

BERNIE FEDERKO

with JEREMY

RUTHERFORD



MY BLUES NOTE

BERNIE FEDERKO

My Blues Note

*Bernie Federko
with Jeremy Rutherford*



BERNIE FEDERKO



Copyright © 2018 by Bernie Federko and Jeremy Rutherford

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher, Triumph Books LLC, 814 North Franklin Street, Chicago, Illinois 60610.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Federko, Bernie, 1956- author. | Rutherford, Jeremy, 1975- author.

Title: Bernie Federko : my blues heaven / Bernie Federko, with Jeremy Rutherford.

Description: Chicago, Illinois : Triumph Books LLC, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018023882 | ISBN 9781629373706 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Federko, Bernie, 1956- | Hockey players—Canada—Biography. | St. Louis Blues (Hockey team)—History. | Sportscasters—United States—Biography.

Classification: LCC GV848.5.F42 A3 2018 | DDC 796.962092 [B]—dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018023882>

This book is available in quantity at special discounts for your group or organization. For further information, contact:

Triumph Books LLC
814 North Franklin Street
Chicago, Illinois 60610
(312) 337-0747
www.triumphbooks.com

Printed in U.S.A.

ISBN: 978-1-62937-370-6

Design by Amy Carter

Page production by Patricia Frey

All photos are courtesy of the author unless otherwise noted.

To My Three Sons—

I never thought I was worthy to write an autobiography, but now that it is all finished, worthy or not, I am so very elated that you all chose to convince me to do so. Being a dad has been, without a doubt, the greatest achievement of my life, and I am truly thankful for that. One day you will understand when you have children of your own. Jordy, Dusty, and Drew—don't wait too long; I look forward to reading this storybook with them. Only Mom and I can say that with no pressure and a big smile.

CONTENTS

- Introduction **ix**
- 1** A Prairie Tale **1**
- 2** Habs Fan at Heart **11**
- 3** On Shaky Ground **25**
- 4** Bernie & Bernadette **39**
- 5** Breaking Bobby Clarke's Record **57**
- 6** Becoming a Blue **71**
- 7** First NHL Game **87**
- 8** Will You Marry Me? **107**
- 9** Bonding with Brian **117**
- 10** All-Star Experience **135**
- 11** Playoff Disappointment **151**
- 12** Harry the Cheapskate **169**
- 13** Monday Night Miracle **187**
- 14** Plager, Kelly Pass Away **209**

- 15** The End Is Near **227**
- 16** Joining the Red Wings **239**
- 17** Post-Playing Career **253**
- 18** Vipers Roll into Town **267**
- 19** Call from the Hall **279**
- 20** Forever Grateful **293**
- Nickname Key **305**

INTRODUCTION

IF YOU'RE EVER in a car driving across the prairies of Saskatchewan on the Yellowhead Highway, you may come across a sign that reads “Welcome to Foam Lake, population 1,123, elevation 1,842 feet.”

The highway borders Foam Lake on the south side, while the north side is bordered by the railway tracks. You didn't really go north of the tracks unless you were going to the cemetery, so we always hoped to avoid that. There are eight streets that run north and south and five that run east and west. In Saskatchewan, the size of the town depends on how many grain elevators flank the railway tracks, and in our case we had six or eight, which meant we were a big town. In my day, the only building south of the highway was the Foam Lake Union Hospital, where I was born. As for the name Foam Lake, there really is no lake. There might have been a lake at one time, but that must have been long before I came along.

As you can imagine, being in the prairies, Foam Lake was flat—*extremely* flat. There's an old saying: “From your front porch, you could watch your dog run away for three days.” But it was home for

me, and I didn't know anything else. In the book *If You're Not from the Prairie*, Canadian author David Bouchard captures this well:

“When travelers pass through across our great plain,
They all view our home, they all say the same:
'It's simple and flat!' They've not learned to see,
The particular beauty that's now part of me.”

We lived on a street that I will never forget. That's because our address was 236 Forget Street, which of course is French and is pronounced “for-jay.” Our house was tiny, with three bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen, and a living room all packed into maybe 800 square feet. That probably would have been big enough if I were an only child, but Nick and Natalie Federko had four boys: twins Ron and Don, myself, and Ken. The house may have been small for that big of a family, but it was perfect for us.

Winter seemed like it lasted 13 months a year, but that's okay when you love to play hockey. We were on the ice for hours on end, and 40 below zero was a warm day. We felt it in our bones, but we just didn't care. We were kids and it was fun. Bouchard also expounds on this in *If You're Not from the Prairie* as well:

“Do you know what to do to relieve so much pain
Of burning from deep down that drives you insane?
Your ears and your hands right into your toes—
A child who's been cold on the prairie will know!”

At the time, I thought growing up in small-town Saskatchewan was a disadvantage, but I didn't know any better. Many great hockey players, including the great Gordie Howe, had roots in the province. Now looking back, that humble upbringing made that little boy's heart and soul grow into something that I would've never envisioned—a Hall of Fame career in the National Hockey League.

Here's the story of my life, and if I'd read this book before I lived it, I never would've believed it.

In true hockey fashion, you're going to come across a lot of nicknames in the following pages. I never had one myself—I was always just Bernie—but I had friends who went by “Lutey,” “Babs,” and “Rammer,” just to name a few. Don't worry though, I've provided a nickname glossary in the back of the book so that you can keep everybody straight.

Enjoy!

1

A PRAIRIE TALE

I DIDN'T WANT to be a figure skater. Mom wanted me in the class, and Mom, she was in control. She had to be. She had four boys.

I don't know how old I was, probably four or five, and I don't remember an awful lot. I know it was 10 to 12 weeks of lessons, and at the end they had what was called a "carnival." It was like a recital, where you went through a routine skating to the music. We had skits with costumes, and all the girls were dressed in white cartons of milk. I was dressed in brown like chocolate milk. Why? Because I was the only boy in the class.

It was extra ice time, I guess, and when I look back on it, it was probably a good thing for me. The kid that plays for the Carolina Hurricanes now, Jeff Skinner, he was a figure skater, and he's an unbelievable skater. But if you wanted to be a hockey player like I did, you didn't want to be a figure skater. Back then, you were the wrong gender if you were a figure skater.

I wanted to play on an organized hockey team, but that idea went up in smoke when the Foam Lake Skating Arena burned to the ground. The rink was directly across the street from our house, so I vividly remember the flames that night. My brothers, they remember hosing down the side of our house to keep it from getting too hot. Everybody in the entire neighborhood was afraid, Mom and Dad included, thinking we were all going to lose our

houses. The rink was so close we would actually put on our equipment at the house and skate across the street. The roads were all gravel, and they didn't plow them, so it would get icy. It didn't matter if your skates were dull or not in those days. Who had a skate sharpener anyway?

I was a little kid, but I do remember how the fire crushed us all, because this was our organized hockey. This was the place in town where everybody hung out in the wintertime and now all of a sudden it was gone. In our neck of the woods, the closest rink was at least 15 miles away. Where were we going to play hockey now?

The debris from the Foam Lake Skating Arena was cleaned up and the ground was left vacant for several years before some housing was eventually built on the property. But before the homes went up, we played baseball in the lot. That was our summer activity. When you're from a small town, you learn that if you don't make up games to pass the time, your life will be extremely boring. There was only one channel on TV, so most of the time there was nothing to watch, especially during the day. Video games weren't invented yet, but even if they were, Mom would have kicked us out of the house anyway.

The alternative was always sports. We played kick the can, hide and seek, and we'd even invent games that only we could figure out. We left the house in the morning, came home for a quick lunch, and were back out doing something else until suppertime. And the funny thing? We never got bored. That was our life in Foam Lake.

The twins, who are three years older than me, were by far the best athletes in town, from the time they started school all the way

through high school. Every time there was an award, whether it was the most valuable player on the basketball team or the volleyball team, or track and field, you name it, my brothers, one or the other, won them all. The other kids in the school would boo when my brothers won. It got to the point where my mom didn't even want to go to the award ceremonies because it was almost embarrassing. Since my dad was the secretary/treasurer of the school district and signed all the checks for the teachers, and my uncle was vice principal of the high school, and my other uncle was the algebra teacher, everybody thought we had everything rigged. But it really wasn't; they were just that good.

Because there were not a lot of boys my age around, I was forced to play with my older brothers, Ron and Don. Actually, they were forced to play with me. The twins were always hard on me, trying to make me cry all the time, because that's what older brothers do, right? But I think the fact that my brothers kept pushing me down was a good thing because it made me fight back. I thought that since Mom and Dad were forcing them to be with me and they didn't want me, I was going to make sure that I could prove myself. I wanted to show them that I was their equal. I think all of that motivated me, and I always felt that I had to compete at a higher level.

Whatever we played, I caught on quickly. I've always said that I've been really blessed that way. If you want to, let's say, play darts, even if I've never played darts, chances are in a very short while, I'm probably going to beat you. I think there are certain things that you're blessed with and certain things that you work for. They asked me that question at the Hall of Fame: What's your biggest

attribute? I think mine was my sense and my awareness. I could see everything around me and adjust. It wasn't just peripheral vision, I could sense someone coming up from behind me. I could see where I should pass the puck before someone was there. I think playing a sport that's moving all the time, I was able to anticipate a lot of what was going to happen. I had good vision, and like I said, it wasn't just hockey. Heck, I could see a golf ball way underwater and tell you the make of the ball and what number it was.

Because the rink burned down, my dad would flood the backyard so that we had a place to skate. My brother's friends would always come over after school to play pickup games, and when they drafted teams I was always the last pick. I'd score most of the goals and the next day we'd play again and I'd still be the last pick. I was always somewhat sensitive with that stuff, but at least I still got to play.

Growing up, I noticed that there were a ton of pictures of Ron and Don around the house, but there weren't a lot of me—and by that I mean there were none. Finding a baby picture of me was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. They were twins and they were the first born, so I guess the novelty just wore off when I was born. That was a standing joke in our family, and I remember bugging my mom about it all the time. I even used to ask her if I was adopted. Another thing I was always confused about was how she got “Bernard” for my first name. Somehow she came up with common names like “Ron” and “Don” and later “Ken” with my younger brother, and in the middle of this you get “Bernard?” How do you name your kid “Bernie?” See, I must have been adopted. She always laughed it off but never really explained why, other than

to say she liked the name. Trust me, she must have liked the name, because she was the one who picked and she was in charge.

Mom was the brawn behind everything. She and dad were school teachers by trade, but when Dad got the opportunity to leave teaching and become secretary-treasurer of the Shamrock School District, he jumped at it. Mom quit teaching once Ron and Don were born and became a housewife, which is the most underrated title of all time. She made that house tick.

She was a great cook. When you walked in, you could smell the aroma of freshly baked bread or a wonderful apple pie. She had a knack for everything. She knew how to furnish the house. It was always decorated to a T. And without any daughters, she made sure that her four boys knew how to do everything. Every morning before we went to school we had to make our beds, and on Saturday morning we had to strip our beds and change the sheets. We vacuumed the couches and the carpet. Our house was tiny but it was always spotless. She taught us how to cook and how to peel potatoes. She taught us proper etiquette, how to set a table, where the knives and forks go. It still amazes me that lots of people don't even know that the fork is on the left. We've done the same thing with our kids, but it was because Mom taught us how to do that. We cooked, we did it all. If our parents were gone for the weekend, we could have survived anything.

Dad gave Mom a monthly allowance to take care of all the household needs, which included buying all of the groceries. I'll tell you, there was never a shortage of food in our house. We had a big freezer in our basement and it was restocked every fall with a side of beef and a side of pork, and a boatload of chickens. Dad

went to work in the morning, came home for lunch, and when he came home at 5:00, we had dinner. And what she made for dinner, that's what we ate. Most of the time it was fantastic, but there were exceptions. The things you didn't like, though, you ate. I didn't like Brussels sprouts, but if I didn't eat them, I wasn't leaving the table. And if you didn't eat supper, then you couldn't have a snack later on. Because of that, all of us boys learned how to eat a lot of things we didn't like, which is a good thing. (But I still can't do Brussels sprouts.)

With that monthly allowance, Mom also had a lot of other things to take care of. She had to buy all of our clothes, so to make things work, she did a lot of things to save money, darning the holes in our socks and patching the knees in our pants. She even cut our hair and we hated that. We fought her, oh my goodness, so hard, because she wouldn't let us have hair over our ears. Her favorite word was that she was just going to "taper" it. What the hell is that? I don't know why she continued cutting our hair because we would get so mad that she would start crying. It got to the point where she would wait until Dad got home and was sitting in the living room. We would start yelling and all hell broke loose, and Dad would peek his head around the corner, stare at us, and we would start whimpering. I don't know why Dad was so intimidating, because he was only 5'6" and about 150 pounds. Heck, he was so passive and accommodating. He was always so politically correct that he even served a term as mayor of Foam Lake and didn't have any enemies; that tells you how good of a guy he was. But still, you didn't piss him off because on that rare occasion he lost his temper,

he might take out a belt and whack you. It's funny that all these years later I can still remember those dreaded moments.

One Sunday morning coming home from Mass, I must have said something that Dad didn't like. We were coming up the back steps of the house and he grabbed the broom that was there to sweep the snow off the back porch and broke it on my ass. It was more funny than anything because he felt bad for having broke it on me. But honestly, it must have been a weak broom handle because it didn't hurt at all. I think it hurt him more than it hurt me. But I got the point. It was about respect. He taught us so much about that word.

Foam Lake was in the process of building a new rink, but that takes time in a small town. They finally finished the Foam Lake Recreation Centre when I was 10 years old. I hadn't played organized hockey for about four years, but I don't think it held me back. In fact, I think it might have helped me grow. The kids nowadays don't have enough ice time to hone their own skills because practices are so structured. But by working on them in the backyard rink for hours and hours, we got better and better. Still, we were excited when the new rink was finished.

It now wasn't across the street like the last one—it was about six blocks away—but the facility was state of the art and it was unbelievable. It was a double-building with a curling rink and skating rink. The curling rink had five or six sheets of ice, and the new skating rink even had spectator stands on both sides. We had real nice locker rooms and showers. The only bad thing was that it was not artificial ice, so in order to skate on it, the weather had to be

cold enough. When that happened, they had to leave the back door open, so the air would come in and freeze it.

For the first time in four years, we were going to finally have organized hockey. With that, the competition in Foam Lake was heating up because a new family had just moved into town. Their last name was Hannotte and they had four boys, like us, and also like us, they were very competitive. Their one son, Allan, was the same age as me, and the big question was who was better, Allan Hannotte or me? It was like, “Oh man, this guy is better than you, Bernie.” For the first time as a child, I understood what pressure was.

I always wanted to get better, so I took advantage of any ice time I could get. We had general skating most weekdays from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM, and if the senior team wasn't practicing when general skating ended, it meant some extra stick and puck time. Peter Seidlyk was the caretaker of the rink. This rink didn't have a Zamboni, so everything had to be done by hand. Peter would have his son and me help him shovel the rink, and we could get some extra ice time after we finished. I had to be home by 10:00, but we would scrape the rink in 10 minutes and that would give us a half hour or 45 minutes to pass the puck around. That was a huge deal and thankfully my folks allowed me to do it as long as all my homework was done.

2

HABS FAN
AT HEART

IN 1967, THE Foam Lake Minor Hockey Association had a huge fundraiser and officially became known as the Foam Lake Jets. We had this great new rink, a new name, and best of all, new uniforms. They were blue, white, and red, and they were beautiful. We were so proud to be the Foam Lake Jets. I remember it was a big thing when we got our new sweaters. With no organized hockey for the last four years, we never, ever had team sweaters. We just wore whatever sweater someone bought for us. Most of the kids had Toronto Maple Leaf sweaters because they were Leaf fans. Not us. We were the only family in town that was fans of the Montreal Canadiens. Every Saturday night, we all sat down in front of the TV and watched *Hockey Night in Canada* on CBC, the only channel we had. Weekly, CBC alternated the broadcasts between Montreal and Toronto and we were always excited when the Canadiens were on. Jean Beliveau was the captain of the Canadiens and he was my favorite player. I adored him, so I wore No. 4 in his honor. In fact, that was the only number I ever wanted to wear. Now with our new sweaters I wanted so badly to be No. 4, and I was fortunate that, because I was a pretty good player, our coach let me pick first. That's how I got No. 4 that first year, and after that it was always saved for me.

There were many reasons why we were excited when the Foam Lake Jets sweaters came in, but the biggest reason was that we all

matched. Having organized hockey back and being in a league now was absolutely the best feeling. I looked forward to every weekend because now we were playing real games. We had a half-dozen farm towns with rinks within a 30-mile radius, so we could travel and play against a lot of different competition. Now that we had a fancy new rink, we could even host some special events. Minor Hockey Day in Canada was always a big day and we now could be a part of it. We invited teams from out of the area to come and play us, and that always expanded our horizons because we didn't really know if we were good or not. I loved going up against the best, and now that was happening as we were playing teams from far across the province.

In 1969, I was 12 when I got asked to play in what was considered at that time to be the biggest Pee-Wee tournament in Saskatchewan. We had our Foam Lake team, but Kelvington, another town about 45 minutes away, wanted me to join their team. It was my first experience spending a couple of nights away from home and playing hockey. It was also the first time I ever went into the United States, because Weyburn was only about 30 miles from the U.S. border, so we went across to Crosby, North Dakota. That's when I met Barry Melrose for the first time.

Most know Barry as the voice of hockey on ESPN, but back then Barry was a defenseman for Kelvington and a really good one. He was competitive and he was always big for his age. When we played against each other, he was their star and I was ours, so we didn't like each other. But when we played on the same team, we really hit it off. He was our go-to defenseman and I was our go-to forward. We called him "Bubba," and I know what you're

thinking, but no, Barry didn't have the mullet then. The Melroses were farmers. His dad was pretty quiet and Barry was not outspoken at all. I don't know what happened but I laugh when I see him now TV because he's got the gift of gab. He made his name with the Los Angeles Kings, coaching Wayne Gretzky, and then when he got on TV he started coming up with all these quirky sayings. All of a sudden people loved him, and now he's making a helluva living with his mullet on ESPN. But to me, Barry will always be "Bubba."

The tournament went great, and at 12 years old the seeds of playing the game were forever being planted. After that tournament, I went right back to playing with my Foam Lake team, and despite having a population of about 1,200, we had a pretty good team for the size of our town. That spring, our Pee Wee team invited a team from Saskatoon to play us on Minor Hockey Day in Canada. Saskatoon is the biggest city in Saskatchewan, with over 150,000 people, so that was a huge deal. We figured the kids were going to be way better than us, and since this was the first time we were playing a team from the big city, we were all nervous. We thought that we were going to get our butts kicked, but it was quite the opposite, as we beat them by about 15 goals. You think we were shocked? You should have seen their faces. That's when I knew we weren't just a small-town team.

A few weeks later, my thoughts became justified when our Foam Lake team combined once again with Kelvington and damn near won the Pee-Wee provincial championship in our division. We won three tight series travelling throughout the province. And then, to be in the final was so rewarding. We came so very close,

losing the last series, but I will never forget the disappointment it brought. But everyone in town was so proud of us. Nobody in Foam Lake had ever won a provincial championship, so just being in the final was big news.

We even had a banquet a few weeks later and George Reed, the big running back at the time for the Saskatchewan Roughriders, was our guest speaker. I still have the trophy we received and George Reed's autograph is still on the bottom of it. I got to shake his hand, my first touch of fame. It was so memorable. We also got our team picture in the town newspaper, *The Foam Lake Review*. All this for finishing second. Imagine if we would have won.

From then on, hockey was different. That May I turned 13 and was finally a teenager. Almost every time we won a tournament, I won the MVP trophy and the Foam Lake paper would write about "Foam Lake's Bernie Federko blah, blah, blah..." It was something I was very proud of, but it didn't make me feel that I was any more special than anybody else. I was just having fun. I wasn't scoring all the goals. To me it was just as satisfying to have that other guy score a goal. I really got a charge out of having somebody feeling good about themselves. That is what teamwork is about. If we won, we won because of all of us.

And it was in the spring of 1971 that we really won what we had waited two years for. Another crack at winning the provincial championship. It was the Kelvington crew and our Foam Lake team going through another four series of hockey playoffs to be the best in the province. I will never forget that feeling. We played Nipawin in the final game. My dad was always very even-keeled, but I will always remember how excited he was that night. The

game was in Nipawin and Dad had relatives that lived there and he was sitting there with them when we won. Finally, a championship for Foam Lake, and this time a picture in *The Foam Lake Review* with the trophy. How sweet it was.

My best friend on the team in Foam Lake was Ron Chaykowski. He was a really good player—big, strong, and tough. Ronnie was an only child, so he was kind of lucky in the fact that whenever he wanted something, he got it. I was somewhat envious of him having the best sticks and the best skates, but I always understood that my folks had three other siblings they had to shell out money for. It must have been really hard to be a parent back in those days because hockey has always been such an expensive sport. The sticks may be \$200 apiece today, but at least they come with a warranty, and if you break one, they replace it. In those days, when you got a new stick, it might have only cost \$5, but good luck if you broke it. There certainly wasn't a warranty on a wood stick, so when we got a new one, we would actually wrap fiberglass tape around the blade to make it a little bit stronger. That didn't always help, though. I remember the day my dad bought me a new stick, I was skating around the rink and, as I went around the back of the net, I accidentally got the stick caught in the netting. I speared myself and broke the blade of the stick right off. I remember crying on the ice, and everybody was wondering if I was okay. I wasn't hurt. I was crying because I didn't know how I was going to talk Dad into buying me another one.

Being the third brother in line, I had all the hand-me-down equipment from Ron and Don. It's called middle-child syndrome, and it's even worse when you're preceded by twins because it's two

things that have to wear out before you get something new. Those were the days when skates had a cardboard toecap and we taped the toe so that we wouldn't get them marked up. Unfortunately the tape didn't make the cap stronger. If you got a real hard shot in the toe, the cardboard busted and so did your toe. I always hoped my skates would break so that I could get a new pair, but no such luck.

When I was 15, Ronnie Chaykowski got new skates and I wanted a pair too. Thankfully my feet were as big as my older brothers' so it was finally time to stop with the leftovers. I begged my mom until she finally agreed, but not without a price. She made me a deal. My folks had always made us all take music lessons, and I had chosen the saxophone as my instrument of choice. Well, my mom was going to have one of her ladies' luncheons at the legion hall and her friend's daughter was going to play the piano at the luncheon. Mom convinced me that if I played two songs with her, she would take me to McLeod's to buy me a new pair of skates. Of course I sucked it up and embarrassed myself, but looking back, it was well worth it. We even got a standing ovation from the ladies.

In those days, the most popular skates were either CCM or Bauer. CCM had Tacks and Supertacks and Bauer had Black Panther, Super Pro, and Supreme. Ronnie Chaykowski of course had the best, the Bauer Supremes. I wasn't surprised that Mom gave me a budget, so unlike Ronnie, I had to settle for the second-best pair, the Super Pros. The great news was that they had the plastic toecaps, so my toes were finally safe. There was one drawback. In order to get a couple of seasons out of them, she bought them a couple of sizes too big. That was okay. I was so proud of those skates because they were better than what I had ever had. I also

think Mom was proud of me too. I had earned them. It was worth it for everyone, except the people who had to sit there and listen to me play the saxophone.

As a 15-year-old, hockey was starting to become more of a passion in my life. Every tournament seemed to bring out the best in me and I was starting to open a lot of eyes in Saskatchewan. That spring I realized that I wasn't a kid anymore, and if I wanted to move ahead in hockey, I had to get bigger. I was almost six feet tall, but I was only 150 pounds and that was not going to cut it. One of the school teachers had a side business, so I took a part-time job, and that was the best thing that could have happened to me. I became part of his crew that did drywalling, mudding, and stippling ceilings. It was nice to make some money of my own. I bought a set of weights so that I could get stronger, and if I needed a new stick or better equipment, I no longer had to worry about playing the saxophone for deals.

So I was becoming more and more committed, but I was still young and liked to have fun. By this time, Ron and Don were graduating from high school and heading off to college at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. I will never forget their graduation, especially the after-graduation party at the lake, about 12 miles north of Foam Lake. Because we were a big Catholic family and because of our dad's status as mayor, we were looked at like the goody two shoes in town. Obviously, we weren't supposed to swear and drink. But trust me, we did both, just never at home because we would have gotten our asses kicked. I don't know how, but I somehow talked my folks into letting me go, and then talked my brothers into taking me with them. At age 15, I didn't

really know what drinking was. Sure I had a beer a couple of times with Dad or my uncles, but I'd never gone overboard. Well, that certainly changed that night. I found out that one should never mix a few beers with a bottle of gin. I guess everybody who's done that could tell you the rest of the story. I was so drunk I puked my brains out, and to this day I still can't drink gin.

It wasn't pretty, but I give my brothers an awful lot of credit for not throwing me under the bus with my folks. But I guess I didn't learn my lesson because two months later, we went to a wedding in Saskatoon, and I was puking my brains out again. My mom said, "Who gave Bernie the booze?" Ron said to Mom, "What are you going bonkers for? It's not his first time." Unfortunately, I didn't get away with it this time and my folks grounded me for quite a while.

When Ron and Don went off to college that fall, it was really different because now I was the older brother, and instead of me being under Ron and Don's wing, I had Kenny under mine. It was the first time in my life that I wasn't sharing a room with Ken. I now had the room that was away from the other two bedrooms. Our house was tiny, so we're talking maybe 20 feet away, but I felt like a true teenager because I could sit in my room and listen to a transistor radio without disturbing Mom and Dad. We really only had one radio station that played music, but it was great to listen to the Top 40 hits. Kenny was a very good hockey player, so we started spending a lot of time together at the rink, but we were never on the same team. Because of my size, I was always able to play on Ron and Don's teams, but Kenny was smaller so he couldn't play on my teams. That kept Mom and Dad pretty busy, taking

both of us to our games, but that was about to change because I was turning 16 soon.

On May 12, 1972, after six months of driver-education training, and a lot of practice with my dad, I passed my driver's test with flying colors on the first try. Dad had bought Ron and Don a newer car to take to university in Saskatoon, so I inherited their old car, which was fine by me. It wasn't exactly a dream car—a 1956 Viva Vauxhall—but to me it was perfect. It was a three-speed standard with a really sensitive clutch, but it had a cherry-red paint job. It was freedom to go where you want, when you want, but I guess it wasn't really that much independence when you live in a town that only has 10 streets.

It was great being 16. Tony, who was my school teacher and also my boss in my part-time drywalling job, started treating me more like an adult. After work on Saturdays in whatever town we were in, we went to the bar after finishing up the job and had a couple of beers before we went back to the shop to clean up. That was the advantage of having a drinking age of 18 in Canada—anybody can pass for 18, and I was no exception. Working for Tony was the best and I will always remember the fun times.

Meanwhile, my parents were getting phone calls from junior teams in Yorkton, Weyburn, Humboldt, Melville, and Estevan, almost all of the teams in the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League. They all tried to talk my folks into letting me play junior hockey, but the answer was no. They didn't want me to leave home. They kept saying, "You're not going to leave home at 16 years old." Mom and Dad were all about education and getting good marks. They