



Remembering Sam & Annie and the Crown Grocery

By Don J. Manderscheid, Q.C.

In the spring of 1960, my parents, together with myself and my four brothers and sister moved into a house in the Boyle Street area which came to be known in our family as “Sam’s Place”. This house was owned by Sam and Annie Wyne and my family was to continue to reside at that house for the next three years. During this time, certain events transpired which have left an indelible impression on myself, as well as my siblings. I wish to take this opportunity to relate to you certain of those events.

The unique thing about Sam and Annie was that, in addition to being our landlords, they owned and operated the Crown Grocery, which was located on Jasper Avenue in what is known as the Gibson Block or the “Flat Iron Building”. Every month my father would dutifully attend at Sam and Annie’s grocery to pay the monthly rent. My father would also use this time to shop for the necessary household groceries. Needless to say, with five strong, healthy boys, my father would usually enlist one or two of his sons to carry the family groceries home. During the times when I was one of the fortunate bearers, I will never forget that when you entered Sam and Annie’s grocery, the first thing that you saw was this huge, round block of cheddar cheese. After receiving a warm welcome from both Sam and Annie, Annie would immediately proceed to cut each of us a piece of cheese. Contrary to what we children may have thought, both Sam and Annie were of the belief that the cheese was needed more than candy. My father’s heritage was a mixture of German and Luxembourgian and he spoke English, German, and I believe, a little Russian. I do not know exactly what specific language my father and Sam spoke but I do recall on several occasions seeing him and Sam conversing in some foreign tongue and having a gay old laugh. Interestingly, at these times, Annie was not present in the store.

At the time that we moved into “Sam’s Place”, my father was a carpenter employed in the construction industry. For the first two years, things went relatively well as employment opportunities for my father were readily available. Unfortunately, this was all to change in the winter of 1962. For whatever reason at this time the construction industry in Edmonton began to slow down drastically, with the result that my father was placed into a layoff situation and unable to meet his debts. My father was a very proud man and to seek “relief” as he called it from the government was something he just couldn’t bring himself to do, despite the fact that it was very close to the Christmas season. At this time, I remember going with my father to meet with Sam to discuss the situation. What transpired was not a notice of eviction but rather an offer of employment. As Sam and Annie owned several houses in the vicinity, Sam merely stated, “You are a carpenter, I need a carpenter, you owe me rent, I will pay you money to pay the rent and more”. The end result was that my father worked the entire winter for Sam and Annie repairing their various properties.

Of significance is that a few days before Christmas, Sam came to our house bearing a box consisting of unshelled mixed nuts and Christmas candy. When he passed these items to my mother, I overheard him say to my mother, “For the children at Christmas”. This is quite a unique statement as both Sam and Annie were of the Jewish faith and to my knowledge did not celebrate Christmas. However, from what I understand from my father, Sam and Annie most likely justified the gifts as being gifts given at Hanukkah. It wasn’t until some years later that I came to understand that in Judaism, Hanukkah is somewhat equivalent to the Christian celebration of Christmas as it is also a time of eating special food and in some cases the giving of gifts, especially to the children.

Neither myself nor any of my siblings will ever forget the Christmas of 1962 and the kind generosity of both Sam and Annie Wyne. To this day, unshelled mixed nuts and Christmas candy are a mandatory requirement in my home at Christmas.

Ironically, some 25 years later, as legal counsel for the City of Edmonton, I was to acquire on behalf of the City of Edmonton the Gibson Block; the very place where Sam and Annie owned and operated Crown grocery. At any time when I pass by the Gibson Block, I remember with fondness the Christmas of 1962 when Sam and Annie Wyne literally saved Christmas for the Manderscheid children in Edmonton. For their kindness, they will always be remembered.

Sam and Annie Wyne operated the Crown Grocery store in the Gibson Block during the early to mid-1930s.