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Coun

PREFACE

This essay is written in "own-story" form. It describes my home community in relation to sociological factors of rural isolation. Discussions of my life, and of my family attempt to prove the effects of isolated rural life on character formation. My home community, as I now understand it, possesses archaic and unusual mores, common only to those type of communities. They suppress the conventional methods of childhood development, and the general social progress. To struggle against the accepted folkways of the community is to suffer social reproach as an abnormal individual. Success is measured in terms of farm production. It is only by a thorough understanding of all the facts of a community is it possible to approximate the success or failure of its members.

## RURAL ISOLATION

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## RURAL ISOLATION

A small, isolated, rural settlement in Northern Saskatchewan, was my home community during my childhood. It is situated about thirty-five miles south of the City of Prince Albert, near a branch of the Canadian National Railway line. The community is bounded: on the south by the Saskatchewan River, on the east by Provincial Highway No. 2, on the west by an Indian Reservation, and on the north by Highway No. 12. The soil is mostly light clay or sand. Some areas of the community has dense vegetation, other parts consist only of bare sandhills. The type of roads throughout the community are ungraded municipal roads, and deeply-rutted country trails. The climate in this area is extremely severe in all four seasons. In winter, great depths of snow, and forty degrees below Fahrenheit temperatures, are common. Rainfall in the summer season is slight; heat temperatures of one hundred degrees in the shade are prevalent.

The local town is the Hamlet of St. Louis, which has a population of about three hundred. The Hamlet includes; three general stores, one garage, two grain elevators, a Canadian National Railway shed, a Catholic Cathedral, an Anglican Church, a community hall, one hotel, one pool hall, one black smith shop, a lumber yard, and Post Office. The main street is made up of the business places. They are old, delapidated and unpainted lumber buildings. The dwelling houses of the Hamlet are mostly log buildings, which are carelessly kept, both inside and outside.

The main occupation of the inhabitants of the community is "hoe-farming". The unskilled laborers of the community loiter around the district when they are unemployed. On the average, each family occupies one quarter section of land, (160 acres). The soil of this area is infertile, and unable to adequately provide for the large families that occupy it. The farmers produce only the required products for their own livelihood, which is a bare existence. They raise wheat, and other coarse grains in small quantities. All farmers of this community have a few cows, pigs, sheep, and chickens. Farming operations are carried on with horses, and outdated types of

of farm machinery. The farms do not use tractors, or any other modern farm equipment. My father, and brother, who farm in this community are still using the "four-horse-gang", and the "sulky-plow". The use of labor-saving machines has not been adopted in any part of the community. The chief means of transportation is the horse-and-buggy. No one in the community owns nor operates an automobile. Families, who do not possess the luxury of a horse-and-buggy have to resort to walking, whenever they wish to travel within the local area. The slow progress of this community is due to the poor economic status of every family. Furthermore, the farmers are suspicious of the new scientific methods of farming.

The majority of the dwellings of my home community are constructed of logs. The walls are plastered with mud, and white-washed with a lime mixture. Many of the houses have only one or two rooms. They lack all modern conveniences, and plumbing is unknown in this district. Coal-oil lamps, and wood-burning stoves are in every home. The small house is not only used as a kitchen, living-room, and bedroom, but it is also used as the farmer's workshop, business office, and the children's playroom. Most of these homes are in filthy, and unwholesome conditions. Dogs, cats, chickens, and newly-born animals are taken care of in the comforts of the house.

The ethnical groups of this community are French-halfbreeds (mixture of French Canadians and Indians), Hungarians, and a few descendants of British stock. The predominant religion is Roman Catholic, My father is of English heritage, and my mother is French. The number of members in each family would average about ten. These people have a high illiteracy rate. My father never received any formal education. He is able to read only the average newspaper, and write very little apart from his signature. My mother cannot read nor write, she is unable to sign her name. My sisters completed grade nine in High School before they were forced to quite school, and earn their own living. My brother left school in the eighth grade to work in the fields, and help provide a living for the family. My father encouraged me to leave school and assist in the farm work, but I refused.

The school house of my home community was situated four and one-half miles from our home. We were forced to make this journey, if we wanted any formal education. I travelled approximately twenty thousand miles, mostly walking through lonely country trails to obtain my elementary and high School education. This one-room school house, with one teacher taught all pupils between seven and fifteen years of age of this community. The grades in the school were one to eight. Only one teacher taught at this school from 1927 to 1937, at a salary of sixty dollars per month. The school was very poorly furnished and equipped. It was inadequately ventilated, being heated by a big iron stove in one corner. The library consisted of a shelf in one corner with about fifty books. It did not have any vocational or manual training equipment; sports equipment was practically nil. All forms of recreation had to be invented by the pupils. This idleness encouraged unwholesome activities, and deprived the children from developing any potential talent or ability. It was impossible for the teacher to instruct anything else, apart from the three fundamental "R's" of education.

When children begin school, conflict follows contact, and socialization begins. The balance of power is maintained by the teacher. He is idol of the community, and children imitate him. The teacher plays an extremely important part in shaping rural children's pattern of behaviour. The school is the organized social machine.

Our home did not contain any books, magazines, nor even a dictionary. My parents were unable to read, and we could not afford any magazine subscriptions. They did not appreciate music, nor art, therefore it was unknown to the members of our family. My father was opposed to education. The community was unable to offer any informal education, because of its illiterate composition.

The rural high schools are similar to the public schools. The high school in my home town was continually opening and closing, due to disagreements by the local political leaders. There was no library or laboratory equipment. The teacher was a high school graduate with one year of normal school training. Students were

expected to work out most of their own educational difficulties. Out of the group of fifty-two pupils, with whom I attended school, only three of them completed high school. None of the other pupils learned any skilled trade.

The attitudes of the rural home reflects on the children's behaviour. The disposition, and temperament of the parents determine the nature of the home. My mother nagged continually at my father, which resulted in many arguments. Our home was one of dullness, and depression, which was due to the extreme poverty in which we lived. My parents believed that their lives were determined by fate, and felt that it was impossible to overcome their destitute conditions. Children were regarded as a part of the farm. Parise would be given to a beast of the farm, before a child received credit for his work.

Courtesy, obedience, and loyalty are strictly taught in many rural homes. Most of the children of this community sincerely respected their elders. My father, a strict and reserved parent is very conscious of the community customs, and the laws of the country. My mother taught us character formation according to her family traditions; her method of punishment was severe lashings. Today, my father and mother enjoy sincere respect from every one of their children.

The influence of the home in comparison with other institutions is greater in the rural community than in the city. As children, our whole life was centered around the home. There were no visible neighbors, the nearest one lived about one mile in either direction. Apart from the school, there were no other institutions that effected our behaviour, as contacts with other people were very few. The members of our family were in constant association with one another. As children, we never enjoyed the companionship of a special friend. We were reared entirely by our parents in the concepts of the community traditions. The parental influence has a greater bearing on rural children than on urban children. Rural children are not able to seek immediate refuge or sympathy outside of the home when they receive punishment by their parents. Rural parents are likely to be too cautious in protecting their children from dangers. My mother would not

allow us to fish or swim in the nearby stream, or use a rifle to hunt in the nearby fields. In checking the adventure of a child, it causes a child's personality to suffer underdevelopment.

Public opinion is very effective in rural communities. There is great respect paid to people who are industrious, and great shame cast on those who are lazy. To be a shirker and a slacker on the farm is to suffer rural social reproach. Community gossip influences rural character formation. The farmers' conversation is usually centered around the local people and their affairs. People of this rural community are ignorant of current events on national and international affairs; therefore they gossip chiefly about their neighbors. My father lived in fear of being considered a loafer.

When the hotel beer-parlors came into existence in Saskatchewan, the local beer-parlor became a popular rendez-vous for the men of my home community. The idea that, "the best men drank beer", soon became accepted in the community. The beer-parlor was a place of distinction to be seen in. I was rudely thrown out of the local beer-parlor at the age of seventeen years, because I wanted to be regarded in the community as a "man who could take it". The best fighting man was the idol of the community.

There are no opportunities in the rural area to learn occupations other than farming. It was not until I left the farm that I learned of the many other opportunities in life. Very few people of this community ever leave, and newcomers rarely enter. My parents were born in this community, and have never been away from it during their whole life. My brother, at twenty-eight years of age has never seen a streetcar, is reluctant to use a telephone, and cannot appreciate a movie. The farmer makes personal contacts only as a result of his necessary requirements for the farm. Visits to the community town were confined to essential errands.

The problem of child labor on the farm is serious. Children of the rural community are expected to share in maintaining the livelihood of the family. It is part of their duty, that the parents pass on to them in early childhood.

This procedure was adopted in our family, and it was also general throughout the community. In our childhood, we were robbed of all play; it was regarded as a waste of time. At the age of seven years, we begin routine chores around the farm. Later, we were sent to drudgery in the fields with primitive tools. We rose early in the morning, and spent the long day weeding and hoeing in a stooped or crawling position. The pace of work was usually set by our father. The work habit soon became a part of our character; we grew up with the idea that work was as essential and important as food or sleep. My father employed all of his children as cheap labor. This type of character formation makes responsible citizens, but it results in poor health, lack of school training, absence of play, and complete lack of occupational opportunities. The strenuous labor on our farm has impaired the health of all the members in our family in some way or other.

Economic returns on the farm are not set, which causes farmers to work harder in hope of obtaining greater returns. Very few farmers of this community have any systematic plan for operating their farms. My father never did, and still doesn't have any organized plan for his work on the farm; he considered it a waste of time. As a result of this procedure, we often repeated the job, or did unprofitable work. Farmers are unable to determine if they are making a profit or going into debt. Often, farmers under the false impression of profitable farming, are actually going into debt. From a survey I made of my father's farm in 1945, I found that he was going into debt of approximately eight dollars per day. I checked the value of his labor, the value of feed being consumed by the farm animals, as against the returns he was receiving from the farm products. He would have saved a few hundred dollars and lived a comfortable and easy winter, if he had sold his stock and feed in the fall and bought the same amount of stock in the spring. However, his farm animals possessed a certain sentimental value that made it impossible for him to part with them.

There are very few social activities in my home community. It is due to the widely scattered farms of this area. However, a greater contributing factor to the minimum social events was the "rulers" of the community. They belonged to a certain



religious group that opposed most social activities. Dancing was forbidden in nearly every home. All social events were prohibited in the school house. In the winter months, social gatherings were limited to one annual Christmas concert. During the summer, the only active sport was softball. The "rulers" of the community insisted on well-brought-up children in the light of a formal, religious manner. However, this policy was only partly realized, for the children became independent when they left school and followed the general customs of the young people of the community. The small hamlet offered more in social entertainment, but the parents did not grant their children permission to attend these functions very often. In most rural communities, social life centers around the home, but in this particular community this theory was only partly true; Every boy and girl were too busily occupied in making a living to participate in social functions.

The farmer lives and works in almost complete isolation. He works in distant fields, shut-off from every other noise. His employment does not require any concentration, therefore day-dreaming becomes a habit which is detrimental to mental development. The type of work on the farm does not train the mind to think quickly and properly. People of the rural areas are meditative; they develop this trait by working <sup>in</sup> solitude. The farmer is hesitant in drawing conclusions. He develops deep convictions that are not easily broken. My rural pattern of behaviour and traditions were so deeply imbedded when I left the farm that it took almost a year to become readjusted to the urban form of culture. The farmer makes his mental adjustments mostly by himself, as very few are made in conference with other people. The rural people are very slow in changing their ways and ideas. The extreme isolation accounts for most of their backwardness. They have very little connection and association between the new fashions, technologies, and their homes. The community traditions play an important role in their life. Rural people are emotional, self conscious, and suspicious. These characteristics were common among the people of my home community. I overcame a large part of my inferior complex in the barrack room of the services; being forced to conform with the rest of the group helped overcome my self-consciousness. It was impossible for me to evade the social complexities that

confronted me, and return to the farm where I was at ease.

Although the farmer is generous in his hospitality, he is selfish in his own individual desires. People of this community who called unexpectedly were always made welcome. However no policy was accepted by the farmers unless it provided individual dividends. Farmers of this community often quarreled with their neighbors, but they never held a grudge. People were trusted implicitly; locked doors were unknown in the community.

Rural people enjoy certain advantages over urban people. Rural children have unlimited open spaces in which to roam and play whenever time permits. Farmers are able to enjoy the wide open spaces of the country, and plenty of fresh air. Rural families appreciate a congenial friendship and deep love for each other. The pleasure obtained from close association with nature is known only to the farmer. He lives in natural surroundings - away from the artificial world of the city. The farmer arranges his own work schedule and is free to allow himself the hours of leisure that he wishes. The farmer's field of income is unlimited. He is detached from all competition. He does not face the danger of being forced out of business, for there is always a market for his products. However this causes some farmers to produce only sufficient for their own livelihood, which encouraged bare existence.

Among the more important disadvantages encountered by the rural people is the poor educational opportunity to learn other occupations apart from farming. Rural parents do not encourage their children to leave home and seek other employment, although they do not offer any opportunities at home. Children are subjected to drudgery labor on the farm. There are no Youth Training Programs in Rural communities. Rural people are deprived of the numerous recreations which can be maintained only in the cities. Children are reared under strong rural traditions. They do not receive proper mental training, as their type of work hinders it. No opportunities are given to develop potential talents. Farmers are generally regarded as the illiterate class of society, and are subjected to

exploitations and impositions of large corporations and industry. Most rural homes lack modern conveniences. People of the rural communities receive inadequate medical attention. Doctors live at a distant city, and seldom visit farm families. The nearest doctor to our home was thirty-five miles. Most farmers in this community could not afford to pay for a doctor's services, even in an emergency. We rarely had the services of a doctor in our home. Sometimes the farm yard is arranged for the conveniences of the farmer, which results in unhealthy conditions. The barns and pig pens are liable to be situated too close to the house. Some farmers are inclined to be careless, and allow the farm yard to become filthy, which will collect flies.

Rural children are free from dangers of slums, gambling, and vice. Although they do not encounter these vices, there is usually easy access to alcoholic beverages. There were "Bootleggers" in my home community who manufactured their own "home-brew". It was quite easy for the young men to obtain this potent liquor at reasonable prices. Sexual morals were on a low level. At an early age farm children learn the process of farm animal reproduction. They discuss sex life freely and crudely.

The war has changed the philosophy of this community very little. Many of the boys and girls joined the military forces, but returned after the war. Some were rejected and remained in the community, therefore did not gain any new experiences. Rejections were due to physical conditions caused by strenuous labor and malnutrition. Although the ex-service men had experienced other standards of living, most of them returned to their pre-war standards of this community. It would appear that a higher standard of living cannot be taught to these people.

The inhabitants of my home community live a happy and contented life; aware only of their immediate interests, and remote from worldly affairs.