

Hi. I'm Laura. Originally Laura Smiley from Lauder. This gentleman by my side, holding my hand, is my husband Connie. Connie's a nickname. He's actually Alton Riddell. Back in his boarding house days, his mates for some reason called him Connie. And it stuck.

Everybody, wherever we live, knows Connie. Partly because of his job. He was the first station master in Pierson. For ten years. Arriving from Ontario in 1895 at 23 years of age. That's where we met. Eventually got married. Such a charming fellow. From Pierson we moved to Hartney for seven years to live the station master life there, and then to Deloraine for nine years. And now, it's 1922, we're in Keewatin, Ontario.



The station is the hub of every community we've lived in. Not only for our family. People actually go to the station to watch the train come in, unload its passengers, freight, and watch it chug away. Even if they have no other reason to be there. You're bound to know someone coming or going. We give and take news and we help move packages to or from the platform. It's a social place, and mostly upbeat. Well. Mostly. As a young mother, station kids become a bit too comfortable around trains. I've needed to be watchful. In a prairie village, trains move slowly. Here in Keewatin, on the main line, trains are on the move. As I and our daughter just learned.

Really, though, Connie's all about sports. That's how he socializes. Gets to chum with friends. He plays, manages and coaches. Hockey and baseball mostly. But he likes soccer and

lacrosse too. Whatever it takes, so he can play the whole year through. And, he plays in the town band. Wherever we live. We both enjoy the mellow tone of his cornet. Busy guy. Gentle soul. And so well loved.

How did we manage it all? As a family that is. We always live in the station house, and so Alton comes home easily between trains. Pops out when needed. That's the positive of being a station wife. And, we go to most of his games. The players' wives and kids are a family. We bring blankets, drinks and food. Every game is a grand picnic. That's how we manage. We're together a lot, and we're both social beings. Both good at juggling busy lives. Granted, I hold his life together on the home front. But now, he's literally holding me together.

Back about 20 years ago, Alton was in serious condition as well. Just after we were married, on our honeymoon in Ontario, he came down with typhoid fever. Nasty. Three months by his side. And a long time recovering at home. We had become pretty popular by then in Pierson. You should have seen the crowd at the train station when we finally came home at the height of winter. Warmed our hearts for a good long time! When we love our community, they love us back, I guess.

Note to the listener. Laura passed away a few days later. She saved their daughter from being hit by a train. But, Laura Smiley Riddell was seriously injured, on October 11 1922.

*Adapted from a story in Vantage Points 5.*

*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.*