



BURIAN GARDER
A Road Well Traveled



Chapter 1



CHILDHOOD

Games & Frontiers

RAISED IN AN ENVIRONMENT of limited resources and household income, Burian found ways to enjoy the circumstances. His mother never worked and his father, a labourer, struggled to secure steady work and income.

“There was just no money to be had. But it was always fun! We had bread men and milk men and people like that who delivered stuff by horse and buggy. So for fun, we would pick up the little weights and the milkman or the bread man would come by and he would take the weight out that was attached to the leather strap. When he put it on the ground, the horse knew and he would wait until the driver came back.”

Weights were used as indicators to the working animal to either move on or

remain steady. The absence of the weight was an indication to the horse to ‘stay put’ until the driver returned and mounted the weight back on the buggy. This relationship between horse and driver was a method for efficient delivery of goods to each home.

“The horse knew as much as the driver when to go. So we, us kids, would take the weight out when the driver wasn’t looking then hit the horse on the ass and he would take off down the road back to the barn and never stop again. The horse knew the weight was there so we would put the weight back on the van or trolley or whatever he was pulling, slap the horse on the ass and it was time to go home.”

Using their creativity, they found multiple ways of amusing themselves. Burian and his friends looked to activities in the neighbourhood as a source of entertainment.

“In the winter we didn’t have ploughs so there was just two gullys for the wheels of the cart to go in and we would hang on the metal bumpers and slide on the road. Those were the things you did when you were a kid ‘cause there was nothing else to do.”

Playing these games were part of Burian’s education and preparation for his working life and role as a delivery man. Little did he know that only a few years later, he too would become a ‘route-man’.



Horse and Buggy. Toronto, 1930's.

Chapter 4



ROUTE STORIES AND TRUCK TALES...

“Whew!”

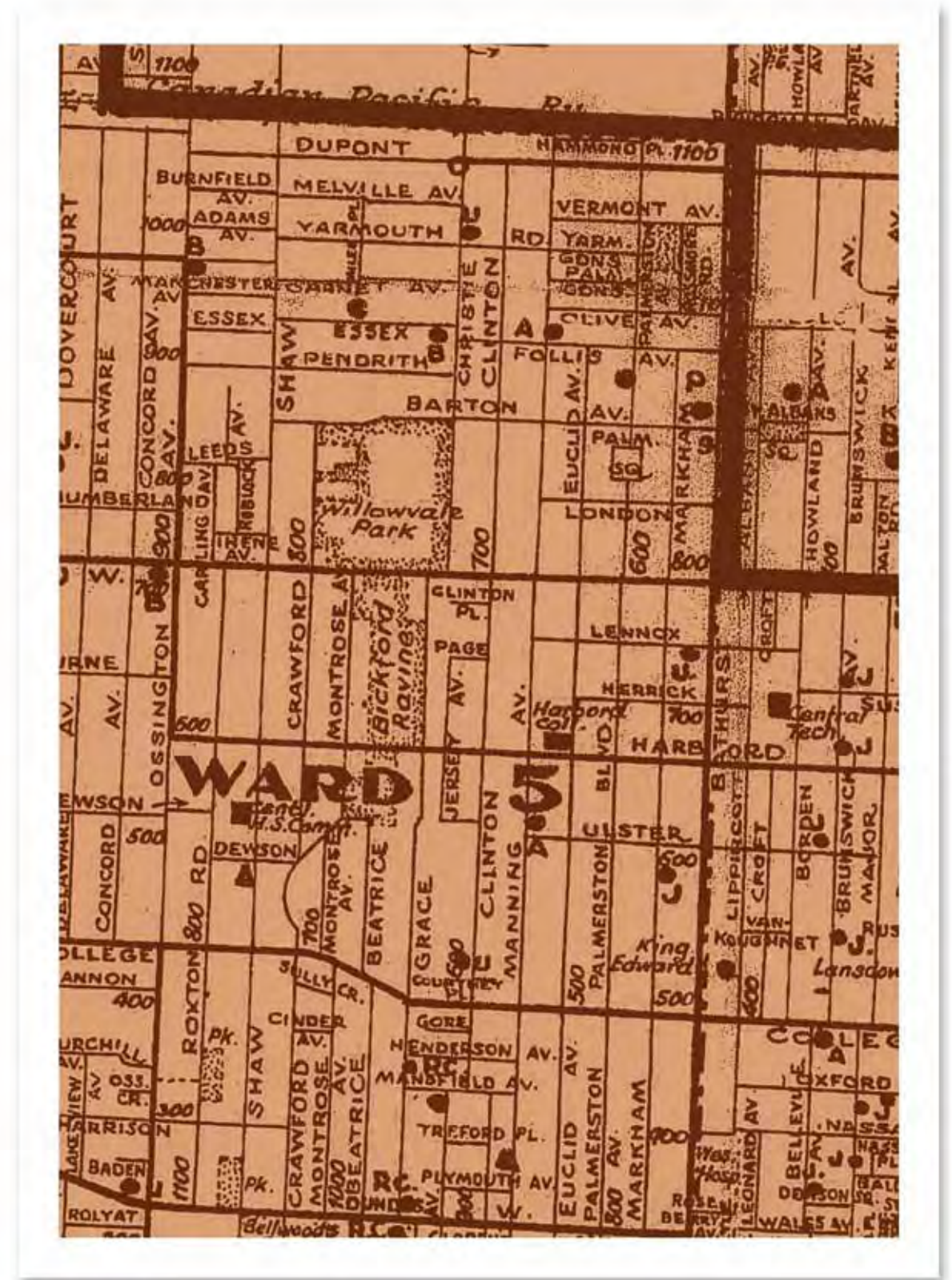
IN HIS INITIAL YEARS as a milkman, Burian picked up routes while others were on holidays. He eventually harnessed his own route along Bathurst Street and ran a truck.

“I remember my first route was an electric truck and I started my route at six in the morning – it was illegal to start before seven but I didn’t worry. I ran from 6am and by 11:30 I was finished. My first buildings were apartments up Bathurst Street at St. Clair with this electric truck. People who were walking along the street were walking faster than I could drive it because it was so heavy and run by a battery. You know the hill along Bathurst Street from Dupont to St. Clair? It’s a huge long hill. You could walk faster than I could drive it, but on the other hand, coming back, that sucker was really heavy. You had to time the light from

the top of the hill down, ‘cause you could stand on that brake, pulling on the steering wheel with all your worth, and you could never stop it. Never mind lock the wheels... You couldn’t stop that thing, there was just no way, it was too much weight and going down hill – whew!”

Burian recalled that many people either did not drive or have a vehicle so traffic was not as big an issue as it is today. His first truck was an electric truck that ran on rails but eventually this was replaced by a gas truck.

“Tuesdays and Saturdays were heavy days. On Saturdays you always got a bigger load so I would get one of my friends to come and give me a hand. When I got the gas truck and moved routes, it was a stand-up truck so you stood up to drive. There was a seat if you wanted it but I didn’t bother – it would just tuck under the steering wheel.



Silverwood Dairy Toronto Map.

You would drive standing up and the first half of the pedal was clutch and the second was brake and the other was gas. It was a five speed stick but it got to the point I could shift according to the noise of the engine so I didn't need to use the clutch. Because there wasn't much traffic and more open spaces, there was a place on Yonge street you could do 'donuts'. Of course you would lose a case of milk or a quart would fly out if you forgot to lock the door to the truck.

Although Saunder was an astute driver, he was not without mishaps with his truck.

"There were always hills in Forest Hill and you always had to turn your wheel towards the curb on an incline so you would ride back on to the curb. With the electric truck, if you stepped on the gas pedal it would go click, click and it would jump. I'm out delivering my milk one day and a little kid gets in my truck (cause the doors are open) and goes over the drive shaft. He gets in and steps on the gas pedal and it jumped. When it jumped it went far enough that it went over the curb and it took down twelve feet of hedge that were about 6 feet tall – just right into it like a plough. And the kid fell out luckily on the opposite side and it didn't roll over him. And it took out the hedge so of course I had to answer to that. But what are you going to do? It is what it is... One time I was driving the gas truck and I parked on Spadina and it was a bit of a decline. I thought I put the brake on and left it in gear, but I guess I didn't. I got across the street and turned to see the truck rolling down Spadina. It jumped the curb and clipped a tree but I got in and stopped it. It was close to an apartment building but it jumped the curb and turned but the box part put a nice

crease in the tree. No one over knew that happened so I just got in and started it up!"

The truck was like a home office for milkmen. They were accountable for damage to the truck, yet, if private property was somehow compromised in the 'moment' of an incident, it was up to the milkman to decide whether the infraction was worthy of reporting. And for Burian, some of the infractions were just part of the everyday decisions milkmen made. And of course, everyone was doing it...

Moments During Deliveries

THE LIFE OF A MILKMAN was not contained to only making money and delivering milk. Odd characters crossed Burian's path and he was often perplexed by his involvement with them yet captivated by their idiosyncrasies. Part of the enjoyment of the work was the interaction with notable characters.

"It was just to have fun, right? There was a guy who ran for Donlands Dairy who used to do the same streets I did. So at Xmas time we would drink rum and chocolate milk. Oh it was deadly! We would put our loads together at the end of the day and do the last ten or so streets together. He would go out one side of his door and I would go out the other and we would deliver. He would deliver Donlands milk and I would deliver Silverwood's milk. He always reminded me of Icabod Crane from 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' with a long neck and big nose – quite the character..."

"Other delivery men who serviced these quiet neighbourhoods became a source of entertainment.

"Other people milkman or mailmen I used to see them all the time. When I went from the electric truck to the gas truck I changed routes to between Avenue Road and Bayview down around Lawrence and those were kinda' rich homes. You didn't have too much to do with the people who bought milk from you other than them asking to leave tickets for them or what the bill was at the end of the week. They would just leave money. Other than that you wouldn't see too many people. You just saw the milkman, mailman, breadman or whatever.

I only had one other route around St. Clair and Spadina – Forest Hill Village, and some folks you would get pretty friendly with. Some would like to get more friendly with you – there was always that. It was assumed milkmen were always getting some on the side. I remember there was a woman, I believe she was a school teacher. She was a bit heavy and I remember the beer man... She lived in one of the apartment buildings on Tweeddale or off St. Clair between Bathurst and Spadina and I used to deliver her milk.

And the beer truck would be right behind me and he would be there for hours.

If I had to knock on her door for some reason she would always answer the door in this see-through night-gown and I knew

the beer man was getting something after I left.... It was pretty funny. You would see that from time to time with other milkmen. There was always someone – a maid or housewives who were always coming on to you, for more than just butter, milk, cheese and eggs..."

Burian did not partake of these extra-curricular activities although he was often awed by the fact that the delivery men thought they could get away with such shenanigans. However, although they did get away with it, Burian knew it was common knowledge on the milk route circuit and likely, the neighbourhood knew as well.

"I was really young and there was always someone trying to set you up with their



Donlands Dairy truck.

housemaid, cook or the lady from Jamaica that was hired help. These Jewish matchmakers – like a day in the life of Fiddler on the Roof! Always someone trying to set you up and like I said, it was always someone who took care of their kids or nannies.

Chapter 5



SPILT MILK...

Life is precious

MOMENTS IN OUR LIVES are precious memories and sometimes they end for reasons we are unsure of, yet they are moments on the larger path of life.

“Eventually they were cracking down on the drivers, more on the wholesale side, for making illegal monies and they knew I was making money but they couldn’t figure it out. And they did fire me but they held on to my book for about 3 weeks cause they were trying to where the money was. My book was about \$300 over which meant they had to pay me plus the overage of my book and they never did figure it out so they ended up paying me out on my book. And that was the end of my milk career, sometime after I got married, I was 21 or 22?”



Possibly Burian realized that scamming surplus monies did not mean he would become rich, rather, this was a ‘moment’ in his life where he would reap the benefits and pleasures that money sometimes brings. Although negotiating the world between legitimate hard work and ‘wheeling & dealing’ for the next dollar, when Burian realized he could access some luxuries, he did it free of the complexities of guilt.

“I just remember my family had nothing when I was a kid and I was bound and determined to enjoy the money I made. And that was all it was. As I made it, I spent it. I never hung on to it. Who knew to hang on to it? I ate well. Of course I was one hundred forty pounds then ‘cause I was always running. I went to parties and stuff like that but never saved a dime – that was for geeks!”

Making money, spending money – it was part of a game Burian and many others participated in. Not a time of certainty by any means, as one never knew when one would be caught red-handed, and perhaps the awareness of that uncertainty, encouraged Burian and his colleagues to celebrate in the fun, fancy and freedom of their situation and period of life.

Without surprise, Burian recalled how his superiors at Silverwood’s unveiled his money-making schemes and the demise of his career as a milkman.

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“But in those days they could fire anyone. There was no such thing as going to court and saying ‘hey, they fired me without a reason’. In those days if you were fired, you were fired. So they fired me.”

He recalled this whole episode in his life as part of the game of life. A lovely met-

aphor he used to reflect on how life is really a game to be played, where one can be thrown into good times and bad, prosperity and poverty, certainty and uncertainty, but it is in how one chooses to play the game that is most important.

“I never considered it stealing. It was something you did. It was part of the game, you know. So I never thought I was stealing money from the company or from anyone else. They were busy trying to figure out how I was doing it and I was busy trying to figure out more ways of how I could do it. That was it. Just became a big circle.”



Just as Burian quickly discovered how he was cheated on by another milkman, others discovered he was cheating the company, too.

“But everything else, it wasn’t the same – not as much fun. It wasn’t creative anymore. Creative bandit! But I was never sorry that I had those years. For me it is something fondly to look back at. I mean it’s not something you tell your kids ‘you stole for a living’, in fact if they stole anything you’d kick their butt.”

He went on to many other jobs and careers, including taxi driver, delivery man for Sears, salesman for a printing company, contracting his own independent construction and renovation work and eventually

