Ethel Collins, presents the Renfrew Horticultural Society's new Silver Thistle award to Nellie MacEwen at the annual dinner meeting December 3. 1992.

DECEMBER 1992 -

AGNES and LESLIE CAMPBELL

They began their married life with each other and one dollar. A sixteen year old bride and her twenty-three year old groom. His earnings were one dollar a day. It was September 6, 1939, the eve of the first great war.

I remember my dad being the last one to bed at night because he had to "bank up" the wood stove and close the dampers just right, so it would crackle and sizzle 'till almost dawn. He was always first downstairs too, in the morning, long before I was even awake. When you could feel the heat rising up from the kitchen stove and the sound of the kettle boiling for the morning tea you knew it was time to get up. Then came the delicious aroma of eggs frying and leftover potatoes being warmed up for my dad's breakfast. By then, mom had our porridge cooked or maybe toast done on the wire toaster or in the oven with brown sugar and butter melted together to perfection.

Dad was usually gone before I got downstairs — off working on one of the neighboring farms, haying or planting in the summer and logging in the winter, not to arrive home until usually well after dark. Sometimes I went to meet him in the summertime and he'd let me have a drink of milk fresh from the 10 lb. honey pail that he carried our milk home in.

I remember S.S. #6 Horton, eight wonderful years there, as my mother had done before me. The smells of that school still linger, a mixture of chalk, lead pencils and wood shavings. The cloakroom smells, of stale lunches, a forgotten apple or orange, a damp raincoat and rubber boots left abandoned for the day when the sun came out.

I remember the oak desks, solid, polished and carved with initials and stained from ink spills.

I remember the Christmas concert when I was about 9 and I was picked to sing 'Frosty the Snowman' in front of all the school and parents, and I was fretting because I had just my everyday handmade clothes to wear. On the evening of the concert when it was time to get ready, mom handed me a brand new store bought tartan skirt and a pale blue nylon blouse with a hand made camisole to wear under it. I shall always remember that outfit, and I'm sure she saved long and hard from her "egg money' so I could have it.

I remember my dad hoeing in his garden late at night, after the sun had disappeared and mom saying "there'll be no vegetables left — wait and see". But, we always had plenty of vegetables — I guess he really could "see in the dark". Lots of vegetables grown with little or no fertilizer, planted, weeded and watered by hand. The water carried in pails from the creek which ran by our house. Vegetables picked and stored and preserved for the coming winters by my mom and dad. Fifty some winters now, never one missed.

I remember coming home from school to find my mother sewing or cooking or bringing in the clothes from the "line", hurrying if it had started to rain, but that was all right too she said "it was easier to iron with a few drops of rain-water on it". My mother was always there when I came home from school. I remember liking that. It made me feel important. Sometimes, often she had a big pot of rice pudding loaded with raisins on the back of the stove. Nothing tastes better after a cold autumn day at school and a mile or two walk home. I remember helping her to fold the laundry and looking forward to my bed that night made up with fresh line-dried sheets. She dried it outside as far into the season as possible, but when the long-johns froze so hard they could stand alone, that was the end of outside drying til next summer.

I remember my mother picking berries to make jam for the winter. Little wee wild strawberries, most of them smaller than the end of your baby finger. It took an awful lot of those berries to make a jar of jam but we always had wild strawberry jam in the cold cellar. And chokecherry jelly, if she could "beat those darn black birds to the best ones". She preserved crabapples, citron with raisins, wild plums, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and even tried wild haws one year.

I remember the year my dad decided to try sauerkraut. He purchased an enormous crock and put up enough cabbage for a small army. It's a wonder we all didn't look like a cabbage by the spring. He said that he grew the cabbage and took the time to chop and preserve it and "gol darn" we aren't going to let it go to waste".

I remember 1946, it was the end of the GREAT WAR and we were waiting up very late at night for my uncle Eddie to come home. We didn't have a car, so he had to walk the five miles from town after he got off the train. He brought me a bracelet from Holland with charms on it. He said he was glad to be home but he seemed very sad.

I remember the "dances" my parents went to. Sometimes it was a wedding dance. Sometimes it was a special occasion dance, maybe to raise money for a neighbor who had a bad crop or an accident or illness. They always took the kids with them. I never had a babysitter except my granny who lived across the field from us. All the youngsters went to the "dances" and had a great time running in and out of the hall, playing hide-and-seek in the dark. We learned from our parents the round and square dances. It was a great adventure to be discussed for weeks afterwards. There was always a lunch served around eleven in the evening. More like a feast really. Everything was homemade and home cooked, cold roast beef and pork, sliced ham and every kind of sandwich possible. Pickled beets, cucumbers, cheeses and of course the desserts!!! Cakes made of chocolate and vanilla, pumpkin and apple and raisin pie, cookies and squares galore. I was usually allowed a cup of tea on such an "occasion" but with lots of milk.

I remember the hill in dad's maple bush up behind the house where I used to sit and dream how it was a perfect spot to build your dream house. You could see the whole town of Renfrew from that spot, nestled in the Bonnechere Valley, and at night with the stars above and the town lights below as you sit in the stillness and listen to the whippoorwill call, there is no more beautiful spot in this world. The reality may not be as grand as the dream, but my house sits on that hill today.

These are but a small token of the memories you have made for me and my thanks is but a small token of the appreciation and respect I have for you both.

Thanks mom, thanks daddy, and Merry Christmas!

Your Daughter