

I was born in Victoria West in 1904. My mother and father came from Bavaria, first to the United States, and then to Victoria. They left Bavaria because the Prussians had taken over and it had become a Police State. It got so bad that if you wanted to visit someone out of town you had to get permission from the Police and could only be absent for three days. My parents met and married in New York, but after about three years there decided to come to Victoria. Actually they were enroute to Astoria, Oregon and had decided to take the first CPR train which came to Port Moody. They would then come to Victoria and catch a boat to Astoria.

My father was a cabinet maker, wood carver and french polisher and on the boat there was a Mr. Sels. When he found out that my father could do these things he asked them to stay and work with him in Victoria. Mr. Sels had a place where the Laurel Point Inn is now located. He stayed and worked there and when Craigdarrock Castle was being built he did some of the carving there.

I went to Victoria West and also Victoria High School. In those days you had the option of taking either general or commercial. In the general course you had to take math, French etc. and the one option was either agriculture or Latin. I was twelve years old when I passed my entrance exams but wished to take the Agriculture course because a lot of the kids said Latin was too hard. When school started in September, just after my 13th birthday, several of the others said "you are going to be a hayseed" so after about ten days I asked to be switched from Agriculture to Latin but instead of learning what had gone on before, I went right into an exam and ¹⁵ out of 100, despite the fact that I got extremely high marks in all other subjects. Because of this early deficiency, I could not keep up with the others. I quit school in April of 1917 and the next year I started over again in "preliminary" and carried on until they closed the schools down because of the flu epidemic. We went down to California where I had a brother. The schools opened while we were away and by the time I got back I had missed several weeks again and that was the only formal botony I had - the rest was self-taught, mostly from books.

I left school and worked on all kinds of jobs. I went surveying as a chainman and rodman on the West Coast of Vancouver Island laying out the road from Jordan River; worked at the fisheries when the pilchard run came off the West Coast; became interested in radio. I worked at Yarrows stripping paint. I had done a bit of radio work here in Victoria and got a job after a time with Hales KPO radio station man. I got a telegram from Aubrey Kent offering me a job as foreman of their radio services department here. This lasted from 1927 until the crash. There was a crew of about

five and I was foreman and making \$125 per month and so Ethel and I married in April of 1929 and at the end of October the stock market crashed and things got progressively worse. In about 1930 Mr. Kent said he would have to cut me down to \$40 per month. In June of 1930 our daughter was born. There was no welfare in those days but in the meantime we had started growing bulbs. A chum of mine who had worked as a teller in the bank got a job in the Liquor Control Board and one of the employees there was Willy Wooldridge and they raised bulbs in Gordon Head. He told my chum how well they were doing so this chum and myself bought a piece of property on Union Avenue and we decided to raise bulbs and sent to Holland to get a ton of bulbs (this was before the days of airplanes). In those days they shipped bulbs in the Fall to the Prairies to force them for Christmas and Easter and received \$46 per thousand for double-nose bulbs (two flowers per bulb). Our bulbs finally arrived in 1930. This was small planting stock and the "Victoria" (one of the favourites at that time) was susceptible to base rot caused by a fly and every Fall we would put the bulbs in hot water of 108° to kill the fly and replant them and by the time we had saleable double-nose bulbs, we offered them at \$6 per thousand and could not get a buyer. When you raise bulbs for forcing you do not pick the flowers, just take the tops off, so we decided to sell the flowers and ship them to Vancouver on consignment. We paid cartage for them to Vancouver and about a month later we got a cheque for 1/2¢ per dozen for cut daffodils.

There was no welfare but if you were married and had a youngster you got relief work building the road on Mount Douglas. I did double jacking - one week's work at 25¢ per hour. That saw us through because we had a good garden. They were hungry times, but very happy times. We lived well on vegetables, some chickens and good clam digging. At the same time there were people living in Esquimalt who had to put their furniture to the torch to keep warm when they could have burned up driftwood from the beach.

Before the daffodils came we rented for a short time a house on Cedar Hill Road from a Mrs. Handley who had a stall on the market and she sold testaricum lillies. There were a few gardens in Victoria who had some and sold them for \$3 a bulb in New York. We bought a few of these bulbs from the Reeve of Saanich who lived in Gordon Head. We increased those by scales and then sent to England for seed of various lillies, but, of course, this disease wiped them out. Dr. Lionel Taylor who was head of the Botony Department at UBC had all different kinds of lillies at Patricia Bay and they were wiped out with "botrytus".

We had a little rock garden with the property on Union Avenue. At that time at Forbidden Plateau, Croteau had a camp up there and they used to take people up there

with a pack horse. They also had a fishing camp there and my cum and I were going up there. Ethel wanted to come along. At that time Croteau just had a couple of tents and we had to hike up from the old Dove Creek trail. Someone told us there were alpine plants up there. We did not know what these plants were, but we knew a Mr. Bennett had a place on McKenzie Avenue, so we went and asked him if there was anything we could bring him back and he told us to bring back a white penstemon menziesii. We did not know what this was so he showed us a picture in a book. This plant is very rare.

Ethel came along on the jaunt with us and when we were about half way along the trail, just at dusk, we heard tinkles and told her there was a pack train coming. She said she did not know there was a train that went up there. (She knows a bit more know). We borrowed some of their animals for our gear and we got up the next day to the plateau proper and met Croteau. The next day Ethel and I climbed up to the top of Mount Albert Edward which is the highest peak in the plateau and it was absolutely wonderful. Snow was across the whole meadow and we saw yellow Easter lillies and other flowers and we brought these things back to Mr. Bennett and he named them for us and of course, we gave him bits and pieces of everything. We had picked up some very rare plants unknowingly. So we planted these things in the little rock garden and then there was a bit of a depression in a rock, so we decided to build a lily pool, but we found we could not buy any water lillies in Victoria. We felt that water lillies might be a good source of income so we investigated and found that they were available in California and sent for one of this and that from the Glendale Water Gardens and planted them. Then as they increased, we would sell one or two and that would give us enough money to buy another variety and we built up the stock. We had about 19 pools on Union Avenue filled with water lillies and we sold them as they increased. We were running out of room for them because they increased faster than we thought they would. However, we got an order from the Parks Department in Vancouver for lillies for Beaver Lake and my brother and I planted all the water lillies there. I also had a cousin who homesteaded at Clearwater B.C. (Otto Miller) and there was a 50 acre lake and we dumped a trailer load of water lillies on him and he planted them in front of his place. Over the years they have spread and it is a tourist attraction now. There are all sorts of wierd stories told to the tourists of who planted them. We also planted them in one or two of the lakes here - Lake Arrowsmith for one. At Mount Arrowsmith we planted them on some of the little lakes and about two years afterwards someone brought them back to Victoria thinking they had found something exciting. My brother and I decided to build pools for people who wished to have lillies and we supplied the water plants. We knew there was a bog plant which did well in pools and we went to a nursery to buy some (they had hundreds of them) but they

would not sell them to us, so we raised our own and gradually with the wildflower plants we had collected on the Island, our business grew. A lot of these plants were not available in England, so we obtained a British Alpine Garden Society roster and got in touch with wealthy people who had subscribed to expeditions to Tibet and had acquired new and rare plants and, being wealthy, they would never sell them, so I would write and offer some notable western Canadian plants in exchange for some seed or division of plant and, through that, we built up a stock of rare plants that were not cultivated on this Continent. We went further afield (this summer, J.C. Bennett Nursery and Preece & Nichols took over) and I became friendly with the latter and decided to go up to northern B.C.. So Archie and I went up to Alice Arm and collected plants up there, but in the meantime, sometimes with Ethel and my brother, we would collect in Western U.S.A. and Wyoming and then in 1936 my brother and I went from here to Skagway by boat and on the White Pass and Yukon Railway and on to Whitehorse where we bought a skiff made of shiplap and we travelled the Yukon River for 600-700 miles for about four months collecting plants. Sometimes we would go ashore for a few hours or days, depending on the plants available and we collected plants as far away as Circle City, Alaska and then went over the white mountains, hitchhiked on trucks to Fairbanks and collected there. Then we went down from the mountains back to the Coast.

There was no transportation available at the Coast, even though we had some money, so we stowed away on the boat and crawled behind a stack of life boats until the ship got out of harbour. The cannery employees on board would be playing black jack twenty-four hours a day and we would grab a wink in their bunks. We went in for meals but the steward told us we would have to get off at Juneau. However, we bribed him and he told us to keep out of sight.

Some eighteen years later we became friendly with a Mrs. Berry in Portland, Oregon and we made various trips with her. She wanted to go to Alaska so we flew up. We took the old railway and back to Whitehorse.

We used to do a lot of fishing and in 1963 we went fishing all over the Island and Ethel caught an eight pound Coho which won the hidden weight prize in a contest. This was a trip to Japan. We had just come home from picking up rhododendrums at Seatac Airport in Seattle when Doris Page, who had looked after the place, told us Alex Merriman wished to contact Ethel. She went to the phone and let out a yell, she had won the hidden prize! This seemed quite a coincidence because when we were in Seattle we were saying how nice it would be to take one of the planes to Japan.

We also travelled through the mountain regions of Europe and put 10,000 kilometers on a Volkswagon which we purchased.

We spent eighteen years on Union Avenue. When we first moved there we built a twenty foot by twenty foot garage with a lean-to kitchen with the intention of building a home, but the depression hit so we were eighteen years in this little "house". Then Ethel and I worked four years building a house and it was just about ready to move into, even the hardwood floors were in. At that time we had a young man who had worked for us for quite a number of years and he was contemplating marriage and wondered if there were any lots around for sale, so we came up to Blenkinsop and saw our present property. The big swamp below had about two inches of water in it and I remarked that it would be a wonderful place to plant rhododendrons. We approached Bob Mercer to see if we could buy some land and the swamp, as he and his two sisters owned the property. It was just like a golfcourse fairway at that time because he broused cows there. This was in 1947 and property values were away down. We owned three lots adjoining Majestic Park and we sold three lots for \$40.

We built up a collection of plants through exchange. There are many plants on this Continent which originated through our efforts. These are very rare plants. We brought back plants from Europe and Japan as well as others from inaccessible places on this Continent.

We had a couple of acres landscaped at this location. We gave the University of Victoria between 400 and 500 Rhododendrons and at the University of British Columbia the rock garden is named the "Ed Lohbrunner Rock Garden".

I have received various awards, among them are:

- The Marce Le Piniec Award from the American Rock Garden Society in 1973
- The first Honorary Life Membership to the Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Association
- Honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Victoria (and citation May 31, 1975)
- The Florens De Bevoise Memorial Award from the Garden Club of America
- An award tray from the Men's Garden Club of Victoria
- Life membership in the Victoria Horticulture Society
- Life membership in the Rock Garden Society

ADDENDUM:

A lot of the plants in the Van Dussen Gardens in Vancouver came from our gardens.

The basic material for the Begonia Gardens at the University of Alberta came from here.

I am still propogating for various institutions. Some of these plants are still rare.

I have a letter from Amos Perry, one of the leading nurserymen in England, stating that in fifty years of getting plants from all over the world, our plants reach them in better condition than anywhere else had ever done.

From an interview with
Edmund Herman Lohbrunner, 1101 Lohbrunner Road,
Wednesday, October 14, 1981, by
Jo-Anne Morrison.