

Chapter 3 - My Enthusiasm - Getting Things Done

Growing up in Canada was okay. Oh, the winters were long and cold, but we did not seem to mind. Never were we confined at home because of the cold or stormy weather. We dressed for the cold, ran rather than walked. I guess that kept us warm!

One fall day during my early adolescence, a group of my pals got together and decided that we needed an ice skating rink – and possibly a hockey team. We began to plan. Along my street about three lots from my home was an empty lot. I elected to approach the owner to see if he would allow us to dig a trench along four sides of the lot – use the earth to make a bank of earth so we could flood the lot and have ice.

The owner was not too enthusiastic until we sold him on the idea that we would teach all the young people how to skate, free. He had a delightful 10-year-old daughter who was the apple of her Dad's eye, and this idea appealed to him. And she was very happy with the idea.

Then we set to work. With shovels and spades we dug the trenches around the lot, built up the banks for the rink. We approached the city fathers and asked if they would flood the rink for us. They send down the city engineer, he approved the site, they flooded it and we had a skating rink.

The gang decided we just had to have a hockey team. We canvassed the area, rapping on all doors and businesses, with the theme, "we will teach all children how to skate and the rink would be available to anyone, but we needed a contribution for sweaters and skates for our hockey team." That theme worked. I think the idea of little kids being taught how to skate sold the idea. We chose our team colors – maroon and gold. Our emblem, believe it or not, was a swastika (Hitler's emblem). I swear, though, there was no thought of being neo-Nazis. We bought the felt and our girlfriends cut out the emblems and sewed them on our jerseys. We were proud!

The rink was quite a neighborhood success. Of course it snowed frequently and heavily, but the lads all got together and shoveled it off.

Spring came, you know in Canada you are shoveling snow one week then the weather changes suddenly and you are planting potatoes!

The owner of the lot called me. "What are you going to do to ready my lot for growing potatoes?" he asked.

"Just as soon as the front leaves the ground, we will level the lot," I told him, and we did, of course. We thanked him and his 10-year-old daughter, and he promised us the use of the land for the next winter.

Remember that in Canada the weather changes dramatically from the cold of winter to the hot of summer. One day my gang was sitting around chatting.

"Why don't we have a tennis court?" one lad asked.

"Why not?" we answered, and began to plan.

Across the street from my home was an unused lot, ideal for a tennis court. We approached the owner, with a similar theme we had for the skating rink. If he would let us use his lot for a tennis court, we would teach any young people who wanted to how to play tennis.

Again the theme caught on. We got together and mowed the weeds. (It was unused, you see), planted grass seeds, marked out the court with white tape, set up the net, set up 2 x 4 timbers and strung chicken wire about the periphery of the lot.

Regularly we cut the grass and that summer and several following summers we played on our own tennis court. Once again we told the neighbors that the court was open to all, and it became quite a nice contribution to our youth activity.

As I became an older adolescent, on Saturday nights our city covered rink had a full band for skating. People of all ages convened in the huge colored area and as the band played, we skated round and round and round that big ice surface. Now, that was fun. The high school students came, skated in pairs with each other, and had a really good time. I think the tickets cost 35 cents, but we all dug up the money somehow and enjoyed ourselves.

Now that was Saturday nights, but on Friday nights, open air skating rinks were available. We would head out after dinner wearing warm duds, don our skates and skate, skate, skate. I believe we skated practically non-stop for about two hours.

Then home again. My mother would have a fresh loaf of her homemade bread ready. I'd cut two thick slices, lay on butter and a thick piece of Spanish onion (remember them) then the top layer of bread and, armed with a big tumbler of milk, I would head up to bed.

Now I tell you after that exercise, I slept, possibly aided by the onion sandwich.

Life in Canada, growing up, was simple, physical and good. My parents always fed us well – three square meals a day and a snack at bedtime.

We always looked forward to the Spring. One reason, the break-up of the ice on the local rivers. The chunks of ice were room-sized and 1 foot thick. We rode them down in the current. Oh, we fell down, slipped off sometimes, and it was, of course, dangerous, but really fun. When it became time to think of heading for home, we'd build a bonfire to dry off. Upon reaching home, and facing the scrutiny of our mothers, we would look quite respectable. Oh, if mothers only knew the hazards we took in the process of growing up.

One Spring, after riding the ice floes, we decided to build a log cabin clubhouse. The local library provided directions of how to construct a cabin. We dug out the foundation, which was 4 feet deep, then built a 4 foot structure. This created 8-foot walls for our cabin. We roofed it, but did not fill in the spaces between the logs. One Saturday, we all walked out, including our mothers (dads were not interested) to see our gang headquarters. Low and behold, rain storms had completely filled that 4 foot dug-out area. The rain had just poured in and flooded us. It was months before we evacuated the water then properly sealed the walls, using mud, of course.

Formal education in music was not thought of in my family, and I don't know why except that it would cost money for lessons. I could even have joined a church choir, but nobody suggested it. So I did not do it, and regret my lack of music today.

One thing I did toward a little music, on Saturdays I would walk or run up to our library, obtain several books, run, not walk home, go to our "parlor" and set a stack of records on the Victrola and close the doors. I would lie on my tummy and read by the hour. Reading became a large part of my life and still does. The Victrola provided my music education.





