

My neighbours said, "If your husband takes that job, don't you go! You'll lose your children on the mountain. They'll be in trouble all the time." Well, I know lots of families in the bush. So far, 2 boys and haven't lost either in the bush!

Les and my first home was a little cabin at Lake William. He was the cattle manager. Lived as a bachelor the previous summer. He was glad I joined him. I loved it even though it was sometimes hard.

Les got paid in Fall, after Round Up. We pretty much lived on love. And, wild fruit. Saskatoons, chokecherries, cranberries. And my favourite. Wild strawberries. Do you know them? As tiny as my pinky nail! One summer I canned 80 pints! That's a lot of picking on my knees!

Our son Gord was born in September '34. There was a storm and the cattle were upset. The attending nurse was worried their bawling would upset me. She didn't know how used to the racket I was.

I'm Frances Jane Hicks. Born a Hammond. Grew up on my parents' farm north of Boissevain. When our family moved to Ninga, I was a teenager. I met Les Hicks and we were married several years later, June of '33.

The Hicks' are cattle people. Well, cattle and horse people. Les never forgot a cow...or horse for that matter. I get it. My dad ran the Livery Barn and raced horses. He was actually harness racing in Deloraine the day of our wedding. Guess it goes without saying Dad was not so fond of Les. Being the oldest of nine, I've been keeping house and making meals my whole life; handy skills when starting a family in tough times. In the 1930s nobody had anything. We just made do.

In the early 1900s, there was lots of pasture on Turtle Mountain. Wildfires had kept trees from taking over. Les' father got permission from the Turtle Mountain Forest Reserve to run cattle there. At first, there weren't any fences. Les was 13 and brother Garney was 15 when they spent the whole summer camped on the south side of Lake William, herding cattle by day and corralling them for the night. A lot of responsibility for two kids, but, that's how it

was. Eventually they built a cabin and fenced off the Mound. The Turtle's Back that is.



When the depression hit, more Ninga farmers wanted to graze cattle there. Tripps, Scotts, Glovers, Washingtons and others. In 1931 they formed the Ninga Livestock Association and together fenced 9 square miles just southeast of the Lake. They cut fence posts right off the oak trees as they went. The next spring, Les was hired as the first pasture manager. He really is happiest working cattle in the bush!

But, we're turning the page. It's September 1937. Les is still the Livestock Association's secretary-treasurer. And he'll always join in on the cattle drives. But he's done with the manager job. Gord's old enough for school, And Don's close behind. We're staying put in Ninga where Les will farm. I'm expecting my third in a month. What if I have more boys? Golly, getting them lost in the bush might still be an option!

*Grazing the Mountain was inspired by stories from the Hicks family.*

*Vantage Points Flashbacks were written by David Neufeld with help from Betty Sawatzky. They were originally aired on CJRB Radio out of Boissevain, Manitoba in the early 2020s.*