

Sonya Dyck Peters and Ella Dyck Friesen

by Elizabeth Dyck Peters, sister

Sonya and Ella were born in Russia to the family of a well-known teacher and principal Dietrich Dyck and his wife Katharina Funk. Our father was brutally murdered in 1921, the “starvation year”, when he returned from a short trip to buy flour, a futile attempt to get at least some food besides the two cups of flour which had to take them through the long winter of starvation due to crop failure. Our mother was left without a roof over our heads (teachers always had good teacherages and no food). There was no food unless you could depend on a farm, which of course teachers did not have. We starved for almost four years until we were able to emigrate to Canada, landing in the little town of Rosenfeld, Manitoba. We were overwhelmed by the country and the freedom and had only one concern: the debt to the CPR to which we owed the traveling expense of \$3000.00.

The afternoon of the day we arrived, October 6, 1925, every one of the family was hired out including 13-year old Ella and 15-year old Sonya as adult housekeepers. Their salaries were sent to Rosthern, SK to pay the CPR debt. They never had one cent. Fortunately they had excellent families to work for, and their only hardship was the constant pain of the absence of our mother and the family whom they missed in a good but strange land. They were dressed and treated like adults and each had four marriage proposals during that first winter in Canada. The girls were happy in their work in an adult world, but they always remembered until they died that they had missed out on part of their childhood.

Then they decided to go to Winnipeg as maids because the salaries were higher and the CPR debt seemed to decrease so slowly due to compound interest. They always came home for Christmas and could then be at home until the first of March. These months were the highlight of the year for them. Mother had bought an old beautiful home

on 6th Street in Winkler which we all loved and socially both girls were well received. They took part in everything their group in church we attended did, which included quilting and other activities. Ella managed to complete Grade XII after she mastered English.

Eventually Ella married Harry Friesen who for many years was the town clerk in Winkler. Sonya married Abe Peters who farmed near Winnipeg. Ella and Sonya died within the same week in February 1998.