

We are here today to celebrate the life of Allan Thompson or as I knew him Uncle Allan.

My name is Rick Ryplanski and I am one of Uncle Allan's 33 nieces and nephews from the Thompson family.

With 33 nieces and nephews, you probably guessed that Uncle Allan came from a large family. Uncle Allan was the 9th of 12 children born to Hlif and Helgi Thompson. He grew up on the family farm in Langruth, Manitoba.

When I was a kid, we would spend many summer weekends at the farm visiting grandpa and Uncle Bobby and we would often see Uncle Allan, Auntie Louise, Brent, Lyle, Sandra and Corrine who stayed at Louise's family farm just a short distance along the railway tracks behind the farm house.

I remember visiting the original farm house where Allan and his siblings grew up before it burnt down. It was a 2 story with 2 bedrooms and a loft (remember there were 12 kids). The kitchen dining table was unique in that it had a long bench on one side and enough chairs on the other side making it big enough to seat the entire family. Originally the house did not have electricity so the stove was fueled by wood. In addition, the house had no running water so you had to get water from the well and use the outhouse in the yard.

It is quite amazing how different this was compared to all the conveniences we have today yet I don't recall Uncle Allan or any of his siblings complaining about any hard ships growing up.

My mother (May) is a year older than Uncle Allan so they spent a lot of time together growing up on the farm. They were on their own to find their own activities because if you claimed to be bored there were always rocks to pick. Mom told me a story that really speaks to what Uncle Allan was like.

Mom and Allan were in a grainery and decided to have a contest. The winner would be the one who could hang upside down the longest. Neither wanted to lose so the question was just how long each could last before they gave up. During this contest, Mom learned Allan didn't understand the meaning of quit. Uncle Allan's hang time ended when he passed out and hit floor. He was OK but he went past the point when most people would give up.

This story shows the level of determination Uncle Allan had, he would never give up. This can be seen by how much he accomplished over his life which was a result of his determination, drive and hard work.

It was always noticeable how much Uncle Allan valued family. After he visited Iceland with some of his siblings, it was important to him that he was able to take all his 9 grandchildren to Iceland to show them his Icelandic heritage which he was proud of.

Uncle Allan also enjoyed his extended family. This was evident because he was always planning a 'Family Reunion'. It had to include his siblings, nieces and nephews as well as his aunts and uncles. Being such a large group, this was no easy task to pull off.

The first family reunion I remember was in the summer of 1978 at grandpa's and Uncle Bobby's farm in Langruth. I can only imagine the coordination that was involved since many families travelled great distances to attend. From out west Auntie Sylvia and Uncle Clint came from Grande Prairie, Alberta. From out east, Auntie Betty and Uncle Lou came from Sault Ste Marie, Ontario and Auntie Linda and Uncle Bruce came from Dryden, Ontario. Just to complicate it even more, there was beer strike in the summer of 1978. The good news was this problem was solved and there was no shortage of beer at the reunion.

The family reunion was big enough with just Hlif and Helgi's descendants but Uncle Allan also made sure the reunion included his aunts and uncles. At the time, I didn't appreciate what was involved to make this happen but looking back I am amazed how he pulled it off. If Uncle Allan was here right now he would deflect credit for the reunion but without him it wouldn't have happened.

I would be hard pressed to name everyone who was at the reunion but Uncle Allan would not only know the names of people in attendance, he would have had a conversation with everyone who was there.

This wasn't the only family reunion. Over the years, we had many family gatherings including ones in 1994, 2001, 2005 and 2007. I gained a new appreciation for the challenges putting these events on when I was 'volunteered' to be on the planning committee for one of these reunions by the committee chairman (Uncle Allan). His goal was to have as many of his extended family spending time together and I even have a Thompson Reunion t-shirt from 1994.

Even after many successful family reunions, every time I talked to Uncle Allan the topic of the next reunion came up. He really wanted to the tradition continue.

Even with such a large extended family, Uncle Allan would always want to connect with everyone on an individual basis. I am sure all my fellow cousins have all had personal conversations with Uncle Allan at these family events. He always had questions for me regarding what I was doing, how the family was and what was new. I know he was listening because the next time I saw him he would have follow up questions about what I had told him.

In his obituary it mentioned Uncle Allan loved singing and Green Green Grass of Home was his signature song. I do agree he loved singing and a family reunion would not be official unless we heard Uncle Allan sing Cotton Fields. I can't sing but the lyrics I remember are:

When I was a little bitty baby
My mama would rock me in the cradle
In them old cotton fields back home

You have to picture Uncle Allan singing the lyrics with a low gravelly voice usually after 1 or maybe 2 beers were consumed. He always wanted to have others join him in song.

Uncle Allan always loved bringing family members together and I consider myself very fortunate to be part of his family and to have the memories from all those family events.

Thanks to Auntie Louise for letting me speak on behalf of the Thompson family today.