

My dear wife Emma agrees, a born adventurer – I'm not. When I try, life finds a way to humble me. As in the story I'm about to tell. Pain teaches caution, I learned, so I settled in as your faithful municipal administrator, for 30 steady years. Thank you for this retirement celebration.

Arriving here from Ontario in 1880, I was filled with stories of Indigenous Chiefs, Cour de Bois giants and Homesteading heros. The book I most studied, though, was "Northwest Passage by Land" - a most readable account of two men exploring by rivers and trails the territory between Fort Gary and the Pacific. I aspired to be adventurous, resourceful and as thrilled to lay eyes on the vast prairie.



### Walter's homestead on the Boundary Commission Trail.

Spring of '82 came. And we had to scramble. The Souris flooded massively – just as hundreds of homesteaders approached - along what we called 'the old Indian trail' from Emerson. Many needed to cross to get to their land. So I cobbled a raft and offered a ferry. It was a wobbly affair - but by strapping wagons securely we managed many hair-raising crossings without mishap.

I'd take my gun along, of course, for a chance at a duck for dinner. As I fetched the gun to go home one day, it went off. Took by hand. Gone, in a horrible instant. The blast was so hot, so near the arm, that the arteries were singed, limiting blood loss. But, I was still in a bad way. No hospital, doctor or nurse in any direction.

My friends grabbed a door to make a stretcher, bandaged the arm, hauled me to shelter and found some ice under a manure pile. That, plus some grated potato, soothed the pain.

Eight days I lay. Gangerine setting in - when fortune smiled. Word about my accident arrived in Old Deloraine – just as a medical student was seeking land. He arrived in haste but had no tools. So, neighbour Dave rode twelve miles to borrow from a veterinarian. All he had was a knife and a small saw. No anesthetic. Yeah! They held me down - amputated and stitched. But, unfortunately, the saw just wasn't adequate. So, they ended up having to break the arm..... I'll give you a minute....

Lone adventurer stories, my friends, are misleading. We need each other. The gentlemen who wrote that book about crossing the prairies? They had an entourage with scouts, tents and forts to stop in on. And I - had attentive neighbours, two unlikely doctors and somebody's front door to lean back on. Living on the edge can be invigorating, but it's also tenuous.

Please be careful. Mindfulness is more important than fresh duck for dinner.

To Emma! To us all!

David Neufeld adapted 'Walter Thomas – After Dinner' from a story written for Vantage Points 4.