

When I was very much younger I always wondered what made a pioneer. At 5 or 6 I thought it was Daniel Boone fighting his way westward wearing a raccoon cap and clutching a single shot musket. At 7 or 8 it was Davy Crocket fighting to the death at the Alamo, saving the New Republic of Texas from hordes of unintelligible Mexicans.

But sometimes heroic pioneers are not larger than life; they're just little 5'8" boys who leave home at 16 to go up North to work in the mines at Gold Fields. And that's how my father began. By the early 1940's he was working for his uncle, Hy Weisler, selling dry good to all the country stores in Northern Saskatchewan. But every night he would come back to the Auditorium Hotel in North Battleford because it was the only hotel within 90 miles that had a room with a bathtub that wasn't down the hall. In 1944, with all his savings he bought the hotel and by the late 1950's he was opening up the North Country building the first modern day motor hotels from Calgary and Edmonton all the way up the Alaska Highway. By the time I joined him in 1973 he had built or owned 21 hotels.

In 1984 in the back boardroom of the Mayfield Inn he began with Fred Sparrow, Bob Splane and their assistant Esther Edwards, what was to become the Canadian Western Bank. For all his years of building he had been forced to go hat in hand to Toronto to get financing for hotels in towns that Eastern Bankers had never heard of and he like his partner Charles Allard, desperately wanted a regional bank so that Western Canadians would be spared the humiliation he so often felt.

So what are pioneers? They are imaginative, creative, builders with the foresight and courage to go where few have gone before and that was certainly our father. Dad was never much for awards, but I think that the last honor he received in 1997 said it all "The Province's Pinnacle Lifetime Achievement Award" and he certainly had reached the pinnacle in his field. But Dad's field was not only business, it was people as well.

Several years ago at my youngest son's graduation from Cornell, the keynote speaker was John Sharp, President of Four Seasons. He said to the graduates of the hotel school that to be a hotelier you must be able to work side by side with all kinds of people. All colors, all races, all religions, immigrants from the world over, maids who barely spoke English, dishwashers who couldn't speak English at all. My father not only worked with them, he did all he could to help them get ahead and prosper and he did it with genuine empathy.

Soft spoken, unassuming, a humble, gentle man, I will always remember him in his last years sitting quietly reading his paper in the lobby of the River Rock Hotel or watching his beloved History channel on TV. In the words of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, my father had learned that the secret of a good old age is simply an honorable pact with solitude. Finally, for him to see his children and grandchildren prosper, was his greatest joy.

I must end by thanking my father's wife Pat. She was a wonderful companion and helpmate to our dad for over 20 years and she has our love and admiration just as she had my fathers.