

The story of Lionel and Imelda Joanis and their family  
as told from the perspective of their youngest son, Gil

Lionel – Early Years

My father, Thomas Lionel Joanis (1893-1984), the son of Jules (1862-1900) and Délina Joanis (1867-1968) was born in Casselman, Ontario on September 9, 1893. The family soon moved to Rockland where Jules worked as a millwright in the Edwards' mill. Jules died in 1900 leaving Délina with a family of 7, 5 girls and 2 boys. Délina supported the family by sewing. Her eldest daughter, Bernadette, was apprenticed to a milliner while my father after 3 years of schooling went to work full-time in the mill then managed by his grandfather, Pierre Jules Depocas-dit-Joanis (1843-1928). He and several other boys ages 10 – 14 would work all summer and late into the fall until the Ottawa River froze and the mill was shut for the winter. These boys were then put into an unmanageable classroom where nothing was learned.

By the age of 14 he was the assistant to his uncle, the cook at a lumber shanty in the Abitibi region of Quebec. There followed several years of working at the mill in summer and lumber jacking in winter. For a time, he also worked with a railway construction crew building track in Western Canada. Although not a big man he had to be very strong to carry and position rails all day.

When the conscription crisis came in 1917 to be followed by the rather infamous Conscription Election and the passing of the Military Service Act, he refused to serve. Unlike Rupert Brooke he had no wish to lie in some corner of a foreign field that would forever be England. He felt with some justification perhaps that the entire crisis was a fabrication of Orangemen and Free Masons to force French Canadian Catholics to serve.

Also, he had no wish to serve in a unit commanded by unilingual, English speaking officers and non-coms.

In late 1917, evading the Military Police, he went to Halifax to help rebuild the city devastated by the explosion of the Mont Blanc.

By 1918 he was in St. Denis, Saskatchewan where he obtained a quarter section of land for \$10 under the Homestead Act. He also exercised his pre-emption for another quarter section for \$160, a dollar an acre. This was land deeded to the Hudson Bay Co. when it ceded the Northwest Territories to the Government of Canada in 1870. Later he would buy 3 contiguous quarter sections from a Mr. Giroux. Here, he established his farmstead and built his one-room shack and a stable.

Imelda – Early Years

Imelda Denise Pion (1900-1989) was born on May 31, 1900 in Lawrence, Massachusetts the daughter of Athanase Pion (1871-1947) and Robertine Girouard Pion (1875-1932) shortly after their move from the Ste. Hyacinthe area of Quebec. Mr. Pion opened a grocery and soon prospered. Imelda's first year at school was spent learning English before proceeding to grades 1, 2 and 3.

In 1908-1909 Western Fever spread in the area. Mr. Pion was greatly interested especially when a Father Bérubé from Vonda, Saskatchewan would tell his audience, "If you break 50 acres you'll be rich!" The decision was taken. He sold his store and in the early spring of 1910 he, his wife and their 7 children boarded the train for Vonda accompanied by the Watkins family. Mr. Pion built a 14' x 24' home, essentially an uninsulated granary,

near St. Denis where there were as yet neither a school nor a church. Mr. Watkins moved a small shack from Vonda for his family of four.

While Mr. Pion broke and seeded 20 acres, the children explored and loved their new surroundings filled with ducks, geese and wild turkeys. But there was a total crop failure and the families were very short of money. To save on fuel all 13 members of the 2 families moved into the granary for the winter. To compound matters, both women had a baby that winter. How all 15 of them survived until the spring defies the imagination.

Within a year they moved to what would become the permanent farmstead and Mr. Pion built a much better home. A school eventually opened but our mother attended only 2 years. She and her older sister Bertha did much of the housework since their mother gave birth to 4 more children by 1918.

In the ensuing years, Imelda worked on farms helping out neighbours as well as at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon. It wasn't until 1925 that she and Lionel began courting. They were engaged in the spring of 1926 and married on November 3, 1926.

### Their Married Life

Blanche is born on August 21, 1927. My mother calls her Marie Blanche after the custom in many Christian countries of adding the name Mary before the girl child's name. I am an adult when I learn that her true name is Blanche.

Irene is born somewhat prematurely on June 27, 1928. My parents call her Ti Bleue – petite bleue – little blue one because she is a blue baby but fortunately of a benign source, not a heart defect, and the blueness soon passes. Decades later I still on occasion hear my parents refer to her by that name.

All is well, they have 2 healthy babies, my father is breaking more acres of prairie every year and the future looks bright. But disaster is about to strike and the next decades of their



Imelda and Lionel 1926

lives will be marred by serious illness, great poverty and, understandably, anxiety.

At some time in 1929, the year that marks the start of The Great Depression, my father begins to suffer from the intense pain of rheumatoid arthritis. On December 31, Lionel Jr. (henceforth referred to as Jim, my mother's nickname) is born. All is well for a few days until my mother develops an infection. The local doctor is ineffective. She sickens to a point where it is evident that she must be hospitalized. The roads are impassable but fortunately a neighbor has a snowmobile. [This refers to an enclosed heated cabin mounted on 2 pairs of skis. The first pair is short and is used to steer the vehicle while the much longer pair support it. The unit is powered by a rear-mounted aircraft engine with a large propeller.] The men get her to the 5 a.m. train in Elstow. She is near death and will spend the next 5 weeks in hospital. In her story published in 1984 in "Pion, A Family History" she tells us that she never fully regained her strength after that episode.

In the summer of 1930 dad's rheumatoid arthritis worsens. Blanche supplies an informative anecdote. She has gone with dad

to St. Denis. While there his pain reaches a point where 2 men have to lift him into the buggy. On the way home, Blanche who is not yet 3 drives the horse. (It is an obtuse horse that does not know the way home). Mother and Aunt Helen get him out of the buggy and into bed.

Dad is hospitalized. One doctor fears that he will die of pain, another tells him that he will never walk again. The pain in his head intrigues them. Indeed, since his late teens he



Joanis family portrait 1944  
back: Lillian, Jim, Irene, Blanche  
front: Lionel, Gil, Louise, René, Imelda

has had on and off trouble with an upper tooth. The tooth is pulled. The dentist discovers a large abscess which involves part of the bone from his upper jaw. Whether or not this chronic infection may have weakened his immune system to the point of causing his rheumatoid arthritis is a moot point. He returns home and is bedridden.

Aunt Helen stays the summer to help, but in the fall she must go to the city to work. She is being married the following spring and needs some money. Our mother spends what she describes as "the worst winter of my life". Dad is in bed, she has 3 young children to care for and a hired man to feed. She is dreadfully weak and begins to look pregnant although she isn't. In the spring, a surgeon removes an ovarian cyst the size of his fist.

Her weakness persists. She tells my father that she must see a doctor but they have no

money. He has kept 50 bushels of wheat with which to seed 50 acres. Now he decides that he will seed one-half bushel per acre and sell the other 25 to pay the doctor. The doctor offered her the operation he felt she needed but it would have left her unable to conceive. Our parents discussed it and she decided not to have the surgery. There were 4 more children: Lillian - July 31, 1932; Louise - March 17, 1937; René - Dec. 20, 1938; Gil - Dec. 7, 1941.

While dad was confined to bed, a neighbour, Mr. Barnes who spoke with a heavy British accent that dad could not understand would visit him. He always brought reading material. That winter dad taught himself to read English.

Our grandmother, Délina Joanis Gauthier, sent him 2 bottles of some elixir that was supposedly good for arthritis. He drank the first bottle and felt as if he would blow up but he found that he could move his toes. After drinking the second bottle he was able to stand and take the first few painful steps he had taken in months.

In the spring of 1930 he managed to seed 40 acres. He told me once that what had been the work of 5 minutes, harnessing and hitching horses to a drill, now took him an hour. Similarly, filling the drill with seed which he had done by scooping full big buckets from the wagon now took an hour or more since all his hands could hold was a tobacco tin of grain. Again, because of his hands he tied the reins together and slipped them over his head and down his back.

There were a few bright spots. In the mid-30s, feeling somewhat better, he pitched hay for a full week. His arms had been quite bent at the elbows because of his arthritis. While dressing for church on Sunday morning he called my mother's attention to the fact that both arms were now straight. The physio of hard work if one can endure the pain!

My father, a hard-working man of 36 who almost overnight became a cripple, was filled with anxiety. How would he support his fam-

ily? This, in my opinion, is what led to the development of stomach ulcers. I have seen him at the end of a day's work lie down on the ground writhing in pain and moaning. Then, he would come in and while the rest of us ate a big hearty meal, he would have 2 poached eggs, 2 pieces of dry toast and a cup of tea.

There is no doubt that in those years my father swore a lot. Since the age of 10 he had worked with men and French Canadians of the day were prone to use the name of God and every sacred object in the church in daily language. In part it was the lack of vocabulary of uneducated men. Even now, it is quite simple to say of a fellow, not, "What an ill-tempered, bad-mannered lout." But, "What an a....." Your listener gets the idea but is spared all the syllables.

For the most part our father swore out of sheer frustration. I have seen him curse a blue streak as he tried to loosen a large nut on a piece of machinery. He had a large crescent wrench and certainly enough strength in his upper arms, shoulders and back. But because of his deformed hands he could get only his index finger and a partial middle finger over the handle of the wrench. My mother would on occasion say, "If you don't mend your ways, you'll go to hell!", and he might rejoin, roughly translated, "You know, she sees herself up there in heaven looking down at me frying in hell. And, she kinda likes the idea." Whereupon we would all laugh and in time so would our mother.

I will digress here to talk about the many kinds of poverty we suffered from. First and foremost was what is usually understood by poverty: lack of money. By the mid-1930s, if not sooner, most of the farms in south and central Saskatchewan were technically bankrupt. Farmers had no cash reserves and often owed money to banks on their land. The land was worthless in that no one would buy it or had any money to buy it with even had they wanted to. Crops were of little or no value, years of deflation had left grain at rock

bottom prices. Several years in the 1930's were years of drought with dust storms raging from the Texas Panhandle to central Alberta and Saskatchewan. In 1937 there was no rain in Saskatchewan. Our father like many others harvested fewer bushels than what he had used to seed the land in May. Grasshoppers ravaged a much better crop in 1938. Farmers, still a majority of the population in the West, had no money with which to buy new equipment. They bought only the minimum of absolute necessities which led to bankruptcies in towns and cities and a swelling of the ranks of the unemployed. The money supply had simply dried up as governments still attempted to balance their budgets despite falling revenues. Our leaders, including the sympathetic but inept Prime Minister R.B. Bennett simply did not know how to cope with the disaster. There was great anxiety. There is a picture taken about 1935 of our mother and the 3 oldest children which reminds one of Dorothea Lange's famous photograph, "Migrant Mother". Mother is wearing a very simple dress, her Sunday best. She is trying hard to smile but her entire face betrays deep fatigue and worry. But, in Germany, men were singing the "Horst-Wessel-Lied" which augured, at great human cost, a return to prosperity in North America.

Our family never went hungry. Our mother was a very good cook and there was always sufficient to work with. We had milk, cream, butter, fresh and canned meats, vegetables and fruit. She also made delicious pastry.

There was very little money for clothing. Blanche tells us she had 3 dresses in 1940: one for church on Sunday, one for school and one for home use. When the last one made from flour bags needed washing, Blanche spent the day in her slip while it dried. Also, since acquiring the Sunday dress, Blanche had had her growth spurt reaching her full height. The result was that the waist band of the dress had moved up towards her armpits. Nineteen forty was the year our cousins from Ottawa

Pauline, Florence and Mark Turner visited us and the Dinelles. My 12 and 13-year-old sisters, Irene and Blanche were in awe of our older, sophisticated, city cousins and greatly enjoyed their visit. Before leaving Pauline gave Blanche a dress, an act of kindness still remembered 76 years later.

A second type of poverty was that of location. The priests who had persuaded men such as my grandfather Pion to come West were trying to form a French speaking, Catholic area. Many such settlers were established in Prudhomme and Vonda. There was no unclaimed land except to the south of Vonda, what would become the St. Denis area. For the most part the terrain was very hilly and rocky. But the settlers accepted it because they too wanted to live in a French Catholic milieu.

The entire area is obviously a moraine deposited by the great glacier 10,000 years ago in its retreat northward and the soil is not particularly fertile. While 4 of our 5 quarters were passable, the homestead quarter first taken by my father was formidable. On one giant hill never broken until the 1980's or 1990's surveyors had erected a cairn as a necessary trigonometric point in the survey of the prairies. From it, at night one could see the lights of Prudhomme approximately 16 miles away as the crow flies.

The land was extremely rocky. We had to get rid of these rocks because they damaged and broke tillage equipment. It was said in our area that rocks were like the gophers, every spring there was a new litter. I recall that when I was home for the Easter break in the spring of 1958, my brother Jim and I spent a week working the rocks on the homestead quarter section. First we picked the smaller ones and threw them into the edge of a slough. Then, using a flat skid, a stone boat, we pushed larger rocks on it and went to the slough. Finally, using the stronger of our two tractors and a ploughshare we attacked the larger ones which often showed only a bit

above the soil. The idea was to try to find an edge of the rock with the ploughshare. If we succeeded we could tip the rock, chain it and slowly drag it to a slough. Some resisted our efforts and required the equipment of a later generation to move. The last large rock we tackled that week was a disaster. When the ploughshare bit into the edge of the rock, with the tractor in its lowest gear I went to full throttle. The large rear wheels spun. Unknown to us there was a small sharp rock under one of the tires which blew out. We now had to get the services of a tow truck. The wheel was hoisted on the truck and it was driven to Saskatoon where the tire was vulcanized. Then the tow truck brought the wheel back and it was remounted on the tractor. A very costly rock! To add insult to injury, with the tractor out of commission we had to walk home nearly 2 miles. The point of all this is that two of us spent a week there while other necessary farm work was left undone.

An advantage of the hills was that once the area was broken, in spring the snowmelt would gather in the valleys forming sloughs, some permanent. And where there is water, trees will grow. In the early years there were few if any trees in the area of useful size for firewood or building corrals. Our father told us of getting up at 2 a.m., hitching 4 horses to a sleigh and driving out 15 to 20 miles to the Meacham area where there were trees. He would fell a good number of trees than pause and feed the horses well, both oats and hay while he ate his own meal. After this the trees were skidded out of the woods, loaded onto the sleigh and the load would be well-chained. Then there came the long, slow drive home often arriving as late as 8 or 9 in the evening.

Another source of difficulty and poverty related to location centered on railroads or a lack of one. The two main lines CN and CP ran through Vonda and Elstow, 25 miles apart. Lack of a railroad meant that no town grew

around St. Denis which consisted of a church, a general store and 4 nearby farmsteads. There were no services which for us meant that grain had to be hauled 10 miles to Elstow where a doctor, a hardware and other services could be found. There was a more significant effect. While elementary schools were soon established in the area: Glenmaur, St. Denis, Casavant and Dinelle, since there was no town, there was no high school. Students proceeding beyond grade 8 had to attend a boarding school which our parents could ill afford.

Blanche finished grade 12 partly through correspondence classes and partly through boarding at the convent in Prudhomme and attending the local high school. Then after a 6 week course she began teaching.

Irene would have liked nursing but high school followed by 3 years of nursing training was out of the question.

Jim, as the eldest son, left school at 15 and worked on the farm. He was academically oriented and a great reader. He acquired the skills and knowledges of farming and was a

hard worker, but his heart was never truly in it.

Lillian left school early to help our mother before working in Saskatoon. Her informative, lengthy and humorous letters testify to a high degree of language ability.

Louise survived 2 years of the atrocious food at the convent in Prudhomme and then went to live with Lillian in Saskatoon, graduating from Sion Academy in 1955.

René did not enjoy school very much. He became an industrial electrician and spent most of his working life at the Cory Potash Mine near Saskatoon

I spent several years in boarding schools, attended Teachers College for a year and started teaching in Kamsack, Saskatchewan at the age of 18.

The third and last form of poverty from which we suffered is more subtle and totally dependent on circumstances and chance. The farms of the 1930's and 1940's were enormously labor intensive compared to the large, modern grain operations of today. In addition to fields of grain, every farm had beef



The Joanis farm mid 1950s



Lionel, Imelda, Joseph Gauthier  
and Délima Joanis Gauthier  
Rockland Ontario

cattle, horses, hogs and poultry. Cattle meant fencing pastures, twice-a-day milking, cutting, hauling and storing feed for 6 months of winter, cleaning barns, etc. The work was endless. One comparison with our nearest neighbors and relatives, the Dinelles will suffice. Laura Joanis, our aunt, married Arthur Dinelle in 1917 and bore him 9 children: 6 boys and 3 girls. Of the six boys, Elzear (Eddy) had to leave the farm because of asthma. However, by the mid-30's Uncle Arthur had the help of Philip and Maurice. They were followed in time by Dan, Arthur and Laurence. Of the first 5 children born to Lionel and Imelda four were girls. Jim was not of age to be of appreciable help before the mid-1940's. Because of this and dad's crippling arthritis, one and sometimes two hired men had to be paid and fed. The difference is substantial.

If I seem to have dwelt inordinately on poverty it is merely to emphasize that it was our family's constant companion. But there was no poverty of spirit in our home. Every evening our mother led us in prayer, the

rosary and other devotions. There were card games. For years, the men, dad and Jim played canasta against the boys, René and me on winter evenings. Reading was important to most. In the fall my father and Jim would order 40 to 50 books from a lending library. These would come three at a time every two weeks. My father would read very late then check on the children and make sure the fires were well banked and dying before he retired. In all, a spirit of cautious optimism permeated the home. We the children knew we were loved and in return we loved our parents. We felt secure.

In 1945 we moved to a recently vacated home a few miles away for 2 years while dad and Jim built a large addition to our home which made it much more comfortable.

In November 1948 Blanche married Cameron MacDonald in St. Denis. They had 3 sons: Neil, Daryl and Brian. By 1954 Cameron was suffering from severe headaches. With the methods of the times, it took several hospital stays and painful tests before doctors diagnosed inoperable brain cancer. Cameron died in March 1962 after which Blanche returned to full-time teaching. She took several summer school classes and while on sabbatical finished her B.Ed. degree.

Also, in the fall of 1948 Lillian told our mother that soon she, Lillian, would have to leave to find work and that now was the time for mother to have the operation she had needed for over 15 years. Mother came home from the hospital very weak. Lillian assumed all the duties of the housewife and would not let our mother do a thing. She even went so far as to give René and me our catechism lessons in the evening which we felt was much beyond the call of duty. I grew very fond of Lillian that winter and would get up on a chair to properly hug her. I christened her "Piggy" and even now almost 7 decades later occasionally think of her by that name.

In October 1950 Irene married Danny Kusch. It had been a very bad fall leaving

much of the harvest not completed. Now, on her wedding day it started to snow. Poor Irene was weeping so dad gave her a little shot of whiskey which brightened her spirits considerably. By the next morning there was a foot of heavy wet snow on the ground which took several days to melt. Then it turned bitterly, unseasonably cold. I recall Jim and a neighbor combining in – 20 Celsius weather. With no snow on the ground the schoolchildren Louise, René and I had to use the buggy. Some mornings were so cold that René and Louise would heap the blankets on me, the youngest and the smallest and run beside the buggy in an effort to stay warm.

Irene and Danny lived on a farm near Domremy, Saskatchewan. They had two sons Larry and Frank and a daughter, Pat. They also adopted a second daughter, Sharon. They retired to Saskatoon about 1990. In May 1997 we were all deeply shocked when Danny, only 69, passed away of a heart attack.

Louise married Claude Rochon in August 1956. They had 6 children: Ron, Gerry, Monique, Mike, Phil and Rick. They lived in Saskatoon all their married life. In January 1985, only two weeks after our father's funeral, Claude died of heart disease from which he had suffered for several years.

Returning to their wedding day, Claude and Louise were married in the morning in Saskatoon followed by a reception at a restaurant at which a warm meal was served. My mother decided to serve a cold meal that night on the farm. Our dinner guests would be Claude's parents and several other relatives from Manitoba. Three days before the big day, mother informed Jim that I would work with her until after the big meal. He had no choice but to acquiesce while I was somewhat ambivalent. Jim could be quite a taskmaster but I didn't know what to expect from mother. She somehow made me feel that WE would serve a great meal. I washed and dried many dishes, got vegetables from the garden, washed and waxed floors, kept the firewood

supply constant, etc. Also there were two other jobs that would simply have exhausted her. I got many pails of water from our deep well – she was barely tall enough to turn the windlass, and I made countless trips to the ice cellar which was quite deep by August. Going up and down that ladder would simply have been too much for her. The farm would not be electrified until that fall.

The meal was a fantastic success, perhaps the best meal she had ever served. Our guests raved over the quality and the number of dishes. Our mother was visibly delighted. In the evening more guests joined us and we all had much fun.

It had been a cool day. That night a killing frost swept across large parts of central Saskatchewan. By morning much of the value of the crop of 1956 had disappeared.

The next day dad took the train for Ottawa. He and my mother had last gone East in 1936 by car with a neighbour. At that time the trip involved driving all the way around Lake Michigan re-entering Canada at Windsor. This time mom did not accompany him. There was probably some canning of garden produce that needed to be done. Also, she was protecting Jim and me from our own cooking. Jim would have made me the cook on the first day which would have led to a diet of boiled potatoes, eggs – fried or hard cooked, and wieners – fried or boiled – the limit of my culinary skills at age 14.

Dad visited his mother who was 89 that summer. She lived with Aunt Marie Anne. He spent time with Bernadette and George Turner who were celebrating their 50th anniversary. And of course he went to Bourget to see Alice and Patrick Schnupp. While there he surprised everyone by writing home. He printed the letter because writing script was very difficult for him. My mother looked at the letter and passed it to me with a perplexed look on her face. Dad had little education and hardly ever read French. It took me a while to realize that it was phonetic

and best read aloud. I don't remember any actual examples so I've made one up. He might have spelled "Jesus" as "j a i z u" which is exactly how it is pronounced in French. It was likely the only letter he ever wrote to my mother. How I wish it had been preserved.

Nineteen sixty-three was a year of weddings. In June René was married to Geneviève Gaudet from Bellevue. They have three children: Yolaine, Norman and Marcel all of whom live in Saskatoon.

In July Lillian was wed to George Lewans of Orkney, Saskatchewan. They have 4 sons: Mark, Michael, Jeffrey and Shawn. After farming for 30 years in Orkney they moved to Regina where they managed apartment buildings until their retirement.

In December Jim and Evelyn Bend were married in Lloydminster. She was a widow who had 3 children: Edward, Fay and Ron. They would have two more children – Suzanne and Mark. Jim took over the farm but sold it in 1971. Like so many he must buy more land and bigger equipment to stay economical but he lacks the equity to do so. It is a process that started in the early 1900's and continues to this day. After driving heavy equipment at mines at Pine Point, NWT and Lynn Lake, Manitoba, Jim found permanent employment at the Cluff Lake Uranium Mine in far northern Saskatchewan and remained there until his retirement. The family lived in Saskatoon.

In the fall of 1963 our parents retired in Saskatoon. Their first two years were spent in a bungalow at 6 Hamilton Place. Our mother finally lives in a home with running water. For the first time we see our mother looking rested. She puts on a few pounds and regains her vigor. She is only 63 and looks great. In those years our father's stomach problems largely disappeared. Also, he ceased to swear. (My wife, Marjorie, who first met him in 1970 never remembers him swearing.) Both changes were obviously caused by the lessening of anxiety and tension.

Two years later, they moved to #6, 134 Avenue P South, their last home. The apartment was rather small but very convenient. It was only a block from St. Mary's church, St. Paul's hospital, a pharmacy, a credit union and several other services. In 1965 my parents went on a long road trip to the Yukon with René and Genny which they greatly enjoy. As well they spent a week with them at the lake. These lake visits will continue for many years.

In 1966 they go East by train. By now Délina is 99 years old and dad would like to see her one more time. They visit with Bernadette and George Turner who are celebrating their 60th anniversary. And, of course they visit Alice and Pat Schnupp in Bourget. They return thinking that this has been their last trip East.

But in 1970 while I am working in Ottawa they are persuaded to fly down. We visit Marie Anne, George and Bernadette and Alice. Terry and Jack Hart have us over for dinner and an evening with members of the family. We go to Rockland where dad shows us the house he was raised in. Then on to Montreal to visit our mother's sister Evelyn. We show them a good time by taking them to an excellent restaurant with great entertainment. It is a short trip but all the bases are covered. Then, in four hours they are back home.

In July 1971 Marjorie Young and I are married in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. We live in an apartment in Saskatoon for over a year and then buy our first home. In 1976 we begin adoption inquiries. We are charmed by pictures of a 5-year-old Cree Indian boy who requires a special diet which his parents in far northern Saskatchewan cannot supply. Marj, a graduate in home economics tells me that in the city the diet could be easily followed. We adopt Cliff who becomes the centre of our lives.

Life goes on. Our parents suffer the vicissitudes of aging. Both need cataract operations which, at the time, involve a 2-day

stay in hospital lying flat on their back with sand bags on each side of their head. Dad suffers from the pain of shingles for months. Some of the arthritis treatment he receives leads to greater pain. For instance, he is given gold injections but suffers an allergic reaction. The inside of his mouth is filled with ulcers for months. Much more positive results occur when he is hospitalized for several weeks and given intense physio. He regains surprising mobility in his knees and hips. He is asked to speak to medical students, interns and residents about his illness. He does and answers their questions and leaves them amazed that without medication and physio he was able to start moving again in 1930.

Gradually, over the years a custom builds up of the children visiting them on Sunday afternoon. Some Sundays the apartment is filled with people, especially when the older grandchildren also come. We, the sons and daughters not only see our parents but also visit with one another. Sunday visits to the apartment become an institution.

In the winter of 1976 we begin to plan for their 50th anniversary celebration which we will hold in early July. But first our father requires emergency surgery for a bowel obstruction. We hold our breaths. For a man of 82 he makes a rapid recovery and is soon going for substantial walks. In July we have a grand celebration. Mother is beautifully coiffed and dressed and looks like a little china doll. Dad in a brand new, good quality suit doesn't look so bad either. The next day Marjorie and I visit them and they are so happy. They who have sacrificed endlessly for us are amazed that we, the children, have gone to the trouble of having this very special day for them. How could we have done less?

As they age they require more and more support if they are to live independently in their apartment. At one time or another all the children assist. But I would be remiss if I failed to mention all the help supplied by René and Genny who live near our parents. Genny is a

stay at home mom who manages to fit endless doctors' appointments into her schedule. She picks up their prescriptions, buys groceries, does routine banking, etc. etc. René, ever the handyman, paints their apartment, regularly shampoos their carpets, keeps the air conditioner in working order and does countless other tasks. We, the other children thank you.

In 1983 dad's doctor informs him that he has a shadow on a lung, tells him its significance and informs him that at his age no serious medical intervention can be attempted. He accepts the news with great equanimity. One day when I am there after school they tell me the grim news. Dad quietly sings the old song, "Me and my Shadow".

On Sunday, December 30th, 1984 I am the only one to visit the apartment. René and family are in Cuba; Louise is expecting a houseful of guests for dinner. Jim is in Cluff Lake. We talk all afternoon. I remind them that the next day Marj and I will bring supper and spend a quiet New Year's Eve with them. I return home only to receive a frantic phone call from mother that dad has had a serious hemorrhage and that an ambulance and a priest have been called. I tell Marj to phone Louise and rush over to St. Paul's hospital. A priest from St. Mary's tells me that dad has passed away. We return to the apartment where the priest consoles our mother for some time. Louise has arrived so I start making the necessary phone calls. I reach Blanche at her son's home in Winnipeg. She tells me, "I'll be there tomorrow." The next day I reach Rene in Cuba and tell him that the funeral will be delayed until their return.

At the funeral mass, the people of St. Denis have turned out in force on a bitter January morning. Dad's nephew Father Denis Pion speaks eloquently of the Cross and our father's relationship to it. A granddaughter, Pat Mitchell, awes the congregation with her rendition of 'How Great Thou Art'. There is a touch of sadness today in her always



Lionel and Imelda 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary July 2, 1976

magnificent voice. All is done well.

Mother wishes to continue living alone in her apartment. Her sister Helen lives just down the hall, so there is always someone to talk to. We become more solicitous in terms of phone calls and visits. She hopes that when her time comes she will go quickly. Her wish is granted.

Late in the evening of January 31st, 1989 she suffers a major stroke and is gone by morning. At the funeral mass, Blanche speaks of our mother's many qualities, of her devotion to the Virgin Mary and by extension of all good mothers in relation to Mary. Imelda lies next to Lionel in Saskatoon's Woodlawn Cemetery.

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And now we their children have grown old. Blanche is 89 and continues to live in her apartment in Lloydminster. She is in good health and still helps out her less fortunate neighbours.

Irene who seems to have more lives than the proverbial cat, at 88 has survived several major health crises. She continues to live independently.

We lost Jim to lung disease in 2009. His widow Evelyn is in a nursing home after suffering serious injuries in a fall.

Lillian is 84 now. For several years she had suffered great pain from a bad back and has lost most of her mobility. Her husband George has lost much of his vision to macular degeneration. They cope with considerable help from their son Mark and his wife Lona.

Louise at 79 is still active and involved. She and her long-time friend Joe travel the world.

René and Genny live in the home they bought in the 1960's. There have been health problems but things are stable now. René putters, fixes and installs in his home and those of his 3 children.

Marjorie is in excellent health and at 74, I am in reasonably good health. We enjoy a very comfortable lifestyle in our condo which is close to all amenities. Cliff is currently posted in Prince Albert. Laura our daughter in law and the 3 grandchildren are a source of great joy to us.

All of us look forward to the future with cautious optimism.

## Envoi

Most summers on a Sunday afternoon Marj and I drive out to St. Denis. We visit the cemetery where my grandparents Athanase and Robertine Pion are buried. Also here are the graves of two of my contemporaries. One, aged 9, died in a tractor accident, the other is the victim of a freak accident. An old rusted .22 caliber rifle has been found. A man is cleaning it on the kitchen table when it discharges. The small bullet penetrates a wall and lodges in the heart of a 14-year-old boy doing his homework. And there is the grave of a distinguished former inhabitant. At his funeral a man leaves the church with a broad smile on his face. He suggests to my father that a coal shovel rather than flowers would

have been a more appropriate adornment on the casket. There are dark enmities even in Arcadia.

We then drive past my father's very hilly homestead on the way to the farm. The farmyard is utter desolation, rank with 4 foot weeds. The house burned down several years ago, perhaps the victim of a careless hunter's cigarette. The barns are gone, some sheds will soon crumble, but the one room shack my father built nearly 100 years ago still stands firm. The gently undulating terrain of this quarter section is as always. I know every square yard of this land. From boyhood walks and countless fetching of cows for milking I know every dip and gentle swale behind which a cow may inadvertently hide. This land was, is and will always be home.



Joanis Farm 2015



Old shed 2015



Larry, Frank, Danny  
Sharon, Irene, Pat



Ron Bend, Edward Bend, Barry Harris  
Suzanne, Gwen, Darlene, Fay Harris  
Jim, Evelyn & grandchildren



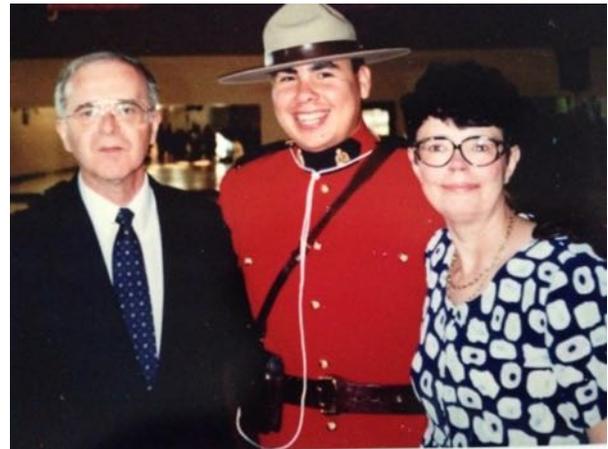
George Lewans and Lillian 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary 1988  
Mike, Shaun, Jeff, Mark



Phil, Gerry, Claude Rochon, Mike, Ron  
Camille (Ron's wife), Louise, Rick, Monique & Choo Choo



Genny and René 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary July 25, 1988  
Marcel, Yolaine, Norm



Gil, Cliff and Marjorie



Thanksgiving 1980 - René, Louise, Blanche, Gil, Irene, Jim, Lillian, Imelda and Lionel



Cameron and Blanche  
Neil, Brian (with kitten)  
Brian in front



Neil, Blanche, Brian and Daryl