

Evelyn Gilbert

June 25, 2009

EG: My full name is Evelyn Francis Elizabeth Greg, that was my maiden name. My father was Irish and he always called me Evelin and my mother didn't, she called me Evelyn. I used to write Evelin when I wanted to, and my schoolteacher said, who is this? I put up my hand and he said, that's not the Canadian way of spelling Evelyn. I was Evelyn from then on. Anyway, I had a very good childhood. I had three brothers and three sisters. I was born in 1913, October 27th. So I've lived a long time. Anyway, I met my husband and the Beulah Baptist Church. I never met his father but there's a little story to this. His father was a bricklayer and couldn't get work in Winnipeg, so he went down to Chicago. He sent money down to the family for a while, not very long. Then it was the wild women and song for him down there, so he never sent money home. The family had to stop school and support their family. He was at the church when we moved in that area and I started going there. His Sunday school teacher was Tommy Douglas. He became his role model I'm sure, because Tommy was an excellent person and we just loved him. We were very good friends with him, but not too much near the end because he was sick and we didn't see him too much after he became sick. He I'm sure had installed in Charlie the want to do good for people. I think that's what got him started on the Alberta Federation of Labor. He became president there, I don't know what year, but he was president for quite a while until he was appointed by Premier Manning to the Workers Compensation Board. It was because of the good works that he had done that led to his appointment on the Board. He ended up being chairman of the board before he left. He retired around 75 because he had Lou Gehrig's disease. I took him to the hospital. He was in a wheelchair for a long time and we had a really good way of getting around. We had a very good van that had a lift on it and everything. We never stopped doing things or going places at all until he became more ill and became paralyzed gradually. It ended up that we had him in the hospital and they told us he had three weeks to live. He was quite sick at that time but he wouldn't complain. I never heard him complain ever. They asked me if I wanted to bring him home and I said, definitely. They asked him and he said, oh yes, I want to go

home. So we got a hospital bed and put it in where the dining, moved it over. He spent six months instead of three weeks in that bed, but he couldn't get out of it. He was paralyzed. Other than that, he did a lot of things that I knew of incidentally. He never was a braggart. He never came home and said, oh I got this done and I did this and that and the other thing. He did a lot of the miners and made the working conditions better, and for the construction people and the electricians, all of the unions. He looked for places that he could improve their working areas or conditions. He moved the workman's compensation from a tiny little office to a nice one in Edmonton. He had a room, I never saw it, but down in Calgary they needed a room for the workman's compensation board, an office more or less. So he did things like that. But there's a funny one, and I have to tell you that one. The construction people were very good to him. When he asked them if they would come and build a new washroom out at the scout camp at Wabamun, what's it called, yo ho ho or something like that. So they said they would go out and do it. He was a scout leader; from his young life on he worked with the scouts. They went out and he was going to pay for this himself but they wouldn't let him. They built this beautiful new washroom for them out there and guess what they called it? The Charlie. I thought that was so funny. You're not going to the john, you're going to the charlie.

Q: When you met, what kind of work was he doing?

EG: He was a printer. Then he went to Lac du Bonnet, we did. We got married. I went with him for seven years and we got married. Shortly after that, a year or so, he decided to start his own newspaper up in Lac du Bonnet. So we were up there for about six years, we had our first child up there. Then somebody wanted to enlarge it and he wasn't interested in getting too much more involved than he was with his newspaper, and they bought it off him. He moved back to Winnipeg and worked there for a little while. Then he heard of a job in Edmonton and he applied for it and got it right away. It was a printer's job, and it moved from that to being involved with the Alberta Federation. I think that was the reason that he was chosen maybe, because he had been working with the working people. But anyway, he knew Premier Manning too by different things he had done. But I must tell you a funny thing. When he asked me to marry him after seven

years, he said, there's two things. When his father was sick he had to get up every night and give him medication on the hour, he was in such pain. He was a smoker and he had gone to the doctor down there and been operated on, and it was fine. He had cancer right by his lip. The doctor said, don't smoke anymore ever. But he didn't listen, he started smoking again. He phoned home and wanted to come home. The eldest daughter went down and got him home, and he stayed at the house. As I say, he was up every hour on the hour practically. So when he asked me to marry me, he said, there's only two things. There'll never ever be any liquor in our house, I will not be drinking anything alcoholic. Nor will there be any smoking; that is a must, because I don't want my family to ever have to go through what I've gone through. So I said, well you're talking to the right person. My family didn't smoke or drink either, so I was lucky. And my kids didn't. He was their role model. He lived a good life and they followed it. Anyway, that was the story to there. After he started at home here, I had to do a lot of lifting. He was in a wheelchair and I had to get him from here into the wheelchair, onto a chairlift, get him up to the bedroom, and lift him on the bed. It was really heavy. So when he became really paralyzed and had to stay in the bed all the time, I slept on this chesterfield for six months. But that was the way our life went. But he was just a perfect husband and I wouldn't have done anything different.

Q: You said his name changed. Would you like to tell that story?

EG: When I met him he was called Rosco Gilbert at the church. It sounded so much like Crisco that I didn't like it, so I asked if he'd mind if I called him by his first name, which is really what he should've been called, which was Charles. He said, no, I like it better, so he went along with it. He did so many good things. My kids would never say anything against him, because they really respected him. It was just time to go and you had to say goodbye. It was hard. He had a little dog, Princie. We got him this little dog when he was in a wheelchair. That little dog sat up on his lap for a while and then he realized that it was not too comfortable for my husband, so it moved down between his two feet. When we got the hospital bed, he never was allowed up on the beds upstairs ever, but I told the dog he could be at his feet up here on this bed. So when he was dying, that little dog went

up and said goodbye. It was really touching. That little dog never left him. Like little Prinnie here, I don't know what he'd ever do without.

Q: Did you go to quite a few union events?

EG: We were all over the world. We traveled a lot. We were in Japan, Mexico three times, and every state in the United States, North Carolina. And he was in every province here many times over. He always included me, asked me to come with him, and I went. Except in Alaska, I wasn't feeling good and I didn't go to Alaska. But he was always traveling to different places. We had a wonderful woman that would stay with the children. We weren't away for months at a time or anything. We went to Hawaii eleven times. That was his favorite spot, Hawaii. We took the kids with us.

Q: In all the traveling that you did and events that you attended, are there any people who stand out?

EG: Tommy Douglas was the one. And I had an uncle who was one. He got me on the right path right from day one. I used to go with his daughter for an evening out or I'd go to her house or she'd come to mine. She was a big help, but the father was mostly. He had, you wouldn't call it a church, it was someplace where all the street people could come and be fed. He ran it himself and his wife did all the cooking of the food and my mother did some. Every Friday they'd have it open and people could come and eat. He would have a service on Sundays, too. He was a lay preacher and he influenced my life a lot.

Q: What do you remember about Tommy?

EG: He was a very sincere type of person. You couldn't help but figure he knew what he was talking about. He seemed to be always happy. I thought, well that's a good thing, be happy. That's the way to live. He moved to Saskatchewan after he had been at Beulah Baptist and Charlie had been his student. Then they became real friends and kept in

touch, because he moved to Regina and we didn't see too much of him. He came to Edmonton to some meeting one time and we saw him then. He would keep in touch quite a bit, maybe ask him for advice, I don't know, phoning him when he needed help. He seemed to manage pretty well on his own anyway.

Q: Was your husband involved in the printing trade union?

EG: He was a printer and had joined the union in Winnipeg. He was with other unions too for different occasions, but that's what he was.

Q: Which unions was he involved with?

EG: Well it would be all of them. When he became Alberta Federation of Labor he would've been involved with all of them. Not in Manitoba – he'd go to the printers union and that was it. But how he got into the Federation, I think it was the influence that Tommy had on him to do good.

Q: Did ever run into the discussion that it was wrong for a Christian to be involved in a trade unions?

EG: No, he never ran into that. I'm positive of that, because he would've told me. But we did a lot of traveling. We were 11 times for Hawaii, because when he had his holidays that's where we'd take off to. He liked it there better than any other place.

Q: How many children did you have?

EG: I had four – three girls to get one boy. That was how it worked. We didn't try for another one, we just got him. Then I have eleven grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. And I'm going to get another one, so I'll have nine. One in Edmonton for a change, the others are in Calgary. We've got some we sure love there. My kids have been good to me and there's so much to be thankful for. I had an operation about a year and a

half ago. Sue didn't want me to come here and be by myself when I was out of the hospital. She said, you're not going back to the house, mom, you're going to stay here, because I don't think you should be doing all the things that I was having to do at the house here, although I usually got somebody to do it for me. But she thought it was too much for me, so she talked me into staying with her. But I still like my house.

Q: Do you recall if your husband had any regrets or concerns in his work?

EG: He wasn't somebody that did a lot of talking. He was more of a quiet person. My son is like that, sort of quiet. Anyway, he was so thrilled to have his boy, he didn't care whether he was quiet or noisy. It was a good job he wasn't noisy, because one time he was mad about something and started to cry. He was just a little kid. You couldn't even stand it in the room, it was so loud. But he very seldom cried.

Q: In the case of Charlie, he was very quiet but he turned out to be quite a leader of the movement and of people. What is it about him that made him into a leader?

EG: I think what he learned from Tommy Douglas, I think that. And of course the experience he'd had in his own home, that he didn't want that kind of a life for his family. He could talk when he wanted to talk, but he wasn't one who went around talking. I have a grandson that never stops talking; I don't know how he'll ever make out in life.

Q: When he gave speeches, he must have been quite convincing. Did you ever hear him give convincing speeches?

EG: Oh yes, definitely. One I do remember was, he was talking about something to do with, ... it might be in some of those writings, I haven't read them all yet. He ended up... and that's for sure. Well they just howled, because it was a ?? speech.

Q: Did he do a lot of writing at home?

EG: No, I wouldn't say he did any much writing at all. He may have. He had to write his own speeches, and he had to do a lot of them. They certainly put his picture in the paper enough, didn't they? However, I kept most of them, I think. But he never did, no. As I say, he wasn't a braggart. We enjoyed our life here in this house. It's been a very quiet spot, we never heard noise at night or anything. Now I'm giving you a sales pitch.

Q: Do you remember any other people that he worked with in Alberta?

EG: Neil.

Q: What do you remember about Neil Reimer?

EG: I don't know, because he never talked about the people that he was dealing with. I had enough to think about with the kids. But let me think. He was always a scout leader, and he also was president of the YMCA. They asked him to be on the Alcoholics Anonymous board. I think he was on that but I don't know much about that because he never said much about it. But he did go to some of their meetings. Of course he was president of the Alberta Federation, then he became, what do they call it? There was someone on that board that he was very close to.

Q: Was it Roy Jamma?

EG: Well he and Roy Jamma were good friends, but it was somebody else too.

Q: Peter Kova?

EG: No, that doesn't ring a bell. ... We had to go down to Ottawa to receive the Order of Canada. He was given it to wear, which he never wore, and my son's getting it.

Q: What did he get when he received the Order of Canada?

EG: He had a medal here and had this one you could wear all the time, you pinned it on. I was down then. I don't remember too much about it because I was at so many of these things. The presentation, where it was, I can't even remember.

Q: Take a look at this picture, and tell us the names of people.

EG: This is when my husband retired and he was presented with a very lovely clock by Anne Baranyk. I was at the dinner and made speech about my husband. I can't remember what I said but I remember making this speech. Roy Jamma is there and I don't know who else. No, I don't remember, because how many speeches you hear in a year with somebody that's involved like he was. I wouldn't remember, no. One day my friend, who's husband was a drinker and knew that Charlie didn't, he went to our church, handed out his cards, he never went to church period, sat at the door and handed out his cards. Then he came to the house and he had this bottle of whiskey and started coming in the door. Charlie said, you'll have to leave that outside. He had to. He wouldn't even let him bring it in the house. He lived by what he wanted. By the time his father died, in six months it had eaten the whole side of his face. It just was horrible in that room, it smelled so bad. Yet he had to do that.

Q: Did Charlie have any hobbies or interests?

EG: His interest was helping people. That's what I would put it down to. As for sports, he played ball with kids and that sort of thing, but he wasn't a hockey fanatic or anything like that. He really had his mind on helping people, and not make a big thing out of it.

Q: You mentioned that he'd helped the miners.

EG: Well their safety, some of their safety rules they got into force. They forced them to be more careful with certain things and they gave ideas that they could do to be more careful. The same with the construction people. It maybe saved a lot of lives, we don't know, but it was a good thing.

EG: Did it change your life substantially when he became president of the Federation of Labor?

EG: No, he just was the same. He loved his kids. He wanted to be there for them as much as possible, but he wanted to help other people too. At least that's what I always thought.

Q: He must have been away more.

EG: Oh he was, but he'd be always home by 9 if he had to go to a meeting, and it wasn't every night. But he'd be home by 9, he'd make a point of getting home to see the kids for a while.

Q: Did you ever go through a strike?

EG: No, I didn't; I don't think he did. Can't remember any. But he built us this little craft shop and it became a big thing until the Americans moved in about two years ago – Michaels. They put all the little guys out but we managed to stay alive for another two years, then we were getting pretty tired of it. Jan had to go to help her husband, who's a lawyer, and she wasn't able to be so involved with the shop, so she said, let's just call it quits. But I miss it. I still do crafts. I've done every craft you can think of except ceramics. You have to have a kiln for that and we could never put that in the church, so we never taught it. But I taught about every other craft you can think of.

Q: There's a picture here of Charlie, and it says he was on the same recreation board as Percy Paige. Do you remember Percy Paige?

EG: The name is familiar, but I didn't meet him. But he was involved with a lot of things.

Q: It shows him here sitting beside Stanley Knowles. Do you remember Stanley Knowles?

EG: Oh yes, I do. Very good. Ya, it's good.

Q: What do you remember about Stanley?

EG: Oh just that he was a friend of his. I didn't get involved with too many of his friends. A lot of them, like Roy Jamma, I got to know them and some of the wives.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

EG: Let me think. Well I never thought there was anything but love in the marriage. I never got to the point that I wasn't in love anymore.

Q: Do you recall what everything was like when you first came here?

EG: It's sure grown a lot. We had to live in a, on rollers – a house trailer. We lived in that until we could get a house, there were so few houses to be had. Then we built a house. Then we moved from there to 95th for a while and then we came to this one. Now I want to sell it to you.

Q: Sue was telling me about you being out somewhere handing out fliers; do you remember that?

EG: Oh ya, he ran for the NDP one time.

Q: Do you recall which area of Edmonton?

EG: No, I don't remember. But he didn't get in. NDP wasn't that popular, still aren't. But it was the kind of thing he was interested in and they asked him to run. He did it not with

any thought of getting in; he didn't put his heart and soul into it. Just because they asked him to, I think.

Q: He also ran for City Council.

EG: Did he? I can't remember half of it. Well I didn't know that, City Council... Oh he was into everything. He left a mark for the world. Not everybody can say that, can they? Who's going to ever remember me? My kids. Oh my classes will. My mother was very good with her hands and I had an aunt who was very creative. I think I got those genes somehow. Then I got the Irish genes. If I'm mad, I'm like my father, in 10 minutes I've forgotten what I was mad about, and away I go. In my own family, my father would get mad at my mother and she'd be furious about something, and 10 minutes later he was there talking to her and putting his hand around her shoulder, and she wouldn't give an inch. She was the opposite.

Q: What sort of ethnic background was Charles?

EG: He was Baptist.

Q: But was he Irish too?

EG: No, I think he was born down east. I think his people were from down east.

Q: Do you know where his parents were from?

EG: No. See, I never knew the father. His mother I got to know very well, of course, after we started thinking about getting married. But I had, after we got married and Sue was 6 years old, after we came back from Lac du Bonnet, I was expecting Jan. She lived on the other side of the city and every night she'd be sitting on my doorstep waiting for me to come, because I'd have the baby out walking in the carriage. She had such a love for that baby, I'm telling you. I didn't think much of it but I do now, because I do the same

thing. If my kids had their little ones up here instead of in Calgary, then my grandchildren have a little boy and a girl, I'd be just there every time I could be there, and that's not good.

Q: Do you remember where his mom was from?

EG: She was born down east, I know that much. Same with my own mom, her mother was born down east. I can't tell you what nationality she would've been even, whether she was Irish, English, or what. They were both born in Canada, from the old school. And of course I wasn't, but we've lived in the best of times and it's not going to be good from now on.

Q: You also lived through the depression.

EG: Yes. My aunt's husband was overseas and I can remember being, I must've been about 2 or 3 only, but we were all sitting at home waiting for him to come home from war. I can remember his face, I can see it as plain as day. He came there and everybody was waiting for him.

Q: Do you remember the dirty 30s when the drought had hit the land?

EG: Oh ya. We were in Winnipeg. We were married in Winnipeg in 1935.

Q: Right in the middle of the depression. Do you remember much about it?

EG: Oh ya.

Q: I mean about the depression.

EG: Oh no, not too much about the depression. I had to quit school when I was 14. I had skipped a grade and I was 14 when I quit school, and in grade 10. I wanted to take a

comptometer course, which is adding, subtracting, dividing. So when the course was finished, I'm not bragging about this, but I did have an average of 99.7. The Bay phoned the place where we were having this course and asked them if they could send about 12 people to help with their stock taking, adding the sheets that came up. It was extension work and it was percentage work and stuff like that. I was chosen as one to go because I was finished the course. They told us that they wanted one person to work, and we've already chosen her. They'd chosen me. So I was working in Hudson's Bay in their statistical office for seven years.

Q: Do recall the reasons why you and Charlie came to Alberta?

EG: He heard of a job that was available. He phoned them and then he waited and heard from them and they told him he had the job. So we came up here. It was in printing, and he worked at that for a while. He was a printer for a long time. He started his own, well that was in Winnipeg at Lac du Bonnet that he started his own. But I don't remember where he worked, don't remember the name of the firm. But he worked there for quite a long time until he was appointed on the board. And I had a very good life with my own family. I felt for him too, that he'd had a rough time. But he lived through it and became a better person maybe, I don't know. But he sure became a role model for my kids.

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