



# THE POSTWAR YEARS

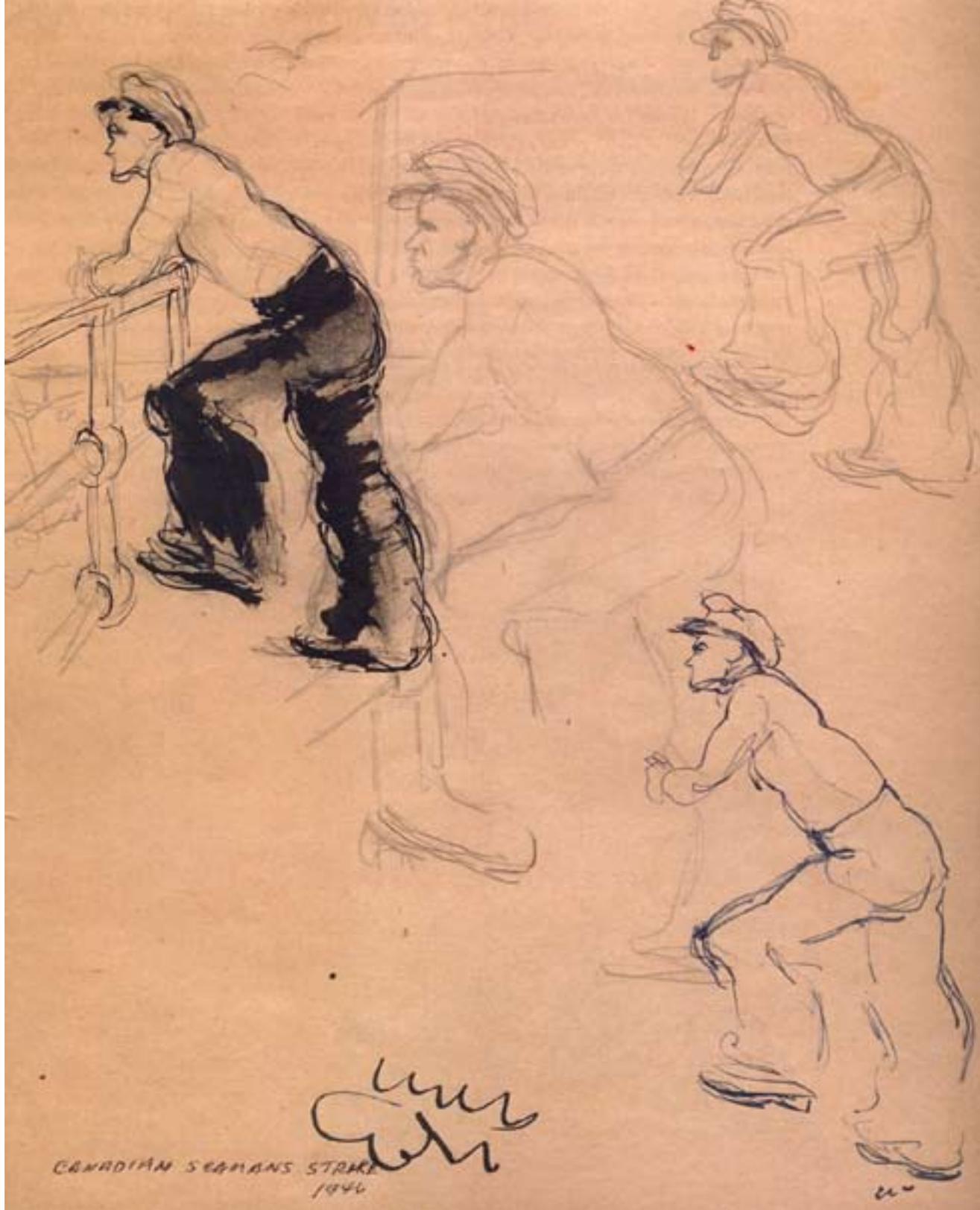
## *The Politics of Post War Life*

**I**n order to sell real estate I had to get a car. Considering I had just spent over 1,000 hours flying planes it was a humbling experience learning to drive on the ground. During this period I was still a political activist and took time off to sketch the big Stelco strike in Hamilton in 1946 as well as the Canadian Seamen's strike on the waterfronts of Toronto, Welland and Montreal. This annoyed sales manager Hugh to no end and finally I quit after a year and a half and went into industrial design and sales in printing and advertising. Here I must reflect on the influence Karl Marx had on my social, business and artistic life at that time. This of course, had commenced in New York when I was twenty, where I first encountered some Marxist friends who challenged my naive beliefs.

The effects of the Depression were all around me - running out of money, walking the streets looking for work, observing the thousands of unemployed living in tarpaper shacks on the lower east side, the bread lines, lunching on bran muffins and milk and gazing longingly in bake shop windows. This, contrasted with the citadels of Wall Street in the background, drove home the contradiction and the failure of the capitalist system.



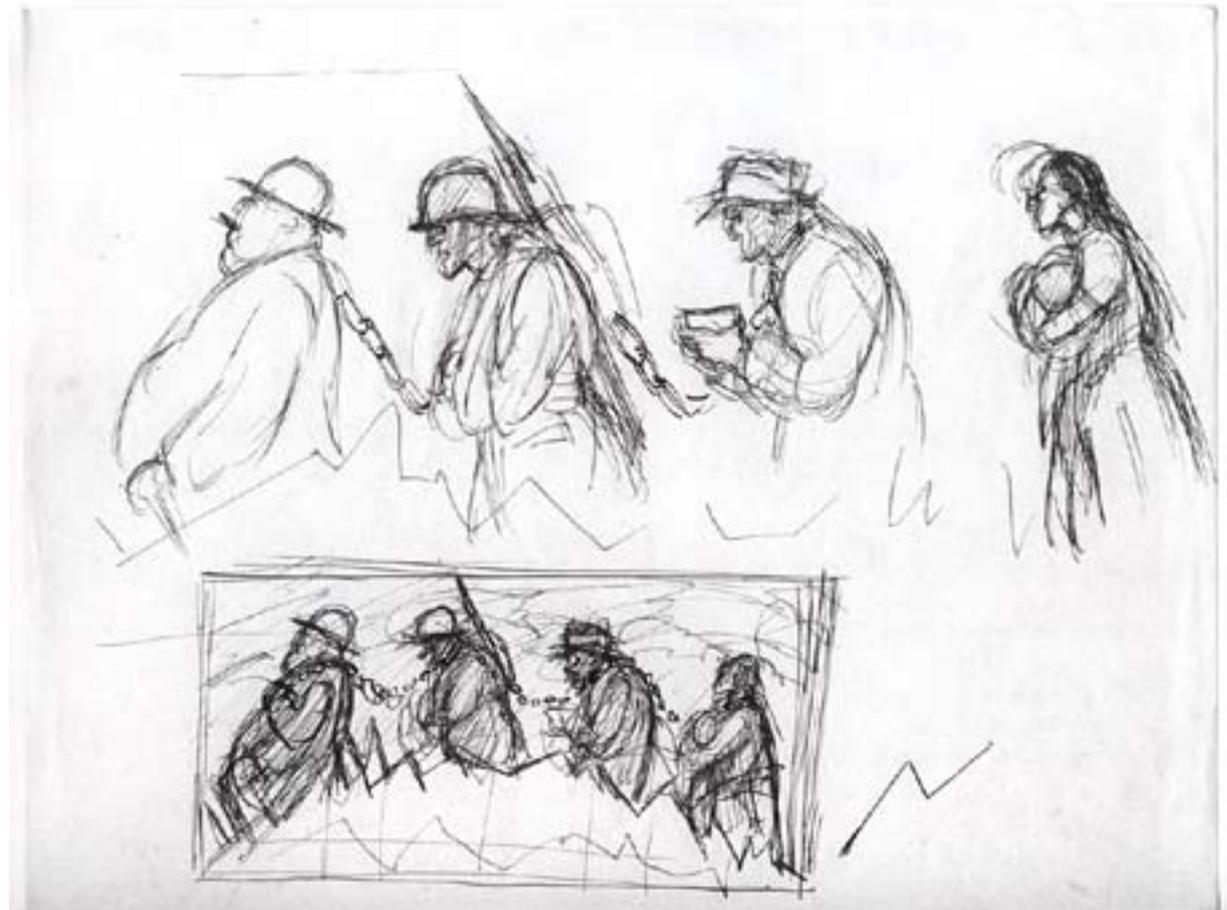
On returning from New York and finding employment in Toronto I became involved in raising support for the Mackenzie Papineau Battalion and the war in Spain in 1939. When WW II broke out there was a period when the "democracies" were trying to swing the war against the Soviet Union, and The War Measures Act was imposed. Communists were accused of being agents for the Russians, like the Gouzenko "revelations", the expulsion of Fred Rose to Poland, and the execution of the Rosenbergs in the U.S. It was only later, when the democracies agreed to support the Soviet Union in the war against fascism, that I decided to join the Air Force. One night, on leaving the Ontario College of Art in Toronto where I was taking some evening classes, I saw a headline in the Globe and Mail — "Canadian Communist Party Banned". The following week I joined. These were scary times and meetings were held "underground". The day after attending a meeting one night in a couple's downtown flat, I learned that the RCMP had raided their place, ransacked the baby's crib and jailed the father for operating a left wing bookstore.



*W. G. S.*  
CANADIAN SEAMANS STRIKE  
1946

Years later, during the Cold War period, I attended an advertising convention in New York. On returning, my sister informed me that the RCMP had called her to inquire what I was doing there. They also called my brother. I was being watched. My underground political life continued to be hazardous as I settled into married life and parenthood in the post-war years. We had purchased our first five-room bungalow in Leaside and I was struggling to pay the bills. As a member of the North Toronto Communist Club it was agreed that we would join the protest line at Rogers Majestic, a company that made radio parts. The advertising manager, Dave Willis, was a real right-winger and I was in the process of negotiating a much-needed contract with him. If he saw me on the picket line I was "dead". The night before, I didn't sleep a wink. My wife wasn't aware of my dilemma. At 7:30 I got up and looked at my daughter Lynn asleep in her crib. It was a tough decision. But I did meet my fellow protesters on the picket line and fortunately, Willis didn't see me. The Communist Party anticipated being

declared illegal again during the Cold War. I was asked to resign the Club and become involved in a secret courier activity to maintain communications if we had to go underground. This required meeting a contact at a different location each week to exchange correspondence. As it turned out, the Party wasn't banned but I chose not to go back. I was becoming disillusioned with the compromises inherent in politics. I was ready to forge my own path.



## *Everything Starts With an Idea!*

**I**t was almost inevitable that Stratford, Ontario would become the birthplace of the Stratford Festival Theatre. It had the Avon River, schools named Hamlet, Shakespeare and Juliet, and streets with the same names. Its institutions all had proper English-sounding names: Knox Church, St Andrews, and the Queen's Hotel. Thomas Orr Sr., a civic-minded citizen, created on an island in the river the Shakespeare Gardens, like the one in England. It tried hard to duplicate the Stratford over there. It was a WASP town.

I attended the Stratford Collegiate Institute in the 1930\*5 at the same time as Tom Patterson, whose older brother, Bob, and I were buddies. In the summer there were Sunday band concerts at a bandstand on the banks of the river, and it was here that Tom Patterson conceived the idea of having a Shakespearean theatre.

He talked about it in abstract terms as Tom had never seen a Shakespearean play and knew nothing about theatre. After the war, Tom sold advertising for a Maclean/

Hunter municipal affairs magazine which requested him to call on members of the town council, and one of the councillors challenged him on his idea about a theatre Tom called on a few impresarios in Toronto and Montreal to broach the idea and was laughed at for not mentioning anything about dancing girls. He persevered, and on a business trip to New York, contacted the Rockefeller Foundation and Laurence Olivier, both of whom politely turned him down.



On his return to Stratford, he reported his efforts to some of the councillors, but with a slight change in emphasis. Suddenly, a headline appeared in the Stratford Beacon Herald about Tom's efforts in New York: "Rockefeller Considering! Olivier Interested!" This inspired some local businessmen to organize a committee and vote Tom a small budget. He suggested inviting Tyrone Guthrie, a world renown Shakespearean authority, to visit them in Stratford, and it was agreed. Tom phoned. Guthrie was impressed, and agreed to visit. Tom was about to explain that they only had \$600.00 for his expenses when there was a break in the phone line. Tom thought Guthrie had hung up on him at the mention

of the paltry budget, but as it happened Guthrie never even heard the offer; he was so enthusiastic that he was prepared to pay his own way. He arrived and so impressed the councillors that a committee of businessmen was formed to raise funds for a Stratford Shakespearean Theatre... The rest is history.

For the first years, the plays were performed in a huge tent. Although Tom didn't know the difference between a stage manager and a production manager, he was appointed manager, anyway. Tom thought it his duty as manager to attend the many cocktail parties. Neighbours reported hearing him staggering noisily along the street late at night in an inebriated condition. When Tom heard this, he

started walking across the lawns and jumping over the sidewalks the better to muffle the sounds of his homeward journey. A number of the older gentry were opposed to the influx of "hippies", drugs, and late night parties; the business community was ecstatic.

In the early years, over twenty new industries were attracted to locate in Stratford where their families would be exposed to culture. Everything starts with an idea!



## *The Two Facet oft Canada*

**W**hile working on an oil portrait of Paul Robeson to raise money for the Robeson Centennial Committee, I re-read some books about this great artist, scholar, athlete - stories of the appalling discrimination and persecution he encountered in his native U.S.A. In spite of his amazing accomplishments - first in law at Columbia, an all-American football star, javelin thrower, linguist (he sang in over 15 languages), his international acclaim as greatest bass singer and star in numerous stage and film hits at home and abroad - he faced unprecedented discrimination by both racial groups and the U.S. government. His passport was cancelled, concerts and speeches suppressed.

In spite of the harassment he was worshipped by many Canadians and performed here to ecstatic audiences. However, on his premiere debut in Toronto he was invited to dine at the exclusive Granite Club. A number of prominent socialites refused to sit at the same table as a black man.

In 1942 at a performance with Marian Anderson before 7000 airmen at Toronto's Manning Depot, he was not allowed to speak. In 1952 he was invited to sing in Canada, but was illegally refused a U.S. permit. Forty thousand people gathered at the Peace Arch Park and listened spellbound to an impassioned Robeson concert on a loudspeaker, the border porous to his voice.

In 1940 while doing illustrations and articles for "New America" a left-wing publication, a tailor friend

invited me to meet Cab Galloway, who'd asked him to make some suits for him. We met in the lobby of the Royal York Hotel. As we proceeded to the elevators, Cab said he wasn't allowed to use the elevators. We walked up the stairs to his room.

The next day I phoned a few hotels to reserve a room for a black friend from Detroit. They politely suggested he would be happier at the second rate Ford Hotel! In these days, there was still a sign at Toronto's Centre Island - Gentiles Only.





### *Remembrance Day*

**M**y feelings range from remorse and sadness to anger at the lack of explanation or understanding about war and its causes. Perhaps, unintentionally, there is some shade of glorification along with the sentimentality.

I was quite clear about the political/economic causes of the war, which applies to most wars. Greed and profits. In the air force where the average age was about nineteen, there was no effort at political education. Their Germans were the bad guys and we were the good guys. Fascism was bad; democracy was good.

When the established capitalistic order was threatened in Spain by the election of the pro-Socialist Loyalist Government, the corporate establishment saw this as a threat to their power and with the support of the main capitalist countries - Germany, England, France, USA, Italy, and Canada, defeated the Loyalist forces and

imposed a Fascist dictatorship. Six months later, Hitler unleashed his armies in Europe. The British Government gave support by betraying its treaties with Czechoslovakia and Poland. The policy was to support the German invasion of the Soviet Union, which they believed would weaken both countries and leave Britain the dominant power in Europe.

The threat of socialism spreading in Europe was a dagger at the throat of capitalism. This was the basis for the stalling of a second front in Europe. The statistics tell the story. At the height of the war, there were no fewer than 200 German divisions on the Soviet Front. There were never more than 50 German divisions on our Front. The Soviet Union lost 25 million people and a third of its territory was leveled.

President Roosevelt had promised Stalin millions in aid to rebuild their country. He died, and Harry Truman succeeded him - a narrow minded right-wing bigot. No reconstruction loan was forthcoming. Instead, the Cold War to contain the spread of socialism. The Soviet Union had agreed to join the allies in defeating Japan, which was a foregone conclusion. In order to contain and intimidate the Russians, Truman dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. A quick review of the world's history, such as the transition from feudalism to the market economy of capitalism, reveals a despotic rapacious system of exploitation by ruling classes of the serfs and working classes. Competition for resources, raw materials, colonies, have caused continuous warfare of increasing intensity. War is big business. War is profitable. War is also inhuman and barbaric.

The theory of socialism is based on the public ownership of the means of production for public benefit. Private property and private ownership would disappear to achieve a classless society. From each according to his ability, to each according to his work. As production to fill public need is achieved, the benefits would be shared. One's social

contribution replaces one's wealth. A socialist world would go a long way to eliminate the causes of war and guarantee a world based on brotherhood, sisterhood and peace.

I don't want to drown in the Yangtze  
Or die on Siberian soil  
For the millions of J. Pierpoint Morgan  
Or barrels of Standard Oil.

(First World War veteran)



## *Cultural Delegation to the Soviet Union*

**I**n 1972 I was still running an advertising agency in Toronto. The best line I heard about doing this I was: I never told my mother I was in advertising; she thought I played piano in a brothel.

My Art Director, Mike Lucas, was president of the Canada-Soviet Friendship Association, so he spent a lot of time on trips there, or entertaining visitors. Mike was a Carpathian, my secretary Ukrainian. He called her a "like" and she called him a "Carp." Mike lived with his father when growing up. He tended sheep on the hills. Once a lamb was born and he proudly brought it down under his cloak to present it to the grandfather. The lamb he had coddled had

suffocated during the descent. The grandfather beat him. Mike's family were leftists. His uncle was a general in the Spanish Loyalist army.

In 1972, Mike asked me to lead a cultural delegation to the Soviet Union. There was Harvey Jay, a photographer, Gwen Mathewson, a writer, and Vivian Trovkomrnko, a musician from the west. Gwen called me one day to say her professor had warned her against going since it could affect her career. I told her the R.C.M.P. were trying to intimidate people to dissuade Canadians from going there. You have to decide yourself. It's a great educational opportunity. I'm going. She decided to go too.

When we were greeted in Moscow, one of our hosts inquired what I thought of their city. I told him I was impressed by everything except their apartment buildings, which by our standards were somewhat grey and pedestrian. He explained that housing people is a major problem. They had lost 25 million people in the war and a third of their land was destroyed. "We put more emphasis on heads than houses." They had more university graduates per capita than any other country, and education was free. The apartments we visited were comfortable but did not reflect our fetish with Better Homes and Gardens.



They preferred entertaining and going to concerts. Vivian and I attended a performance at the Bolshoi. It was packed with workers and peasants. Vivian had worn a show-off dress with a bare midriff. The men stared at her. The women stared at them. At intermission I said I was going to sketch as an excuse not to be seen with her.

We also went to the Moscow Circus — the world's greatest — and the Hermitage. I sketched old women sweeping streets. They had modern cleaning

equipment but the women wanted to contribute.

There were groups of old women selling flowers. It was a

social event for them. Although they had not overcome male chauvinism, women were

running factories, universities, and even ships, doing traditional male jobs.

There was virtually no unemployment.

In a period of less than 50 years they had led the world

in culture — music, literature, dance and science, (first on the moon), while industrial production equaled the U.S.A. in many areas. In 1918, 80% of the population had been illiterate.

We visited Kiev, Leningrad, Talin (Estonia) and Iravan (Armenia). Most of the TV commercials were produced in Talin — they were of an educational nature. Also in Talin we attended an unforgettable outdoor concert of 10,000 singers on a hillside. Iravan boasted the world's first children's art gallery, devoted to children up to the age of fifteen. A group of Italian businessmen took an exhibition about Italy to tour their country for two years. There are currently exhibits touring South America, (I have a book about it).

We were interviewed three times on radio and they insisted on paying us. Ludmilla, our 30-year-old guide, was a schoolteacher and had devoted her vacation time to guiding our trip. She was intelligent, knowledgeable and spoke perfect English.

The year before, I had entertained a group of Russian visitors, one of whom was named Valentine Storizenko - one of their leading actresses who had won the Stalin Award as honoured actress of the Ukraine. I took her to the Royal Alexander Theatre with an interpreter. She knew many of the actors whose photographs were on the walls. She knew Victor Juarez and his wife in Chile. I gave her a drawing of him with dismembered arms. We were in love but couldn't communicate. Mike tried arranging for us to visit her in Odessa, but it wasn't possible. The Russians are great romantics.





On returning to Moscow one of our hosts, a Siberian scholar who was doing a thesis on Canadian ghost towns, knew Jackfish, Ontario. He inquired which of the five cities we visited did I like the most. I replied, „it was like meeting five beautiful women and I liked them all for different qualities.” He said, “You are a diplomat.”

Gwen Mathewson tried to interest MacLeans and Chatelaine Magazines with her articles about Russian women. They turned her down. A few years later, when I was in the advertising business, I attended an advertising convention in New York. The R.C.M.P. phoned my sister and brother to inquire why I had gone to New York.



## Footnote Years later

I went on a camping trip with two friends. We travelled to Jackfish and walked about a mile from the highway through the bush. There was the deserted railway station and a few empty houses. The Jackfish Hotel, where famous travellers had stayed, had been burned down. In the schoolroom, old-fashioned desks were still there, and books with the names of the students in them. Swallows flew in through the windows. On a trip to the Soviet Union in 1972, I met a Siberian scholar who was writing his thesis on Canadian ghost towns; he knew about Jackfish! It had outlived its reason for existing as a coaling stop for trains. We drove back to our old site at Steel Siding. There was nothing left but a few wrecked shacks and the spring from which I had carried water with a neck yoke. A section man stopped on his electric car to use the section phone. I asked him if he knew Franz the trapper, who years ago had shot a bear we'd caught with a rope. He gave us a ride for about three miles, then stopped the car and said, "Down there." My friends didn't like the blackflies, so I hiked alone down a trail to the lakeshore. There was a cabin there, but it wasn't Franz's. Then I remembered his cabin was at the mouth of the Prairie River. We gave up and walked back to our car. I still have a watercolour of the bearskin Franz had stretched on his cabin wall.



## Ernie

While living in New York in the depression, where I had gone to study art, I shared rented flats with various roommates, one of whom was Ernie. Ernie came from Fredricton, N.B. and hung out with other graduates from the University there. It was a birds-of-a-feather sort of thing.

Ernie was short, baby-faced, with glasses, and disliked big guys—he thought they were stupid. To compensate for his stature, he dressed like a reporter with a fedora and trenchcoat, and smoked. He had a sense of humour so we got along most of the time. While I was pumping iron one day at the YMCA, Ernie was watching me with cigarette dangling. “What are you doing that for Bill? You’ll never be as strong as a gorilla.”



These bluenose guys from Fredricton were all “lefties.” I became one as well so we attended rallies together. We both went through periods of unemployment and had to tough it. Ernie liked describing the interesting day he had experienced, sitting on a bench in Central Park and reading “free” newspapers.

After two years in New York I returned home to find work in Toronto. I wrote Ernie once. He never replied. Years later I was riding the subway downtown and who should be sitting across from me but Ernie and his wife. After a short greeting, we agreed to have lunch. A few days later I called and pretended it was the police. “This is Sergeant Preston, R.C.M.P. calling.” (Sergeant Preston was a famous radio character.) “We have been checking your record and it says you lived in New York with a left-wing activist by the name of Stapleton in 1939, and associated with others at public demonstrations. Would you mind dropping in so we can clarify your position.” Ernie hadn’t spoken a word so I couldn’t refrain from laughing and to let him know I was joking. Unfortunately Ernie had never heard of Sergeant Preston. He thought it was for real. And of course, it could have been.

We never did have lunch. In 1994, my home was broken into at 2 am and I was stabbed by an assailant in my bed, an event which got a lot of press coverage. One of the calls came from Ernie’s daughter, who had heard him speak of me. Before hanging up she exclaimed “Ernie was such a prick!”