

The Janzen Family Values



Wayne E. Duchart, Photography West

Ernie and Agnes Janzen; Tim Janzen; Carmen Langstaff

Our three Cover Story personalities operate separate Notary practices in the same location. They thoroughly enjoy working and playing together—an enviable state for any family to achieve.

The Janzens also share a fine sense of humour and positive outlook on life. Talking with them is a relaxed and comfortable experience. Within this close-knit group of congenial individuals, there is a family tendency to listen well to the person who is speaking—an ideal attribute for a Notary Public to have.

Tim and Carmen were born in Abbotsford. In 1986, the family moved to Kelowna.

Except for a few years in Edmonton, Ernie has lived most of his adult life in BC. For the past two years, he has capably served as President of The Society of Notaries Public of BC.

Dana Johnson kindly posed the questions for the interview, which was recorded in their Notary offices. Special thanks to Al Houston of Dye & Durham, Vancouver, for his assistance in arranging the services of Kelowna Court Reporter Deanna DiPaolo.

The Scrivener: *Good morning, everyone. Our approach today will be to pose questions to be answered by each of you. Here we go! As a youngster, what did you want to be when you grew up?*

Ernie: I don't have a clear recollection of having any great passion when I was a kid. I made model airplanes and dreamed of flying but never got around to that. I just grew up.

Tim: Similar to Ernie, as a youngster I just went to school, did what I was supposed to do, never did anything wrong, of course, and *(laughs)* studied hard and played hard. I never really thought about anything past being a kid!

Carmen: I wanted to be a vet . . . or in the circus. . . maybe a horse trainer *(laughs)*—new day, new passion. I had no definite direction, I was all over the map.

The Scrivener: *What events and people have helped shape you into the person you are today?*

Ernie: Well, I have to say that the primary people in my life that shaped me have to be my parents. They grew up in Russia and survived the Revolution. Those events had a strong effect on the way I was raised, and have certainly influenced me all my life.

Tim: It's amazing; it's the same for me. The stories from my grandfather and grandmother about their upbringing had a profound effect on me. And as I was growing up, I watched my dad; I could see what it was like to be a man doing good things and making some mistakes.

Carmen: Dad never made any mistakes *(laughter)*.

Tim: I took guidance from Dad. I would also hang out with friends and get together and talk. The ideas of young people your own age start to shape you, as well.

Carmen: My parents have shaped me. They have very strong values; they taught me to have a sense of responsibility toward the people and the things around me. I learned from general life experience, too. Every day I learn something new about myself, whether I like it or not. Sometimes I have to change the way I am.

Ernie: I want to talk about my parents a little bit more and the type of values with which I was raised. My father came from an industrial family in Russia that owned a large manufacturing facility. My mother came from the intelligentsia; her father was killed during the Revolution, as were my father's parents. My mom and dad met during the Revolution and escaped. Despite all of what happened in Russia, my parents raised me with an overriding value of tolerance to other viewpoints. At the time, that didn't seem unusual, but in retrospect, I have grown to really appreciate that teaching, particularly in view of today's world events.

The Scrivener: *What was your very first job?*

Ernie: My first job was picking berries and hops and delivering newspapers like every other kid, I think.

Carmen: I forgot about picking berries. I did odd jobs for Dad at the insurance agency.

Tim: My first job was picking berries; my next job was cleaning cars for Budget®. Those two jobs probably prompted me into thinking about what I wanted to do when I grew up, because it sure as heck wasn't *that* (laughs)!

The Scrivener: *What business interests did you pursue before you became a Notary Public?*

Ernie: That's quite a list for me. I recall deciding early in my career that I really didn't want to stick at anything very long because life was too short to be bored. So, I set myself an arbitrary goal of seven years with any one thing, and I have

probably stuck with that. The only thing I've stayed with for more than seven years has been my career as a BC Notary. My first job was with an engineering firm. Then I became a chartered accountant; I was in public practice for a number of years. Then I went into industry as a CA, retired from that, and went into car rentals. I owned an insurance agency, did some real estate development, and then became a Notary.

Carmen: And the reason you've stuck with it so long is 'cause you think you can't leave us (laughs)!

Ernie: Yes, my kids ended up in this business (laughs).

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Tim: Well, my first interest wasn't really business. I started off with a career in flying. Spent a big whack of my dad's money and never earned a dime flying (laughs). When I was finished with that, I joined him in his insurance agency and ultimately became a partner and a Notary Public.

Carmen: My first business experience was as the operator of a small coffee shop in which Dad and myself and a fellow by the name of Mel got involved.

Ernie: Mel's Diner.

Carmen: That's close . . . Mel's Coffee Shop. I ran that for a couple of years. That's where I found that to be truly happy in a job, I need to interact with people. That's what makes being a Notary Public so perfect for me.

The Scrivener: *Why did you become a Notary?*

Ernie: For me, it was an opportunity that presented itself at a time when I was

able to do it. I knew what a Notary was. I always thought it was interesting work, so I took the opportunity.

Tim: After seeing my dad work as a Notary for a number of years, and peering over the shoulders of the secretaries, I came to understand that the nature of the work fit with my personal nature a great deal, so I embarked on a career as a Notary.

Ernie: I think he enjoyed it a lot more than the insurance business.

Tim: Way more.

Ernie: I'm not sure why (laughs).

Carmen: For me, becoming a Notary just happened. Dad gave me the impression that he was going to retire, so I applied as a Notarial candidate and was accepted. Actually, I worked with Dad for a while first, to see if I'd like it. I made it through the course—all the while thinking he was going to retire. I ended up taking over an entirely separate Notarial practice because Dad wasn't ready to retire. I became "the competition" for Tim and Ernie.

Tim: If you want to call it competition (laughs)!

Carmen: Serious competition—you watch out! I'm still not sure whether Dad ever did intend to retire; he still hasn't. I think it was a clever scheme.

The Scrivener: *Why did you all choose to practice in Kelowna?*

Ernie: I happened to be living in Kelowna. I didn't want to move again, and that's where the Notarial Seal was available.

Tim: Because there was a Seal available for free. What other opportunity would one ask for (laughs)?

Carmen: Kelowna was my first choice because my family and friends are here. Fortunately a Seal was coming available. If Kelowna had not worked out, I would have had a very difficult time deciding where to go. At that time, Seals were vacant in some pretty fabulous places in BC . . . but I was just lucky that I got to stay here.

The Scrivener: *Please describe a typical day/week in your busy life.*

Ernie: That's a tough question. Every day is different. My clients throw the most interesting questions at me. I'm quite busy. My past two years have been somewhat different in that I *am* approaching retirement; I'm trying to leave the Notarial work to Tim and Carmen. I'm doing more of the administrative stuff, and spending time as President of The Society—a time-consuming commitment and a very interesting one. Those duties range from assisting the Executive Director in the day-to-day affairs and dealing with special issues as they come up. Very rewarding work indeed. Weekends, I tend to relax. I am fairly heavily involved with my church, and spend much of my time there during the weekend.

Tim: There's no such thing as a typical day, other than about the first 10 minutes when I arrive at the office and sit down at my desk to plan out my day. Then the first phone call or first client will come in or I'll make my first phone call. The whole sheet of things I was going to do that day sort of goes into the wastepaper basket, and we just go from there. It's very busy. We see a lot of people. It's always interesting to see the kind of problems people pose for our input, that they need help to remedy. Every day there's something brand, spanking new that we've never heard of before. I work like crazy for the next five days, then shut it down and play for two.

Carmen: Well, I'm not going to talk about my Notarial practice so much (*laughs*). I get up early and feed the barnyard beasts: the cat and the dog and the horse and the chickens, then I go off to work. My Notarial practice is really busy right now with various duties that we Notaries perform. I don't usually get home until 7:30 in the evening; I'm very fortunate to have Dana there. If he knows I'm coming home late, he usually has a fabulous dinner prepared for me. We read the paper in the evening, maybe watch TV, and that's my day. On weekends, it's pretty hard to get me out of my house and my yard. There's a big garden with a pond; I love to be there. We also have lots

of people over on the weekends.

The Scrivener: *What's the most interesting project you've ever worked on?*

Carmen: My life.

The Scrivener: *Notarial project?*

Carmen: Notarial project? I don't know. I haven't had a whole lot of earth-shattering projects that have taken me too far out of the realm where I'm comfortable. I've done a few subdivisions.

Ernie: It's hard to think of projects that are really extraordinary. We took on one life lease project where we were the escrow agents for the leasing money coming in. That was kind of interesting. And we've done a couple of condo developments in the last few years, as Notaries for the developers; those types of projects are always interesting, especially when they burn down in the middle of the process and get phased in different forms.

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The Scrivener: *What do you find particularly rewarding about your work as a BC Notary?*

Ernie: For me, the most rewarding thing is that people recognize the value they receive; they come to us on the basis that they expect value, as opposed to feeling some reluctance, for example, to see a lawyer, where they feel that every minute is going to cost them money. I get a lot of satisfaction when people leave and the job is done; we have very often gained a friend. Because Kelowna is a small town, these people recognize us in the stores and on the streets. I really value the number of friendly faces and welcomes I get when I walk around town.

Tim: The biggest reward I get during the events of a day is when a challenge that has been baffling my client—who feels

it's the most overwhelming problem he's got—can be solved. I sit down with the individual, work out a solution, and put the balls in motion. At the end of the day, you say, "Look, it's all done; it's all taken care of," and the client looks at you like you've just performed a miracle.

We Notaries are no brighter than our clients. Some people might roof houses for a living—I'm not going to roof a house because I don't know how. But a client's paperwork doesn't baffle me, yet it takes no more intelligence than doing a roof. The client is just so happy to be able to talk, comfortably, to resolve the problem. It's an easy experience. We don't make the person wait three weeks for an appointment, and we accomplish the task quickly. Then there are those big smiles we get!

Carmen: I like the chocolates and flowers (*laughs*). People come to see BC Notaries because we're trusted and respected; I'm very proud of that. I think it's great to spend time with the clients—not necessarily just on the task at hand but on other topics. I find it rewarding to help clients with their Notarial needs and to find out about their life experiences and their views.

The Scrivener: *How do you add balance to your life? What pastimes do you enjoy outside of your work?*

Ernie: For me, music is a big outlet. I like to listen to music of various kinds; I like to play music. I play my violin in a band at church; that's fun. I also enjoy cycling, I do some fishing, and we travel a fair bit, hauling our fifth wheel around. Tim?

Tim: Well, balance is really unique. If a Notary practice were stable—that is, if it didn't get really busy, then slow down—you could achieve balance more easily. It becomes tricky to keep the teeter-totter from actually bouncing on the floor. Our family does a lot of things together. Weekends are absolutely family time, where we enjoy our parents' motor home or fifth wheel and disappear, or take Dad's boat and go play. The family also has a beach-front property (*laughs*); we love to visit there. During the winter, we ski just about every weekend up at Big

White. And we do a lot of biking. I spend a fair amount of time with my kids, toting them around to all the little soccer games and music practices.

Ernie: Don't forget gymnastics.

Tim: And gymnastics, and wherever else we can spend some time together.

Carmen: I spend a lot of time outdoors—horseback riding, I run, I like to garden. Camping is an activity I would like to do more.

The Scrivener: *What aspects of community service interest you?*

Ernie: Most of my community service revolves around voluntary agencies through our church affiliation. For years, I've belonged to an organization called the Mennonite Economic Development Association. This group specializes in micro-economic development in Third World Countries. They raise funds throughout North America, and send people to developing countries to assist individuals and small business. They

provide small interest-free loans to individuals, and teach them how to manage a small business and become self-sufficient. That's pretty rewarding in my life. I work with some other voluntary agencies that are primarily sourced through the church.

Tim: Like Dad, most of my community involvement funnels through the local church. We have spent the last three years putting a new church into place in a little community called Winfield, where I live; I commute to Kelowna to work. We have just come back to the mother church, where we are involved with our children—getting them set up and helping where we can, where a hand is needed. If someone asks, we'll help out.

Carmen: Kelowna is a fabulous community with many avenues for community service. I haven't yet been involved to a great extent, but I hope to be in the near future.

The Scrivener: *What do you value most in life?*

Ernie: For me, it's relationships with family, friends, and clients. And you keep getting new friends in this business. Through my association with the International Notarial Association, I travel; I can drop in on friends in almost every city in the world.

Tim: I value my immediate family more than anything else in my life.

Carmen: Do you mean just your wife and kids—or us, too (*laughs*)?

Tim: That would include Ernie and Carmen; my mom, Agnes; my daughter Raelene and my son CJ; and my wife Tracy. And those are in no particular order (*laughs*).

Carmen: For me, it's the time I'm able to spend with my family, my friends. ▲

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