



Chapter Four

Emma Long (Gramma)

One of the great sorrows of our large family is that only John, Ann, or Rosemary are likely to have any memory of Emma, unlike our memories of Grampa, who lived long enough for all of us Kuzzins to cherish. Our grandmother Emma West, née Long, was born at East Hanney, Berkshire, England to Philip and Harriet Long. Like Grampa, her records show varying birthdates. The marriage certificate indicates 1880, but the gravestone shows 1877. Unlike Grampa's siblings, none of whom had more than one child, five of Emma's siblings had full families ranging from 4 to 6 children. It is curious also, that of all her siblings, Emma is the only one with no middle name. Her parents ran a bakery in East Hanney. She had long hair as a girl. Percy and Grampa John both tried to sit by Emma at school, but Grampa "won" her! There are stories of Grampa delivering flour from the Venn Mill to Emma's father Philip Long. Perhaps this was the beginning of their romance. Late in 1902, Grampa took over the operation of Venn Mill, and it's a pretty good guess that this was when his serious courtship of Emma began. She married Grampa in 1904 and they lived at Venn Mill House, when Jack was born in 1905 and Elsie in 1907.

By contrast with Grampa's exciting life in documents and stories, Emma's life seems at first, somewhat less dramatic. The fact that she died less than a year before I was born contributes largely to my own perception. But there is much more drama to it than that. Her life circumstances included the extreme difficulties of homesteading in a northern climate before, during, and immediately following the First War years. From 1915 until 1918, Gramma single-handedly looked after 6 children (and gave birth to a 7th) while having no news from Grampa for up to six months at a time. They include the conditions of war wives and women who gave birth to large families in those years, in pioneer areas such as Alberta. Auntie Marjorie once spoke to me about these issues and told a story of Gramma Emma during the time of the great Edmonton flood of July, 1915. With Grampa in the war, she was alone and full of despair. With 6 children to take care of and being flooded out of their home, she walked to the river's edge, took off her wedding ring, and threw it into the river. Edna once told cousin Ann that her first memory was of being carried out of the flooded house by a fireman. Cousin Dianne remembers the aunts talking about Gramma living in a sod hut and changing a baby's diaper before the farmhouse was built in 1910. By the time she had finished changing the baby and reached for the soiled diaper, it was frozen solid. I am left with the sadness that I never knew this wonderful woman. My own mother described her in a letter following Gramma's death from stomach cancer: "the dearest and most unselfish mother in the world". The growth of the family during the difficult years of homesteading and Gramma's nurturing during the war years and the family-growing years in Vancouver show a woman of giant stature!

Photo left: Gramma Emma with Phil and baby Harold - 1913