

MEMORIES OF MONTGOMERY PLACE

By Doug Gent, May 2016

I couldn't sleep last night, so I started thinking about the Montgomery Place reunion planned for September 17, 2016 and thoughts started going through my head about people, places and events when I realized that my memories of fifty plus years ago were of great times and people, were also fading. It seems hard to believe that I left Montgomery Place in 1968. With this in mind, I figured what memories I still had should be put in a more permanent form. So before I start, I must first apologize for memories that may be stronger in my mind than what actually occurred.

Of course one of the best memories is of the year we built a barricade at the alley between 11th street and Caen on Lancaster Boulevard Halloween night. It was a spur of the moment idea that started several blocks away and we started gathering "junk" to make the barricade. Finding enough garbage cans and stands and anything else that was not nailed down was not a problem, it was how to carry it. This was solved when we conscripted a trailer from someone's back yard. Everything was proceeding well when we hear one of our helpers yell "that's my dad's trailer" and he proceeded home to tell dad. Do we stop or go on? Little did we know that this was to become a tradition on Halloween and so we ran gathering what we could and deposited it at our chosen site. Just before the bus arrived all was in place and by some standards that first barricade was not much more than a mild inconvenience, but I understand it grew over the years.

Not many will remember the farm that was across from our house at 3211 11th street. My memories are vague here, but I do remember them putting up stooks of grain in the fall and that they made great hiding places for "hide and seek". I would have been under five when the house and buildings were vacated and torn down.

Before the local rink was built, several of the men in the area (Art Gent, Harry Bailey, Tom Mainland and others) flooded a skating rink where Gordon Hendricks house was to be eventually built.

We used to ride the bus to King George school in Riversdale, by ourselves, one transfer, when five years old. The bus driver most often was Harold (?) Ward and he watched out for us. At this time, the bus did a turnaround at 11th street and Lancaster. This was an area that was liberally covered in crushed lava or was it coal clinkers? It was always the first spot to melt in spring, and where many a child lost his marbles. Steelies, cat's eyes, boulders – it was a lucky child who had a bag of "new" marbles comes spring time.

Another spring event was Hopscotch. This took place in front of Sedgewick's house and the frame was almost a permanent fixture so well it was used. I recall the best throwing piece for me was a broken piece of glass from the bottom of a Nivea cream jar, heavy but not too much, with a rounded side to catch the dirt and not bounce.

Kites were another rite of spring. Made in the traditional shape with a tail of rolled newspapers for balance, it was a real event if we could get one off the ground. Somehow my dad could build one that worked, but I never could.

Thinking of dad, who can forget putting a rope behind the 1950 Meteor and attaching it to a toboggan and being pulled out the “low road” towards Pike Lake. No hills to climb, just sheer exhilaration. Also the sand hills behind the old Sanatorium for tobogganing.

Remember the field out behind the Power Station along the river and the farmer who had white “attack” turkeys? It was always a challenge to go out there, but it was also the best spot to find arrowheads in the spring after the field had been plowed. I myself don’t recall finding any, but I believe Arnold Mainland was a “finder”. If you are reading this Arnold, what did you do with your collections?

Springtime; as young boys, this was about as close to Nirvana as we could get. Sloughs with enough water to build a raft, rubber boots that never seemed to dry out because the water was just over the tops. Remember before they filled in the slough where Montgomery Service used to be? I think that is where I learned to swim, because I didn’t like the alternative of drowning.

Who could forget Rusty Hersch who would tell us there was a quarter underneath one of the weeds in his backyard? After pulling weeds for a while, Rusty would pull ONE weed and “find” the quarter and say he was just lucky, and give us the quarter. Did we ever figure that one out? How could anyone be so lucky to pull just one weed, and it was the right one?

Another right of spring were the first Crocus’s. The field on Elevator property was always the best, as it was natural prairie as it had never been tilled. Mothers couldn’t help but forget any misdeeds after receiving a bouquet of the first flowers of spring.

Are you getting the idea here? You start to remember and then the memories keep on coming. Moving along.....

Do you remember any of these? Jam Can Curling beside the rink, the old pot belly stove in the change shack, the music over the loudspeaker calling everyone out to skate at 6:30 every night, skating to a Vienna waltz with someone special, cleaning and flooding the ice for \$5.00 a week (four times), frozen hoses, fingers, toes and more. It was a carefree time and kids could be out by themselves late at night. It was a time when you knew your neighbour and just about everyone else in the neighbourhood because you met them at school, church or community events. How about the Christmas parties at the Intercontinental Packers Cafeteria; remember the grass park like area on the west side with trees and a pool? How about the three hole golf course where the parking lot eventually was? The smell on a summer evening when the wind was out of the east and the aroma of the Stockyards, Packers and the oil refinery that drifted over Montgomery?

As we grew older they built Montgomery School. Was it four or six rooms? The school gymnasium served double duty on weekends and evenings for gymnastics, cubs, scouts CGIT and the forerunner of Trinity United church. Throughout all this the community worked as a unit to bring facilities to our community.

During this time many parents stepped up to coach or assist with minor hockey and ball. At this time all hockey games were played on outdoor rinks around Saskatoon, and I can’t recall any being cancelled because it was too cold. The ultimate success story was to win your division and then get to play in the playoffs at Rutherford rink or the “old Barn” downtown. What a luxury to play on “artificial”

ice with no cracks. Rutherford arena could be a hazard in the spring as icicles and frost could come crashing down at any time.

I think I only played ball one year, and there were a couple of reasons for that. First were the uniforms. They were ill fitting and made of the itchiest material known to mankind, and second, I was just no good at baseball. I enjoyed a game of 500 and you are up, or scrub ball where batters rotated around to every position no matter how good or bad you were. It was a time when anyone could play at some level.

Another event which was held was the old time and ballroom dance classes, held in the basement of Harry Bailey's house. I had two left feet and I apologize to the many partners over the years whose toes I stepped on and whose rhythm was destroyed by my ineptness. It was not until many years later that alcohol taught me to be the smooth dancer I am to-day. Well maybe still not as good as I think. Harry Bailey was a strong supporter of the community and his memory remains in the Harry Bailey Aquatic Centre. I remember that after work Harry would come to Riversdale pool and swim laps every day. I can't recall how many, but to us kids it was a lot. Not just a crawl or backstroke, but the butterfly. Not an easy exercise.

Another advantage of the good old days was that parents in the community knew who you were, and as a result there was very little that we could get away with. Parents were not averse to correcting errors in behavior and our parents didn't sue them because of it. I remember one night while checking out local produce in some ones yard that the porch light came on and a voice yelled "Doug Gent" I am going to tell your mother, and she did. I still don't know how she recognized me among five of us as we were laying on the ground at the back of her yard in the dark. Perhaps I was not as angelic as I remember I was.

As we grew older we were intrigued by the wrestling being held at the Arena and us boys saying we wanted to learn "wrestling". I forget his name now, but we found out that one of the men in the neighborhood was a "wrestler". Imagine our disappointment when he agreed to teach us wrestling, but it was Olympic style wrestling and not the glorified style of the arena bad boys. He did teach us the style of wrestling and when watching Olympic or college wrestling on TV today, I can fully appreciate what skill is required.

As the neighborhood grew so did the sports grow. From being just a Montgomery Place team we started having players from Mount Royal and Pleasant Hill. Our group of friends started to include many from other parts of town so that when we reached high school we had a network that encompassed the city. But still, Montgomery was home and a special place.

The neighborhood grew to Elevator Road and south to the CN Railyards and things changed a bit. A new church was built with a lot of sweat equity. Another school was built and if you can believe it, a sidewalk was built along 11th street. Bus service encompassed the whole neighborhood, but the feeling of community remained. Friends were not just with-in the block, but covered all of Montgomery Place. We started attending high school and driving cars. Remember my 49 Morris Minor; stick shift, bucket seats, leather upholstery. I remember trying to see how many girls we could get in it. I think it was eight, but my memory says 12, but maybe I was just wishing. I remember one afternoon when a guy pulled up to Betty Fredrickson's and asked who owned the Morris. I said I did, and he proceeded to tell

me he used to own one and would I let him take it for a drive. Being unsure, as we didn't know him when he said, here take mine for a drive. As his car was an MG or Triumph, I quickly gave him my keys. Only in Montgomery would a person give you a \$2500.00 car for a \$50.00 car

My next car was a 57 Chevrolet, four door hardtop, a classic that I would love to have back. There were a lot of other great cars as well. Dennis' 57 or 58 Buick, Bill's Cougar, Ric's 55 or 56 Chev post, then a Chevy 2. How many of us boy's learned how to steer and use breaks in an old motor less car from Tom Denison's yard. We would push the car to the top of the lane then push like crazy to get it going downhill. Just don't forget to jump on for the ride of gravity. I think because it was Tom's car, he got to drive most times!

We boys learned how to shoot bows and arrows, and then BB guns then pellet guns graduating to 22's and more. Woe betides any gopher that ventured out on a Saturday afternoon.

Remember going to school after the first fresh snow fall. Someone always made a "pie" to play tag on. Running, laughing and challenging whoever was "it". We weren't overweight because we walked or ran everywhere. There was always a scrub ball game in summer, pickup hockey in winter, and whatever sport was seasonal. Everyone played.

Did we ever get in trouble? I like to think not, but how many rides home in police cars got us into more trouble at home than whatever the police would give us. I remember we were climbing under the train bridge by the nuisance grounds when the CN police ordered us down. They took our names then took us home to our parents. What an embarrassment to our parents to have a police car come in and be seen by the neighbors. As I said the punishment by our parents was the worst. After chewing me out, grounding me and warning me of dire consequences if it happened again, my father said "what's wrong with you boy, they never caught me!" I guess we weren't the first to try some of these things.

The more I write, the more I remember. Remember Cub Scouts and camping at Pike Lake? The old army bell tents that had no floors, weighed tons and were guaranteed to bring on torrential rains the first night. There was a reason to dig a trench around the tent, but I think we forgot to do that allowing the rivers of water to flow through the tent and not around. Thinking of Pike Lake, one day we swam across the lake for something to do. About a hundred feet from the opposite shore the life guard caught up to us and ordered us back. Being tired from the swim we tried to rest on his paddle board, but he thought we were going to drown him or something. Long story short, when we got back to the other side we were again greeted by the RCMP. I seem to remember a lot of police in my life, but it was an age when a good talking to from them kept us on the right side of the law.

The more I write the more I remember. Getting ice from the ice house where the water plant is now, water delivered when the water lines broke again in front of Intercontinental Packers. Bread and milk delivered by horse and wagon, mail delivered by Barb and Ken Thompson's mom. Remember Barb and Ken's Collie dog? It had no trees around for shade beside its doghouse, so it dug a hole in the ground to keep cool. Pets, we all had one at different times. Usually they were strays, but some were different. Ric Fabian had a "pet crow" that would come back every year. How many years, I am not sure, but two or three I think. Ric? Coopers had a German Shephard, and I remember it jumping a five or six foot fence to get my dog Tim. Thank heavens that Bob Cooper was in the back yard and (King?) was well trained. When he called his dog came to him right away. Wizers used to have chickens and turkeys

along the back lane of their yard, and the turkeys sometimes roosted on the fence and could give me a good scare late at night. Not many will remember when we found out we could turn off all the street lights in Montgomery by pulling a switch in the back lane behind our place. I don't know who turned it back on, but they must have gotten tired of re-setting it that eventually they took it out.

Remember the Stockyards? Cattle used to come in by train and be unloaded into many pens. Of course they needed food for the animals, so they had big sheds covering hay bales. What a great place to go and build a fort or play hide and seek. Yes, they told us we could not play there, but did that ever stop us? NO!!! Also what came in with the cattle was manure. This was cleaned from the pens and deposited at the west end of the property by the railroad tracks. This was not a place to play, but a place to pick mushrooms after a spring or summer rain. There used to be a man of Asian descent who after a rain would come out on the bus and pick at least two shopping bags of mushrooms and then catch the bus back to wherever was home. Did he run a store, restaurant or just really like mushrooms. I guess I will never know.

Remember the riding stables, the oil refinery, and Esso service station by the stockyards? How about The store/service station at 11th street and Elevator road that had wood floors and an air hose to fill bike tires? Eventually Montgomery Service built where the slough used to be at 11th street and Dundonald. Remember Riddell's Shoprite that used to drop nickel chocolate bars from the upstairs window on Halloween.

Remember all the places we used to hang out? The park across from Newman's house that had a picnic table with a lot of names carved in the top. The paddling pool from the time it opened to meeting in the parking lot on Friday and Saturday nights when we eventually had cars to just about anyone's house that had a rec room. Don't forget making homemade pizza or ordering a bucket of chicken while watching a movie or listening to 45's.

I talked to my sister Judy, about this and she seemed to think most of it was true, so I will leave it to those who read it to decide what to believe or not to believe. Let me know what memories you have and if you want let me know what they are. I won't include them here, but I hope they will encourage you to write what you remember to be included in your own memoirs and they just might jog a few more of my memories. I have to clarify that these are my memories that encompasses my period of time in Montgomery. I am sure that your older or younger brothers and sisters will have different but just as memorable memories.

One more! A group of us were trying to see how far we could make a poplar tree swing back and forth when Ray (Fuzzy) Back went a little too far. The tree broke and Ray fell flat on his back on the ground and bit his tongue. Two teeth marks and a lot of blood sent all of us to Ray's house. I am not sure what happened next, but I am sure it involved a trip to the hospital.

Memories, memories! Write them down folks because we aren't getting any younger and our minds aren't getting stronger. You may feel foolish putting some things down, but your kids and grandkids will really appreciate it. We made history in Montgomery Place and we should be proud of it!

