

## **Toast to the Groom**

by Walter Goresky, given on the occasion of the 70th wedding anniversary of Isidore and Anne, June 1991.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to be the one to give the toast to the "groom". This is not an easy task for me since I, as his son, have looked to Isidore as a father rather than that of a person in his own right. But I do want to try and paint a picture of Isidore as a person with his accomplishments, difficulties and life direction that might give us some insight into his life to date.

I'll begin with some early facts. Isidore was born in November 1903 in Barbivtsi Ukraine. He was the oldest of a developing family of 13 children. He has very limited memories of the times in Ukraine as the family emigrated from the Ukraine to Canada when he was 3 years old. They settled on a farm in Stony Mountain Manitoba, just north of Winnipeg.

Isidore's father Basil was a blacksmith, a quarry stone cutter who worked in the local quarry whenever work was available. This amounted to only about 3 months in a year and his \$30 rate of pay was only 15 cents an hour.

This, then, was all the money the family had at their disposal. They were therefore very dependent on the farm for their livelihood.

This was a period of serious poverty for many families, Isidore's family included. It is difficult to describe the seriousness of this period. There were no welfare supports. Starvation did occur. People were dependent on one another in times of crises. Hunger, insecurity and the depression of poverty haunted everyone. I see this experience as a central theme in the subsequent life of people who have lived through this era.

Grandfather is difficult to describe. He died early. He was a man who basically knew several languages. He was interested in current events, he was a good story teller to the children and the grandchildren. He has been described as a strong willed man but I recall him as a kind person. I picture him in a lifelong struggle just to keep himself and his family alive. Grandmother was a very basic woman. Busy with children, farm animals, cooking. I recall her as a powerful woman but a friendly and determined person.

Isidore's early years highlight one central feature. This was his early reverence for learning, a theme which has remained central throughout his life. This may well have begun as an attempt to escape from poverty but it changed to a love of learning itself that remains to this date.

There were also some important people in Isidore's life who helped fire his

enthusiasm. He speaks for instance of an Anglican Minister, a Reverend Smith, who lent him books and confided in Isidore, his own interests in various fields. He received encouragement from some of Grandfather's friends and relatives: a Mr. Kabatiak and our Uncle Elias Eustace, a United Church minister.

They helped get Isidore going on values of learning, reading and culture.

Isidore was good at this and took to these values like a duck to water. Books and their secrets became a first love. He discovered more and more of the complicated world through books. He learned of values, politics, philosophy, cultures and literature all through his own reading.

Isidore did well in school at Stony Mountain and by the age of 16 obtained a teaching permit (1918) that sent him in 1919 to Baskerville School in Rosa Manitoba. He was paid the princely sum of \$79 a month, \$30 of which went for room and board.

It was here that he met Anne, his bride to be. She was a beautiful sought after woman who attended his class and finally fell in love with him.

I wondered what attracted Anne to Isidore. Why would Anne choose an outsider when there were many others, much more financially secure who had come forward looking for her attention?

I think she saw in Isidore a serious minded and ambitious man. A man whose values in education and learning impressed her since she herself had a strong wish to pursue the same path. I think she saw a personally committed man, sensitive to and ready to help and teach others. But also I think she saw a sensitive and emotional man who needed and responded to nurturing.

So they were married 70 years ago.

The beginning years were certainly not easy. Isidore had to continue training as a teacher and finances were critical. Isidore went on to Normal School, one year of University and with added correspondence and summer school he received his B.A. degree in 1926, specializing in English and History. By this time, he, Anne, and baby daughter Adelaide had moved to Smoky Lake Alberta where Isidore accepted the Principal's position of the local school.

Isidore was and is still an impressive teacher. The hundred odd students he taught in the "little red school house" all held him in very high regard and do so to this day. Many became, like Isidore, dedicated teachers responding to his excitement of learning and his dedication to people.

Isidore then entered a limited political career. For 5 years Isidore took part in the major decision making for the province and I recall his enjoying this part very much. He saw his role as being responsible for the affairs of the country as a whole and

supported those issues where he felt all would benefit. He did obtain funding to build a public road allowing access to a region that was frequently cut off in adverse weather conditions. Many remember this as the "Gibbons Road".

I remember his hurt and sense of loss when, in the next election, he was wrongfully accused of being treacherous and a communist and ultimately defeated by a narrow margin. These were difficult hurdles for someone who had tried so hard to remain dedicated.

Isidore essentially turned back to further learning. He moved to Edmonton, began to take a more active role in Ukrainian affairs and was able, through teaching, correspondence schools, years of training, night time correction of correspondence papers etc. to eventually obtain his M.A. and M. Ed, degrees.

His life took a very different turn in 1941 when the RCAF finally accepted his repeated offers to join. He was 38 at the time and was placed as an officer who taught law, discipline, and administration.

Isidore seems to really enjoy these experiences. It was a sharp contrast to what he had done before. It may be that the built in security of the Air Force was a new experience but he also worked closely for the first time with large numbers of people sharing their interests and activities.

In 1945 Isidore took up a civilian post of School Superintendent in Consort Alberta. He moved to Consort, alone for the first year, then the rest of the family following except for Adelaide, now married, and myself, remaining at the University.

Isidore's life as a School Superintendent made use of increasing maturity and knowledge and he welcomed this part of his life with enthusiasm. Here he could influence vast numbers of students sharing with them the interests, information and values that were hidden to them. He pioneered the first language lab in Alberta. It was so successful that it became part of the curriculum for schools province wide. The University of Alberta became particularly interested in these labs and very soon incorporated similar studies in their own classrooms.

His M.Ed. thesis, "The History of the Educational Movement in Alberta" was a monumental work that has since been followed by a number of papers based on his research and is still referred to. All this was made even more difficult by me since I recall using many of his research pages to fly paper airplanes and the catastrophe this presented when he tried to put the pages back together.

When Isidore retired in 1957 he had been promoted to that of planner of elementary school curriculum for the province, again, an area he enjoyed thoroughly especially techniques of learning to read and write for beginners.

Retirement to Isidore has merely been a substitute of one activity for another.

He joined a pioneer group in Alberta who put to print the many individual family histories emigrating from the Ukraine to Canada. Today Isidore is probably the most knowledgeable referenc person around who can give specific information on the various waves of Ukrainian/Canadian immigrants and their individual family histories.

In recent years Isidore has had to once again make special adjustments. His failing eyesight and his allergies have forced him to stay closer to home. But he remains active, interested and still ready to assist, even to teach people who wish his counsel. He is an active member of the Canadian Institute for the Blind and uses their "Talking Books" continuously. He remains strongly rooted to family and his children, grandchildren and great grand children all respond to him as do more distant family relatives.

This, then, is the man my mother married 70 years ago. To this day she shows her respect for his knowledge and holds him in high regard for his authority and dignity among men. She, more than anyone, could have given this toast more clearly and I apologize for omitting the many important other aspects of Isidore's life. But I do have great pride in presenting to you our Father, this groom of 70 years who still remains in our eyes a "man for all seasons".

"Ladies and Gentlemen, to the Groom".