

Inside Edam, Saskatchewan's One Room School

by Margo Porro

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My father, Bill Veenstra, was a teacher in the same one-roomed school house he attended as a child during the depression in Northern Saskatchewan in the town in which he was born and raised. As I was growing up, he'd tell us stories of his experiences. He described it so well, I felt like I was actually there.....

After doing our chores – mucking out stables, chopping wood, or getting water from the well – and eating breakfast, we walked by the grain elevator building and arrived at the white boarded school with our lunch pails in hand. Sometimes, we were accompanied by the sound of crickets chirping in tune with the school bell clangs that beckoned us in. Inside, the school smelled strongly of wood smoke from the black potbellied stove that was stoked up early in the mornings throughout the crisp fall and frigid winter months of the year to ward off the chill. On some mornings, it seemed we could almost taste the burning wood on our tongues. On gloomy days, not unknown in this region of northern Saskatchewan, the windows emitted a dull, hazy light, only slightly enhanced by ceiling lights. We squinted at the blackboard at the front of the room where the teacher's desk was also positioned. We sat in rows of seats, with the smallest and youngest at the front (nearest the stove), and the largest and oldest at the rear. Desks were attached at their bases by metal toboggan-like runners. The wood of these desks seemed beautiful to me, smooth and coloured like the brown hue of the spots on the cows in the nearby fields. The floor was bare wooden planks worn smooth by time. A Canadian flag hung limply at the back of the room and above the blackboard, running across the front of the room, designed to draw our eyes to it, was a paper strip showing the beautifully shaped script known as handwriting. This room was full of hope and determination as we tried to learn our way to a brighter future.



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