn't speak anything but English, so he finally told her, "Come on, get dressed, this is your next stop."

We got off. Dad was there to meet us. Of course, Jenny, it didn't matter to her, she was only two years old then. I was five then. And anyways I didn't know Dad -- and Mom and Dad still laugh

about it -- Dad picked me up in his arms and I didn't know him, I was scared of him, I started to bawl. I got used to him until after that, of course. And he was a very good father to me. So anyways, they had bought some furniture and put it into this farmhouse. And we lived there. Dad worked for Mr. Bartel for 2 ½ years. We killed our own cow, pig, and chickens for the wintertime. We always had meat. I might tell you here that the whole district at Drake at that time were Mennonites. And we went to the Mennonite Lutheran church. And we used to have these, what they called, pig weddings. And that meant that all the farmers from all around would gather at your place, and the men would start out having a big breakfast of course. And then they'd butcher a cow, a calf, one big, oversized pig, then about 50 chickens. And then the women would preserve all this into jars for the winter. Then after that was all done, then sausage was made in the evening. And after the sausage was made, Dad could cut hair, he had a clipper set, so he would cut everybody's hair, and us boys would go like mad and us kids would have a whale of a time, all the farmers' kids and everything, running around and playing games and what not. It was a lot of fun. But one day, when the whole thing was done, you had enough food for the winter. Then the next Saturday say, you'd all go to another farmer's place, and you'd do the same thing. And then the next Saturday or whatever day you chose, you'd go up to another farmer's place and do the same thing, until every farmer had the same thing done. And that's the way people got along in those days.

Money, well as I said, you had your farm, well Bartel owned the farm. And we had our cows, chickens, and pigs. From the one pig, we bred it, and naturally we got other pigs, and we'd kill it. And other cows and other chickens and so on. Always keeping just two horses to do the heavy stuff. And Dad would go over and look after his farm in the winter and summer. And in summertime we'd hardly ever see him because he was always busy out in the harvest field. But the salary stayed the same, 115 dollars per year. Plus, a place to live, like board and room you might say.

Oh I'll tell you one funny thing. The first day that we came to Canada, and we arrived at this farmer's place, and I remember it was late at night, and the next morning was Sunday. And they served corn flakes. Mother, Jenny, or myself, had never seen corn flakes in our lives. And the farmer pulled out the corn flakes, or the box, and poured it. They poured cream over it then, with sugar. We were just sitting there; we didn't know what to do. Eventually he says, "Oh didn't you know? (And he said this in German). We eat Bügelspanner (and that means wood shavings). On Sundays we always eat wood shavings for breakfast!" That's what he called them. And so, then he explained what corn flakes were and everything. We tried them, well we liked them. We've been eating them ever since. Well maybe you eat them too.

But anyways, in about three years, my dad had an awful argument with Mr. Bartel. And they almost got into a big fight throwing pitchforks at each other or wanted to. And he quit. So, what furniture we had, we packed up into a hay rack, and went to Nokomis. Nokomis, Saskatchewan. Back there because he knew a couple of people there. So anyways we went back there, and we rented a little house on the outskirts of Nokomis. The rent was at that time 2 dollars a month. And it contained a bedroom for Mom and Dad, and a bedroom for Jenny and I. And then one large kitchen/living room area. And then there was a barn out at the back. And of course, the usual toilet, it was all outdoor toilets at that time. Anyways, we lived there, and Dad went to -- one summer, the first summer we were there -- he went to work for a couple of farmers around Nokomis. And then he thought, "To heck, I'm not gonna work for no 5 dollars a month." And he started around town, taking odd jobs, here and there. And he found that with odd jobs, you know 50 cents for mowing this guy's lawn, or 1 dollar for digging this guy's garden, or cutting the grass, say 75 cents, the people didn't think much of it at that time. But you add this all together, and he was making 15 dollars a month. So he says, "I'm not gonna work for no farmer anymore." And that's the way we kept going.



William, Wanda, and Larry in the 1970s.

Afterword (by Mervin Weiss)

With the same entertaining style, Otto continues his family's story in Saskatchewan with a further 12 pages of transcribed audio tape. He relates the serious, as well as the sometimes comical, aspects of adjusting to a new life in a new world during the difficult 1930s. William continued to work for farmers in the Drake-Nokomis area. Times were hard, but they always had their own livestock and garden for food. He next obtained a job with a crew building a road near Punnichy. With two horses and a dump-wagon, he was working on a steep slope when the wagon overturned, pinning him underneath. It took two years to recuperate from the life-threatening injuries before he could return to normal activities. He took up various jobs in Nokomis, including becoming the town's policeman. In the late 1940s he moved his family to Regina where he again worked at a number of jobs including the CPR railroad and finally retiring after 23 years as an orderly at the Regina General Hospital. Gregarious by nature, gifted with energy, ambition and sheer determination, William Schwentke made a life for his family in Saskatchewan. This is the story of a fascinating man as told by his son, who was obviously very proud of him.

William Schwentke died 07 February 1983 in Regina. His wife Wanda died 07 May 1984, also in Regina. The storyteller, Otto Schwentke, died 26 July 1988.