RETURNING HOME

LIVES IN TRANSITION

Calgary. July, 1946. Saturday morning.

The train pulls into the station by the Palliser Hotel. You straighten your uniform and step onto the platform and there's Mom and Dad running toward you. They appear so small, so much older. On the drive home you can't help but notice that the whole city seems smaller and older. Even your house looks a little more worn than it did during the nights overseas when you walked through it in your imagination. It will be a while before you notice that the city hasn't changed - you've changed.

A week later you wake up wondering why the world seems so quiet. You remind yourself that you are home. You want to believe in tomorrow but it's hard. This Saturday, you wake for the first time with a sense of anticipation. You have a golf game at the Club arranged with some other fellows. They'll be coming by soon to pick you up so you dress quietly and wait in the kitchen. It is odd to be sitting there. A man now. Only a few years ago you were a boy living with Mom and Dad and caddying for pocket money at the Club on Saturdays.

Money is still tight. With your folks convinced another depression is coming its hard to ask them to spend a little extra. Can't blame them though, what with the strikes down East and lots of other vets looking for jobs and none of them with any peacetime training either. There are so many adjustments to make. Even now some people can't get used to the idea of using their cars whenever they feel like it, even though gas rationing is over.

Oh, well. Enough of this. The other fellows are here. It sounds like they're in good spirits today. Maybe they didn't go out drinking last night. They learned to drink pretty well in the forces.

Bumping along Elbow Drive you look for familiar sights. The other fellows laugh. They've been back longer and want to see something new, particularly girls, not old memories. The poplar trees along the streets are in full leaf. Elboya Bridge is still the unofficial border of the city and Burt's store at the top of the hill continues in business, forever it seems. The population is close to 100,000 and if the married fellows and their brides keep having kids at the rate they're going, the city is going to burst its seams. It doesn't look like they built any houses during the war. Housing might be something you could get into. But the fellows in the car don't want to talk about jobs. They want to enjoy their Saturday. Today is for golf, they remind you. Have a good time, they say. It is easier for them, you think. They've already made some decisions. They're going to university or for retraining - the government's paying for it - or else they've already started working with their friends.

It's hard to hold back the feelings you have as the car turns off Elbow Drive and heads down the hill to the clubhouse. It wasn't that long ago that you pedalled around the corner on your bike and coasted down the hill to the caddyshack. The course looks as green as you remembered it. With the tumult of the war still pounding away in your memory, a game of golf is what you need to get your mind off the past and onto the future.

There's a nervousness in your stomach as you lift your bag out of the car's trunk. The other fellows loudly kid you about the pre-war vintage of your clubs and offer you a swing with their new Spaldings. Out of the corner of your eye you catch a glimpse of old Jamison briskly walking in your direction. You remember caddying for him before the war. He's a glowering grumbler, the Club's stickler about course conduct and he's your nemesis. He always had you pulled out of the caddyshack and, despite the 25 cent tips, you wondered whether it was worth putting up with his stern reprimands. Old habits unforgotten, you tuck your head down and fumble with your clubs, hoping the other fellows have enough sense to settle down before Jamison comes over and lectures them about minding their manners around the Club.

There is a loud "Ahem," behind you. It's Jamison. You straighten up and shuffle your feet in anticipation of a stern word. He unexpectedly reaches out his hand. "Welcome back." You chat for a few moments then, as he departs, he mentions that he's looking for a young man in need of a fulltime job. "Stop by my office this week if you're interested."