

## **BONNIE LINDA SIMPSON**

My parents are Clifford John Simpson and Helen Margaret Tucker, the eldest daughter of Ralph and Muriel Tucker of Unity, Saskatchewan. Helen was born January 17 1921 and died September 17 1984,

My parents were married in Unity, Jan 23, 1943. They lived on the farm, 10 miles northeast of Unity, from seeding until harvest every year, and then in Saskatoon from the end of harvest until the end of winter session at the University of Saskatchewan, where Dad was first studying and then teaching in the College of Agricultural Engineering.

I was born April 9 1945, at St Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, just in time for the annual Spring move back to Unity.

When I was old enough to start grade one in Unity, we spent the winters in town instead of in Saskatoon.

In 1963 I graduated from high school and attended the University of Saskatchewan from 1963 to 1967.

B.A., B.Ed (although the last year of the B.Ed I took in Calgary)

In 1965 I married Jim Hillson of Briercrest Sask. Theology student I met at St. Andrews Theological College and Student Centre.

In 1967 we moved to McCord, Sask., where Jim was the United Church minister for a three-point charge, including a huge rural farming and ranching area.

I taught piano and figure skating lessons and helped with the church choir.

In November, 1967 we adopted a six-month-old baby of Métis background from Prince Albert and named him Mark Andrew

On October 15 1968, our son Brendan Michael was born in Regina.

From 1970 to 1971 we lived in Hollywood, California, where Jim took study leave.

From 1971 to 1974 we lived in Viscount, where Jim was the minister of a three-point charge and I was the organist.

In 1974 we moved to Calgary, Alberta. Jim a minister, and of course I the organist/pianist. As both boys were now in school, I started teaching. I taught high school English in four high schools in Calgary over the next 30 years, mostly in vocational schools for high-risk teens.

In 1980 Jim and I divorced.

I retired from teaching in 2003

Presently I live in Calgary with Mary Ann Britt, my partner since 1999. She is from Augusta, Georgia. We met on-line as English teachers, and set up a program between our two schools.



We keep in contact with my grandson in High River, and with my brother, Brendan, and his family in Medicine Hat. We make frequent trips to Unity to visit my parents, Dad and Betty, and my brother, Bryan and his family.

## **Anecdotal:**

### Simpson grandparents:

1. I liked to wear my hair long. Mom wouldn't allow that for school; she braided it. Grandma Simpson didn't know how to braid hair, so I liked to stay overnight at their place, so I could go to school next day with my hair long.

2. I dropped in for a visit at Grandma Simpson's after school (grade one). She had some ladies there playing Bridge, so she came up with a job for me. She handed me an addressed letter and a quarter and asked me to mail it for her. This turned out to be a new experience for me. When I returned, she asked for the change. Change? I told her I put the letter and money into the mail slot. So, she sent me back to the post office to see what could be done. Thank goodness for small towns - some nice (no doubt amused) man dug out the letter and quarter, and I took the 20 cents home to Grandma. Smart lady; she made me do it myself.

3. Whenever Bryan and I went to Grandma and Grandpa Simpson's house for lunch, they would get us playing "I Spy".

4. Ding, Bing, Ding. How many years did it take to learn practising in the back of the car on long trips to Saskatoon.

5. Grandma's insistence that none of her family should have to pay anything to ride on the ferries over to Victoria, because after all, that was still part of the Trans-Canada Highway and it should be free.

### Character building:

When I was ten years old, I had to get my teeth straightened. That meant frequent trips to Saskatoon. The first time, the whole family went. The next time, Mom and I went on the train. The CPR, which stopped at every village and hamlet, and went from Unity to Saskatoon in about five and a half hours.

Dad would drop me off at the north Unity station about 6 a.m. on his way to the farm. Sometimes I'd lie down on the bench until the train came. I took a taxi from the station in Saskatoon to Dr. Schacter's office, and then for the next 12-24 hours, my mouth would hurt like hell from the tightened metal bands around each tooth.

But I got to know downtown Saskatoon, and sometimes Uncle Eddy and Aunt Muriel Tucker (who had the Rexall Drugstore) would invite me home with them for some soup for lunch. Otherwise, I would order an egg salad sandwich at Pinder's lunch counter, and work on half of it, slowly moving very small bites around in my mouth till they were small enough to swallow whole.

Back to the station at 5 pm, to start the trip home. If a conductor saw me looking kind of sad (trying to get through the second half of my sandwich, because I really was hungry), he'd stop and talk to me; conductors did that then. And by the time the train got to Unity, I'd feel pretty good - one time having invited a total stranger to spend the night at our house because her ride wouldn't pick her up till the next morning.

## Music:

From the age of six, I took piano lessons. I was 10 when our new house was built, and then it was quite a walk on cold dark winter mornings to get to Mrs Cleall's by 7:30. Dad always said he'd drive me, but I never wanted to wake him up. So I'd set out with my music case, as fast as I could go, two blocks to the medical building, go inside for a minute or two, then hustle another block to the church, go inside the front door, taking advantage of the warmth as I walked downstairs, across the hall, up the stairs and out the back door. Next was a block-long alley, through which I would squint my eyes, hoping not to see any cats frozen to death. Then just a half block more and I was there!

Mrs Cleall taught me well enough that at a fairly young age, I got to be the church organist. I sometimes played the hymns so fast that Mom would tell me later people's tongues were hanging out. My mother also could tell when the choir was a bit late. Not by her watch, but because when I finished my set of voluntaries, I would simply ad lib until I could see the choir in my rear-view mirror. Mom knew I was playing pop music slowed waaaaaay down, modulating from one chord to another.

Playing for funerals was part of this job. They were usually set for 2 pm, the middle of the school afternoon classes. So I felt very 'adult' being allowed to leave the school at 1:30, dash over to the church, put on my gown, run over the anthem with the choir, and then be at the organ in time for the prelude. After the service, I was de-gowned and out the door back to school before the last mourners had exited the church.