

# The Newton Farm





The chick incubator hood on the chicken house. Greatpa would hang a light in the top and the little chicks would huddle underneath the hood.



The pig house at front and the chicken house at the back. When they had no pigs, Greatma and Greatpa would use the small shed for storage.



Helping Greatpa build the chicken house.

Who is this?



Here I am with our friend Patsy on a stump that was near the house.

# Introduction

Dear Charlie, Chloe, and Pieter,

When I was a boy about your age, my *Greatpa* and *Greatma* lived on a small farm not far from where you live in Langley. It wasn't a big farm — they had some chickens, turkeys, geese, and sometimes a pig and sheep or two — but it seemed like a magical place to us. One of our favorite adventures was to visit them, especially if our cousins were visiting at the same time.

Often we would get to stay overnight because the trip to the farm took so long. I remember how much fun it was sleeping there. We would spend the evening playing board games with *Greatpa* while listening to the polka music he liked, and fall asleep to the tick-tock of the old clock that sat on the shelf. It would remind us of each hour and each half hour with a gentle chime — even in the quiet of the night.

I thought you might like to read about the farm and the things we did when we would visit. So Fran and I have prepared this book.

We hope that you enjoy reading about these adventures and looking at the pictures as much as we have enjoyed writing about them.

I wonder if your own stories about visiting *Oma* and *Opa's* house or flying out to visit us on *Ile Bigras* will include adventures like this. I hope they aren't as dangerous as the time when *Greatpa* tried to blow up a stump!

Love  
Bill and Fran

# The Newton Farm

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: The Interurban Tram.....	5
Chapter 2: The Rumble Seat.....	7
Chapter 3: The Kitchen.....	9
Chapter 4: Rainy Days .....	11
Chapter 5: The Stump .....	13
Chapter 6: The Blast.....	15

# Chapter 1: The Interurban Tram

We were all very excited because we were taking the ‘interurban tram’ to Greatma and Greatpa’s.

This day was especially exciting because we heard that Greatpa was going to blow up an old stump with dynamite!

“Let’s just get out the stumping powder,” he said after spending hours trying to dig out the roots of a huge stump near the chicken coop. “That’ll fix this pesky stump – without all the bother of digging and chopping.”



Tram leaving the tram depot on Hastings Street. **Can you see where the driver stands?**

To get to the farm we took a bus downtown to the old BC Electric building across from Woodward’s on Hastings Street. We then caught the tram at the depot in the Army and Navy building. I was always amazed when I saw the trams turning in and out of a huge doorway in the building. It felt so strange that a tram would drive through a building!



Puttalo Bridge with the tram bridge open for a tugboat

The tram would take us across the city by the Grandview highway, then through Burnaby and New Westminster before crossing over the Fraser River and scaring me under the seat. This was the only part of going to Greatma and Greatpa’s house that I feared.

I remember looking down once and feeling my stomach tighten with fear since there was nothing between me and the swirling Fraser river below. It felt like all someone had to do was run to the side of the tram and that would be enough to tip the whole thing over. I could almost feel the cold water on my skin.

Sometimes it helped to keep my eyes fixed on the cars on the Pattullo Bridge above the train. I would look at the huge steel girders and the strong guard rails and wonder why they couldn't put the same on the train bridge. It would make the trip to Greatma and Greatpa's so much more pleasant!

That day, however, when we got the word that we could watch the explosion, there was nothing that would stop me from being on that tram. When I saw the steel arch of the Puttalo Bridge and heard the echo of the train on the tram bridge I found an empty seat in the middle of the car, kneeled on the floor facing it, closed my eyes, and held my breath.

Once over the bridge it was pure joy. I could return to the games Peter, Robert, and I usually played on the tram (whenever our parents weren't looking — and the conductor wasn't around). Like flipping the seats back and forth — first of all putting them all facing in the direction we were heading, then flipping them back (if no-one was sitting on them) so that they would be facing backwards — or placing them one front, one back, so that groups of four people could chat along the way. If we were lucky, we might even head out to the back of the car and watch the tracks and ties fly backwards as the tram sped along. If someone had opened the window, we could even hang out our heads and feel the wind blowing our hair like a dog in a car.

Who wouldn't love this way of traveling?

When the conductor announced the Newton station, we forgot all about the excitement of the tram and turned our attention to the next adventure — a ride in the rumble seat!



Tram at the Cloverdale Station. The Newton Station was much smaller. Do you know what the long pole on the roof is for?

## Chapter 2: The Rumble Seat

When we jumped down from the tram at Newton station, Greatpa had still not arrived. We ran under the small shelter with our bags to avoid the drizzle and took turns checking the long gravel road along which we expected Greatpa to come. It was only a short time before we saw the small black Ford coming toward us, leaving a trail of gravel and dust in the road behind it.

“I want to ride in the rumble seat!” we all chanted as Greatpa’s smile greeted us from the window.

The rumble seat must have been specifically invented for kids. It appeared as if by magic when the back trunk of the Ford was opened. But this wasn’t a trunk like the one on cars today.

Instead of lifting the lid up, Greatpa grabbed a T-shaped handle just below the back window and pulled open the curved back of the car. It opened like the shell of a clam — and inside was a cushioned seat — just perfect for three young children and a small dog.



We took this picture of a rumble seat when travelling across Canada with Samantha in 2012. Can you see the small white steps on the bumper and fender?

We scrambled up the small round steps built into the back fender and tumbled into the rumble seat, fighting for a place on the outside. Our luggage was tossed in at our feet and Greatma's dog Patsy was lifted up onto our laps. Since both Mum and Dad were with us, Greatpa had to make two trips to the station and back, but we didn't care since it meant more time riding in the back with the wind and drizzle blowing our faces.

I loved to climb down by the passengers' feet when the rushing air became too cold. Crouching down with the luggage, it was like a small cocoon — warm and comfortable, where the clack of the gravel on the mudguards became a dull roar that blended with the sounds of the motor.

The trip always seemed too short. We would feel the car slow down and turn in through the gate about the same time that Patsy began barking at Greatma in her apron covered in flour.



The farmhouse where Greatpa and Greatma lived. **Can you see the sign about eggs for sale?** Greatma had many chickens — and sometimes even turkeys or geese. That looks like Greatpa talking to Dad by our Chev.



Here's a drawing of me and my brother Peter in the rumble seat. **Which one is me?** You can also see that Greatpa is driving. He looks like he is enjoying the ride as much as we are.

## Chapter 3: The Kitchen

Greatma always seemed to be baking something and usually it was very yummy. So after we scrambled out of the rumble seat, our first stop was the kitchen.

Clack! Clack! Clack! The screen door slapped as the three of us rushed into the kitchen. It always smelled so good — of bread or chicken soup or scones — and always with the special smell of the farm: a mix of warm food, burning wood (or sawdust), and fresh tea.

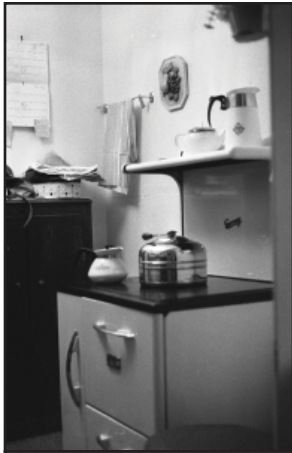
All these delicacies were produced from an old black and white cookstove. For our earliest visits I remember it as the centre piece of the kitchen, along with a stack of wood that had to be regularly replenished from the woodshed out

back. Later in our lives, I remember the same stove — but by that time it had a large tin hopper that Greatpa would refill with sawdust. It gave a warm glow to the coldest, wettest of days.

On days like that we would clean off the kitchen table and unfold a board game or pull out the stamp albums that Greatma had been collecting over the years. I not only loved looking at the tiny images from far off places on the stamps, but enjoyed hearing Greatma's stories about where they came from, who sent the letter, and in some cases, what the letter was about.



Greatma and Patsy. It looks like they are waiting for us in front of the garage.



The stove when it burned wood.



Greatma and me working on the stamp collection.  
*Can you find Patsy? What do you think she is doing?*

The kitchen was also the place where we would empty the button jar onto the table and go through all the shiny and colourful buttons that Greatma had gathered over the years. I loved discovering the strange metal pieces that fell out of the jar — pieces that Greatma identified as special jigs for her sewing machine. I thought it was so clever when she would put them on the machine and show us how they helped her sew buttonholes and special hems.

Years later I enjoyed watching Daegan and JP (your father) going through the button jar with Greatma just like we did. Several things had changed by that time, however. Greatma and Greatpa were living in another house (this time in Clearbrook) and the button jar had become a button tin.



Daegan and JP going through the button tin with Greatma (1977).



My brother Robert and Greatpa playing checkers. It looks like Greatpa is very serious. He's probably trying to figure out a way to trick Robert. **What games do you play with Oma and Opa?**

## Chapter 4: Rainy Days

On days when we were driven indoors by the rain or cold, the house provided a store of treasures. It was during these times that the checkers would come out, the button jar would be dumped over the table, or some new delight would be revealed — like the apple corer, the cream separator, the canning equipment, or the meat grinder.

On those days when we had really settled in, we were allowed up in the attic. This was our version of adventure heaven! We couldn't just sneak up there, of course — we had to prepare for the climb.



The attic in Greatma and Greatpa's house.

We had to bring in a ladder, move the hatch, and plug in the extension cord to have some light. Only then could we climb up the ladder with the light bulb guiding the way and choose our favorite spots. For me, it was beside the stacks of National Geographic



Sometimes it was hard to find places to sit.  
**Where would you like to sit?**

magazines near the tiny window at the end of the room. I would sit there for hours thumbing through the photos from around the world, exploring lands, maps, and places strange and exotic.

Some days we would get into the many trunks and boxes underneath the rafters. Some of them were full of old magazines, some with photos and trinkets, and some with clothes and blankets smelling of mothballs and cedar. The muffled sounds of adults talking in the room below, the

soft chimes of the old clock, and the smells of dinner became part of the comfort that enveloped us every time.

It was hard to get us out of the attic once we had settled in. Even calls to eat were usually answered reluctantly. Often, it was only the threat of unplugging the light that sent us scrambling down the ladder.

On the rainy days when no one wanted to get out the ladder to the attic, there were still plenty of places to explore. Another of my favorites was the garage.

Greatpa had a garage that smelled like oil and grease. It was the smell of a fix-it man, because that is exactly what he was.

The workbench was covered with tools; parts from his latest project; jars of screws, bolts, springs, washers; and strange pieces of metal or rubber. We loved exploring all of them and imagining what they would be used for and how they would work.

Some of our favorite tools were those we could work, like the grindstone with a long handle. One of us would turn the handle to get the wheel spinning while another would touch the grindstone with a large nail or piece of metal. We loved watching the shower of sparks that flew from the metal and took turns seeing who could get the wheel spinning the fastest — in order to make the longest shower of sparks.



A corner in Greatpa's garage. Can you find the little wood stove he used to keep himself warm in the winter? His workbench was much messier than your papa's!



Thomas turning the handle on Greatpa's grindstone that is now in our house. Would you like to try it when you come to visit?

That grindstone is now in my house, and I enjoy watching as Zachary, Samantha, or Thomas try their hand at spinning the wheel and creating the shower of sparks. Perhaps you can have a turn when you come to visit me someday.

Occasionally we would climb up the ladder to the garage attic to explore the small barrels of nails, trunks full of metal pieces, and parts left over from cars or other equipment.

But today was very different — we were not interested in spending time in the attic or garage when there were stumps to blow up!

## Chapter 5: The Stump

Greatpa got a very short greeting from us on blasting day. We were too worried about missing the main event, so we jumped down from the rumble seat, skipped our usual visit to the kitchen, and ran out to join the men in the tool shed. Greatpa and Dad were soon piling the shovels and picks into the wheelbarrow and preparing to head down to the old stump.

A small burlap bag was resting on the old table saw. I remember thinking that it must contain the dynamite from the way Greatpa handled it. At our insistence, he pulled out a stick to show us, then opened the coil of the fuse with its blasting cap at the end. He showed us where the cap end would be inserted in the stick of dynamite, ready to be lit. Of course he couldn't resist teasing us about the dangers of the explosion — just to heighten our anticipation.

We were not allowed near the stump, so we had to watch from behind the garden fence as Greatpa and Dad worked at its base. It was one of the big ones that grew behind the chicken house — taller than my father and spreading out in the base to the roots that stubbornly held it in place.

It was just like the one farther back in the woods – the one we called 'the fort'. This is where we would play for hours, squeezing through the narrow slit that allowed us access to the hollow space inside, climbing up the outside using

the old worn notches that remained from the lumberjacks' springboard, and proclaiming our triumph as we reached the top of the stump, challenging ourselves to walk all the way around the outside ring of wood.

The stump was so big that we could only circle it by calling our cousins to join hands around the base. It would take all of us in a chain to make it around.



'The fort'. It wasn't the stump that Greatpa blew up — but it was about the same size. Can you find the slit where we would squeeze through to the middle?



Me, Peter, Bob, and our cousins David, Rick, and Bruce — one day at the farm. I guess that June (Rick's sister) was taking the picture.

As with most of the big stumps in the region, they were scarred with charcoal from an old fire. We were never clear whether this was from a forest fire long ago, the remnants of a campfire set by kids like us, or the futile attempt of some farmer like Greatpa who was trying to clear the area for a new field.

Sometimes we would pretend we were lumberjacks ourselves. Greatpa didn't mind if we cut up the dead trees. We just had to be sure that there wasn't a bees' nest in it before we began, however. I remember how we found one once, so Greatpa got out his beekeeper's equipment and moved the bees to one of the hives he had ready.

Dad and Greatpa seemed to take hours at the base of the stump — chopping the roots to make just the right place for the dynamite, setting the charge, and covering the sticks of dynamite with rocks to ensure that the blast would be directed to the roots of the stump rather than fly uselessly into the air.

At last, they stood up from their work, piled the tools back in the wheelbarrow, and headed up to where we were standing behind the garden fence.



Pete and Robert are bucking a tree in the woods. Greatpa said we could make some money by cutting a cord of wood and selling it for firewood. He didn't tell us about how hard it was to cut a cord of wood!



This still isn't a full cord!



## Chapter 6: The Blast

We jostled for the best places to watch, but weren't sure what to expect. Would the whole stump blast off like a rocket? Would it split apart like a huge log? Would it send a shock wave that would knock us off our feet? It wasn't hard to convince young boys that all of these were possible — and that's just the type of thing that Greatpa loved.

"Keep your heads low, boys," he called out as he approached our hiding place. "There's no telling where she'll end up."

"If you see it flying your way, run as quickly as you can to the shed," he added — but I missed the smile on his face as he wheeled the barrow past the raspberry bushes.

He grabbed a box of matches, then turned once again in the direction of the stump. My Dad headed off to the house to let Mum and Greatma know that the blasting was imminent but he was back at our sides before Greatpa had reached the stump.

We heard the screen door slam as Mum and Greatma stepped out to get a look, then they turned toward Greatpa as he yelled to us all, "Everybody ready?"

We all waved and he went back to work on the fuse.

In no time at all, he straightened up, took a couple of steps backward, then turned and ran to where we were crouching in anticipation. We all held our breath.

There was much less noise than I expected — but the dust and dirt were spectacular! The stump didn't shoot up like a rocket, but out of the dust we could see something sailing through the air. It flew up over the chicken house and past the big fir tree before starting to fall — right toward the house!



A view of the garden fence from the side the house. **Can you see the 2 geese? Can you find the garden fence?** The stump was well beyond the large pole on the other side of the fence.



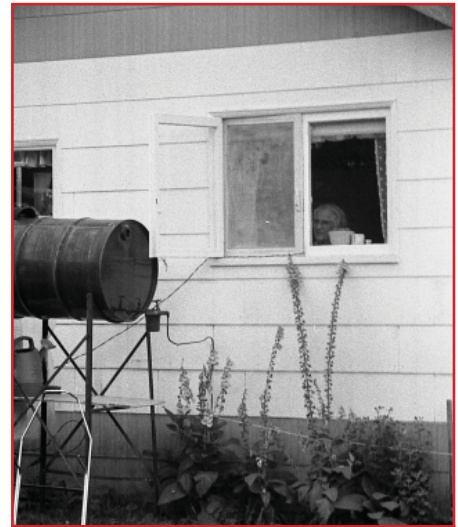
A view near where the stump used to be. You can see the farmhouse beyond the tree — a bit of white with a window and roof showing. **What do you see in the field?**

We all stood in wonder as the rock continued its descent — down, down, down — then, with a crash, right through the kitchen wall!

We all stood in disbelief as we listened to the distant crashes from inside the kitchen. My cousin Rick began to cry and Greatma turned to comfort him, assuring him that all would be okay.

Greatpa was the first to rush inside the house, quickly followed by Dad. As we ran to see the damage, we could hear the exclamations of the two men as they explored the debris. By the time we got over to the house, Greatpa was standing in the doorway with a smile on his face and a rock the size of a softball in his hand.

That evening we enjoyed a family dinner in a kitchen with an old board covering the hole in the wall. We laughed at the way Greatpa had created a cannon from an old stump, and we added how thankful we were that no one was standing in the kitchen when the cannon went off.



The farmhouse — and the wall the rock went through. The hole is all repaired. **Can you see Grandma Dumville in the kitchen window?** She came for a visit.

By the time we left the farm that trip, the hole was repaired, and the kitchen cleaned up. But the stump remained as it was — except for a rather large crater at its base where the dynamite had been. Even when the farm was sold many years later, the stump was still standing to remind us of the day that Greatpa had used it to launch a rock through the kitchen wall.



## Family gatherings at the farm



Rick's girlfriend, Rick, Uncle Carl, Pete, June, Robert, Mum, Dad, Greatma, Greatpa, Me, Elsie, Dick



Robert, Bert, Lina, Me, Rick, Dick, Elsie, Pete, Terry, Dad, Mum, June, Aunt Tina



Can you find Fran in this picture? She is pregnant with your papa (JP).



Samwise running to greet Daegan.



Here's my Mum smiling at something in the garden on the farm.



We had many family meals at the farm with some of your relatives that you don't even know. Can you find Greatma and Greatpa?



And here's my Dad laughing at something. Maybe it's Mum.



This is what the farm property looks like today. The house, garage, chicken house, and other buildings have been torn down to make room for new houses. The old stump was finally bulldozed over to create a street out the back — but you can still see some of the tall trees that were part of the farm when I was a boy. **Can you find them in the old photo of the farmhouse included in this book?**



A view of the farm trees as they are today. **Can you tell which ones are left from the farm?**

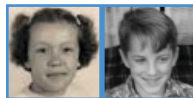


Daegan, JP, and me

After the farm was sold, we went back to see what the developers had done with it. At that time they had done very little — but just let it grow over.



Me and Greatma



F 'n B Productions  
 Bill.Reimer@concordia.ca  
 December 2013