

# *CHAPTER FOUR*

*MY LOVE OF SWIMMING  
AND THE DOWNTOWN  
VAUGHAN STREET Y.M.C.A.*

*MY FIRST JOB,  
LIFE GUARD  
AT  
MINAKI LODGE, ONTARIO  
1940*

*THEN*

*LIFE GUARD  
AT GRAND BEACH, MANITOBA  
1941 - 1943*

# 4

*I loved our "lifesaving" classes. Jimmy Wolks, our instructor, was an energetic and enthusiastic young man. He was like a big brother to all of the young aspiring candidates like myself, who were working for our Lifesaving awards. There were ten of us in our class. In fact, we had an older gentleman in our class who was in his late seventies. In spite of having difficulty in getting into proper shape, he made up the difference by his sheer "grit" and "guts". He taught us youngsters that intestinal fortitude was one of the most important ingredients in becoming a successful and very good Lifesaver. Most of the people in the Senior Lifesaving Class were also members of the "Tankers", so that camaraderie that we exhibited in training for the swimming races was still evident in our lifesaving classes.*

*Our objective was to achieve three awards simultaneously. The Royal Lifesaving Association "Bronze Medallion"; and the "Award of Merit". Also, we prepared to pass the "Senior lifesaving Course" of the Y.M.C.A. The Bronze Medallion of the Royal Life Saving Association involved knowing how to "break" numerous "holds" by which a drowning person might grab a life saver, when approached in the water. Additionally, it involved in not only breaking the various holds, but maintaining control and positioning the person being rescued so that they could be "towed" in a various number of ways to safety. The "Award of Merit" of the Royal Life Saving society involved breaking a number of holds, and towing people in a various number of ways, but in addition it*

*required that all this be done with the rescuer being almost fully clothed, excepting shoes. Of course, the person being rescued also had their clothes on. Another tough requirement of this award was to swim "a half mile fully clothed", after having exhibited all the various break and tows, as previously mentioned. The "coup de grace", was the last requirement, which was to recover within "three" dives, and object approximately six inches square, which had been previously "hidden" in the Y.M.C.A. pool. The pool was approximately 25 ft, by 75 ft. so this was a very difficult task. In order to be certain that we could do this, all of us practiced swimming the full length of the pool (75ft) underwater. Since we could see approximately eight to ten feet on each side of our body, while we were swimming underwater, with three passes through the length of the pool, we could be certain to recover the hidden object. This important manoeuvre later proved invaluable for me in recovering the body of a young boy who had drowned when he dove off the side of the old pier at Grand Beach, struck his head on a rock, and drowned in the old "dangerous hole", at the easterly side of the pier.*

*By the end of summer in 1938, Papa Joe had been getting a little more work, and had suggested that I enroll at St. Paul's College to get my Grade XII. He had encouraged me a great deal to get a good education, and really he wanted me to become a Medical Doctor. Around this period in my life, I used to get some week end work by playing my accordion at house parties. I think I got about seven or eight dollars for the evening. It was hard work, because I had to cart my accordion around on the Street Car, and it was awfully heavy. Papa Joe agreed to loan me the seventy-five dollars, which was the tuition fee required at St. Paul's. I could pay*

*him back when I was able. During this period, I had learned to play the Trumpet, and had taken a few lessons in arranging music for big dance bands. I made a few friends who were playing in organized bands, and joined the Local Musicians Association, Local 190 of the American Federation of Music. With a few of my musical friends I organized a Dance Band and we rented and played on Saturday Nights at the Fort Rouge Legion Hall on Osborne St. South. The band was known as "Chuck Guarino and his Gentlemen of Rhythm. We played the Legion for most of the winter of 1938 and into the spring of 1939.*

*On September 1, 1939 Canada declared war against Germany and the German Dictator Hitler. The army immediately began recruiting men, and I can remember long lines of young men who had just finished school enlisting in the Army at Minto Barracks in the west end, because they would receive the huge sum of One Dollar a day, and all living expenses were also looked after. Hundreds of my young friends were enlisting, and usually they were immediately sent to Camp Shilo for training, and then within a few months were sent to Aldershot, England, for further training before a planned invasion by the Combined American, Canadian, and English armies into Europe. I had considered joining the Airforce but Papa Joe successfully persuaded me to go to school instead. Thus, in September of 1939, I enrolled at St. Paul's College for Grade XII. It was a very tough year, because I immediately found myself involved with a school system that treated young men such as myself as young immature children.*

*Even in class, it was evident that the boys who had come up through the primary levels of the Catholic School System were usually very*

*childish and poorly behaved young men. The system seemed to have caused it. At Kelvin High School, during my Grade XI year, I had been placed in a "mixed" class of boys and girls. Our teachers treated us as serious young adults. We learned to behave as such. I experienced great difficulty in relating to my new school environment at St. Paul's College.*

*About the middle of May in 1940, just a few weeks before we were to write our Grade XII departmental examinations, I encountered great difficulties with some of the priests who taught us. During one of breaks between classes while the teachers were moving from room to room, the boys in my room got into a lunch throwing session. Although I had not taken part in it, I was hit on the side of my face by a tomato, just as the Father McGarry came into the room. He immediately asked me to tell him who had thrown the tomato, and I refused. (It was Charley Payne who had thrown it). Many years later, after having served in the Air Force, he became an airline Captain for Trans-Canada Airlines and Air Canada). Father McGarry then angrily asked the class to tell him who threw the tomato. No one owned up to throwing it. Then he proclaimed that "our" punishment would be for the entire class to stay for an extra hour after school. I had arranged a dance band practice at the Fort Rouge Legion, and I told him that I could not stay after four, because of the practice that I had already scheduled. I pleaded that I was an innocent victim of the horsing around that had gone on in class. When four o'clock came I picked up my books and prepared to leave the classroom, and Father McGarry sternly stated that if I left the classroom and refused to stay after four, that I would be expelled. I left the classroom, and never did go back to St. Paul's College. Fortunately, I was*

*able to arrange with the Manitoba Department of Education to write my Grade XII examinations at the old Normal School for Teachers on William Avenue, next to the Main Winnipeg Library. I passed them successfully, but I always had a very bad feeling about the way I was treated at St. Paul's College, and the immature behaviour that not only the students exhibited, but also the immature, tyrannical treatment accorded students by some of the teachers and fathers. To this day, despite receiving the college magazine "The Crusader", I have utter contempt for the "Catholic" Jesuit run institution. However, there was one wonderful priest there at the time that I really admired. Father Holland. On the several occasions, that I did return to St. Paul's College, many years later, I always attempted to see him and have a few words with him.*

*One of my very close friends, Bob Armstrong, was a swimming buddy from the Y.M.C.A. "TANKERS". Bob and I had trained very vigorously for all the Life Saving Awards that we were pursuing at the time. On one occasion when I loaned Papa Joe's newer second hand car, a 1932 Chevrolet Sedan, I had previously given Bob and his girlfriend a lift home from one of the Dances that the "Y" had put on. He was extremely grateful for the "lift". Some months later he approached me, with the suggestion that I should call or talk to a Mr. Phillip Stark, who was the Assistant Manager of the Fort Garry Hotel which was part of the of the Canadian National Railways Hotel chain at the time. As such, he acted as the Manager of Minaki Lodge during the summer months. Minaki Lodge was also part of the Canadian National Railways hotel operations. Bob had been offered the position of "LIFE-GUARD" at Minaki, Ontario. He felt at the time that he could not accept the position,*

*and thus he had recommended his buddy "myself", to take his place. All that was necessary was that I interview Mr. Stark, and I probably would get the job. My interview with Mr. Stark went very well, and I had my first "job", a Life-Guard position for the summer of 1940, at the very exclusive C.N.R. summer resort at Minaki, Ontario.*

*At the time it was one of the "ne plus ultra" summer vacation areas in Canada. My fabulous salary was \$10 per month, plus my room and board. It was \$10 a month more than I was earning at the time, and it involved swimming and life-saving, which were both dear to me. However I greatly increased my earnings by giving "swimming lessons". For the registered guests at Minaki Lodge, I charged the huge sum of \$1.00 a lesson or if they signed up for twelve lessons I gave then the cost was only \$10.00 . I was to start on the 24th of May 1940 and my term would end at Labour day week end, September 1st. It turned out very profitably, and I earned several hundred dollars by the seasons end. I used to send my earnings back to Nanny Guarino in Winnipeg by a "Postal Order", and she deposited my earnings in the Bank for me. I earned over \$250 for the summer of 1940. It was sufficient for me to enroll at the University of Manitoba as a "Premedical Student in the Faculty of Science, at the Junior Division which was then located at the north-east corner of Broadway and Osborne Street. (The washrooms for the Memorial Park are presently located very close to where the junior division of the University had previously been situated).*

*I will always remember leaving Winnipeg by train, "The Transcontinental", to go to Minaki. Papa Joe had helped me pick out a metal suitcase, that resembled a small trunk. It was small enough to carry*

*and take onto the train, and at Minaki Lodge, and as Papa Joe had suggested, when I arrived at Minaki and was given a bedroom, it would fit snugly under my bed. I remember the splendour of the train, and I visited the Dining car and had a snack. The train ride was approximately three hours, and it was the first time that I had seen the Lake of the Woods area. I was mesmerized with the rock cuts and the few short tunnels that we had to pass through. The train left Winnipeg about six in the evening and by the time it arrived at Minaki, dusk had set. I remember getting off the train, at a very small station, somewhat similar to the station that I knew at Grand Beach. There was a long wooden platform in front of the station, along with the large baggage wagons that were similarly used at Grand Beach. I noticed a very small older building a few hundred feet away from the station, and learned that it was the Hudson's Bay Trading Store. Mr. Stark, had arranged for the new employees to be picked up at the station, and a young "Metis" guide named Bert Weir met us. His father was the caretaker of the Lodge during the winter, and the head grounds-man during the summer. The Lodge owned an old half-ton truck that transported our baggage, but we had to walk through several fairways of the golf course to reach the main Lodge from the C.N.R. station.*

*My first glimpse of the Minaki Lodge was from the second fairway of the golf course, and I was very astonished to see the large log structure and wonderful wooden architecture of the main lodge itself. Many of the lights were on, and beyond it was the dark purplish sky of dusk, and from the employees lounge and dining area came the beautiful sound of Glen Miller and his Orchestra playing their theme song, the beautiful "Moonlight Serenade". Many years later, when I played lead trumpet for*

*Charlie Mazzone at the Marlboro Hotel supper dance, whenever we played Glenn Miller's "Moonlight Serenade", I could not help think back to crossing the ninth hole of the Minaki Golf course and listening to the beautiful strains of that song coming from the employee's cafeteria in the basement area of the Lodge.*

*The employees cafeteria had a large Wurlitzer, and featured records from all the major big bands of the 40's era. Bert Weir introduced me to all the employees who had gathered for the evening in the cafeteria. These included the "head" bellhop, Bob Clarke, and several of the other bellhops, Henry and "spook" Adams, as well as the "Porter", Doug Glasgow. I was also introduced to my new room-mate, Henry Finbow, who was a Ph.D. student from Dalhousie University. Henry in turn, showed me to our room, which was located on the upper level of the Garage. I was very pleased to learn that the Life-Guard at Minaki was classified as a professional, and as such privileged to his meals in a section of the Main dining room, along with the paying guests. It was very prestigious. Other employees who were thus privileged, were the hotel Manager and his assistants, along with the Accountant, Head Bellhop, Porter, Golf Professional, Security head, and Engineers. At each dinner, we received a beautifully printed menu which usually featured a photo illustrating some nearby locale or of the Lodge itself. The meals were superb, and I quickly gained weight.*

*When I retired on that first evening, when I drew down the blind on my window, the previous life-guard had beautifully written his name and the year of his lifeguarding there. It was Desmond (Des) Burgaffney. I learned that he had enrolled in a Roman Catholic Seminary in Eastern*

*Canada. Later, He became a priest.*

*I learned that there was a shortage of Golf Caddies, and arranged with the Golf Professional to have my brother Vic come out to Minaki to caddie. I think Vic only took a day or two to get out to the Lodge, and immediately began working as a caddie. I was also able to persuade my room-mate Finbow to move in with another friend of his that worked in the Power house, and thus enabled Vic to move in with me.*

*Vic and I enjoyed ourselves tremendously over the next few months. Vic liked joining the Owl's Club, which was a "beer-boozing club that the employees of Minaki had started at Holtz's Point, which was a privately owned Lodge, located a little south of Minaki Lodge, and also south of the Railway bridge crossing the Winnipeg River, just east of Minaki station. There was a very pleasant ritual associated with joining the Owls Club. All the members of the Club bought a bottle of beer for a new member on their initial or first night in the club and the new member was obliged to drink every beer that was bought for him. As the club became larger, it meant that a new member had to drink more beer in order to join. Vic joined the club when it was large, and I think he had to drink nine or ten beers over the course of the evening. I remember that he passed out on the dock at Holtz's point, and spent the better part of the night there, before being able to make it back to our room at Minaki Lodge. Reflecting back now, I wasn't very smart in leaving him in that condition to make it back to the lodge on his own towards morning. I don't think that he ever drank that much beer in one evening again.*

*Most of the guests at the Lodge came from the United States, mainly*

*from Minnesota, Iowa, North and South Dakota, and Wisconsin. However there were some that came from New York, Chicago, San Francisco and even movie stars from Los Angeles. Minaki was pronounced in two distinct ways, and it was obvious immediately to the staff if the guest came from Winnipeg or from somewhere in the USA Typically, the affluent or rather affluent appearing Winnipeggers coming to Minaki would pronounce it very broadly, (Min-awe-key), whereas the American guest would simply pronounce it as (Min-ak-key).*

*The guests at Minaki swam in the Winnipeg River, directly in front of the Main lodge. The Railway had built two docks at the front of the lodge. One was used as a boat dock for the Lodge's launch, which made a trip to KENORA, Ontario several times a day to pick up guests who were travelling via the C.P.R. and had registered for a vacation at Minaki. Others came from the Mid-West United States, via the Soo Line, and then the C.P.R. to KENORA, Ontario and then up to Minaki. Of course Minaki was on the main line of the C.N.R. and many of the transcontinental passengers would stop off at Minaki, as a midway point in their trip across Canada. The C.N.R. had developed the lodge for that very purpose.*

*The C.N.R. had also developed a second dock at the front of the Lodge, immediately next to the launch dock. This dock was designed for swimmers. It even had a three metre diving board built on it, along with the usual springboard which was approximately one metre off the water. C.N.R. engineers had designed a "floating swimming pool", for the children. It was made of wood, with spaces between the planks that lined the floor and sides so the water from the Winnipeg River could enter the pool area. There was enough superstructure to the pool that it maintained*

*a proper balance and floated, yet allowed water from the river to enter. I was coached in the "cleaning" of the pool by the caretaker of the Lodge, Bert Weir's father. He also looked after the lodge during the winter months. I simply used an Evinrude outboard motor of about 25 Horse Power, and attached it to a stationary stand at one end of the pool. When the motor was running, it forced the water through the pool, and I used a long handled scrubbing brush to sweep the algae and gunk that used to adhere to the planking of the pool.*

*About mid July, I met a very lovely young lady, a gorgeous blonde and only seventeen. She had come up to Minaki with her parents, from Minneapolis. Her name was Mary Schmitt, and her father owned a very prosperous string of Music stores, as well as a musical publishing company. We really liked each other immediately. I think the Schmitts were only at the lodge for two or three days.*

*I met Mary on the dock when she came down to swim. Somehow, while she was taking off her bathing cap, after coming out of the water, at the edge of the dock, she accidentally dropped the strap. The water was at least twenty feet deep right off the dock's edge, but somehow I was able to get down the twenty feet and since her bathing cap strap was white, I spotted it among the rocks on the bottom. She was thrilled that I had been able to retrieve it for her. We had several opportunities to go for walks, after I had finished life-guarding for the day (about six in the evening).*

*On one of our walks through the golf course in the twilight evening, we stopped off on the return at Holtz point lodge, where there was a very small employee cottage that was used as a lounge and dance area, and it*

*had an upright piano in it. Of course I played the piano for her and she loved it. I think that the next evening was a Saturday night, and Mary had to remain in the lodge with her parents for dinner, and I was able to speak to her momentarily on the golf course side of the lodge, and I will always remember the little tears that were streaming down her cheeks, as we said "good-bye", because she was leaving the lodge very early the next morning to return to her home in Minnesota.*

*When Mary returned to Minneapolis, we wrote to each other daily. I guess you could say that we both had "puppy love" for each other or we were madly "infatuated" with each other. We continued to write to each other for more than a year. Mary's girlfriend in Minneapolis, Charlotte Whidden became a "Pen-pal" to my best friend Walter Creighton. (They never did meet each other). Walter had just joined the RCAF, and was training as an airframe mechanic. Charlotte wrote to Walter for the next two or three years, and followed him with her letters to each of his postings in England. They never did meet personally.*

*I liked Mary very much, and since I had recently taken several courses in arranging and writing Music, I wrote my first song for Mary and sent a copy to her. However, she found it too difficult to play herself but finally had someone from her father's music store play it for her. I still can play that song on the piano, and often when playing many of the songs that I have composed, will play the one that I had written for Mary Schmitt.*

*Vic and I enjoyed the summer at Minaki tremendously. Papa Joe worked as a locomotive fireman on the plush transcontinental passenger*

*train running through Minaki. He used to leave Winnipeg about nine in the morning, and he ran to Redditt, Ontario, the next town east of Minaki. The railway used Redditt as a turnaround terminal for the enginemen and train crews. Papa Joe would leave his train going east at Redditt and after several hours would meet and take over the train running west and thereby back to Winnipeg. Thus, he was able to return to Winnipeg within seven or eight hours, and usually arrived back home about six or seven in the evening. He used to work this run about every third day. On several of his days off he visited Vic and me at Minaki, using his pass and travelling as a passenger on the same run that he worked. Looking back now both Vic and I realize how much our father loved us, to spend his day off, going back over his same run as a passenger to visit us at Minaki.*

*Vic and I introduced him to golfing, and we were really surprised to see him drive his first ball off the first tee for almost two hundred and fifty yards. It seemed like he had been playing golf all his life. We took pictures, and made a tour of the Lodge, and he greatly enjoyed it. I couldn't have a guest with me for lunch or dinner, because I was eating with the "elite". However Vic was able to have Papa Joe have his lunch with the "Staff" in the staff dining room. The summer disappeared very quickly, and I still vividly remember saying good-bye to all the friends that I had made at Minaki during that summer and boarding the transcontinental train and returning to Winnipeg.*

*I had saved enough money to enroll in Pre-Medicine, in the Junior Division of the Faculty of Science at the University of Manitoba. The Junior division, as I previously mentioned was located at the north-east corner of Broadway and Osborne Street. This worked out well for me,*

*because I could walk from my home on Jessie Avenue to the Junior Division of the University. Also, since the Y.M.C.A. was located just several blocks away on Vaughan Street north of Portage Avenue, I frequently visited the Y.M.C.A. and had a swimming workout.*

*I quickly made friends with many of the students, one of whom was Eddy Colson, who now is a dentist in Jamaica. I also developed another good friendship with a young fellow named Monty Halparin. We met in a "Selkirk" Avenue Street car which ran from the University campus at Fort Garry do Selkirk Avenue in Winnipeg's north end. We had just attended a freshman day at the Fort Garry Campus and were returning to Winnipeg. Monty's companion was Sid Yanofsky. Although he was just a very young man, he was already recognized "world-wide" as an International Chess Master. We became friends, and Monty who nominated me to run for Junior Stick of the Science division at Broadway. However, I lost out to another wonderful young Art student, who later became a very well recognized lawyer, Bill Appleby. A few years later, Monty was elected the Senior Stick of the Science Student Association when we studied together in the third and fourth years of the Science course. Of course he persuaded me to become his Social Chairman for the student association and we had a tremendous year planning the many student events together.*

*While in Junior division at Broadway, I had joined the University Dance band and became their Lead Trumpet player. The orchestra became popular with the students, and by the time I had entered third and fourth year Science, I had become the Leader of the Dance Band. As I recall, my official title was "Chairman" of the Dance Band, which was part of the Board of Instrumental Music. I also played Trumpet in the*

*University of Manitoba Symphony Orchestra.*

*Many years later, that same Monty Halparin, who one of my youthful companions through my years in both Junior and Senior divisions of the Faculty of Science became very famous as "Monty Hall", of the very popular television show emanating from Los Angeles called "Let's make a Deal".*

*I had been given credit for first year Science, having attended St. Paul's College and completing Grade XII there. So my first year at the University was really into second year Science, where I was enrolled in the Pre-medicine class. The year went very quickly, and I enjoyed it tremendously. I had been able to continue upgrading myself musically, and I seemed to be achieving my long range goal, which was to become a Medical Doctor. Unfortunately at the end of second year pre-medicine, and after having applied for entrance to Medical College, I did not get accepted. Although my marks were good, and I had completed all the required subjects, I could not gain acceptance. I was rather bitter about this, because some of my friends, who had as many as three failures, were granted admittance to Medicine, on the condition that they could re-write and pass the supplementary examinations in the fall, and that they would attend summer school in order to do so. Our pre-medicine class contained over three hundred students, and only sixty students in total were accepted. This also allowed for some students to be admitted from Saskatchewan, because there was no medical school at the University of Saskatchewan at the time. It was quite evident that in order to gain acceptance at the University of Manitoba Medical College, one had a better chance if they were an Anglo-saxon. And if your father was a Medical Doctor in*

*Winnipeg, you also increased your chances of admittance. My only alternative was to continue on into Science and by majoring in Biology and Organic and Physical Chemistry I could reapply after third and fourth years. If I did not get accepted, I could obtain a degree in Science. That is the route that I did choose, and I did reapply after third year, and despite having good marks and passing the course completely and successfully, I still did not get an acceptance. Factually, I don't know how I could have made it into Medicine even if I had been accepted, because the course was very arduous and difficult, and I did not earn enough money to pay my way through the course.*

*After completing second year of the pre-medicine course, I had planned on returning to Minaki Lodge to again Life-guard for the summer. However Mr. Phillip Jones, the Superintendent at Grand Beach learned that I was Life-guarding at Minaki from Papa Joe, who at this time was running as an Engineer and made a number of trips into Grand Beach. On many of thos occasions, he talked with Mr. Jones, the Beach Superintendent, who usually met the train. The two life-guards Len Tustin, and Ray Fulton, who had been employed at Grand Beach for the five or six previous years had both left to join the armed forces. Mr Jones was having a lot of difficultin in finding new lifeguards to replace them.*

*He persuaded Papa-Joe to talk to me and see if I would change my mind about Minaki Lodge and come to Grand Beach instead. After a number of discussions with Mr. Jones I did agree to come to Grand Beach instead of going to Minaki. Fortunately, I was able to persuade Mr. Stark to employ Vic as the Life-guard at Minaki in my place.*