

Draft dodgers adapt to Canadian surroundings

The following article, second of three about Nebraska draft dodgers now in Canada, was written as an assignment in the UNL School of Journalism Depth Reporting class. The author is a senior from North Platte.

by Mary Huffman

Winnipeg, Manitoba—When Jerry Tagge, football in hand, reached over the goal line for Nebraska's winning touchdown over LSU in the Orange Bowl last New Year's night, a small cheer rose in Winnipeg.

A group of Nebraska draft dodgers huddling around a television set at the North Star Inn in Winnipeg were cheering for Big Red. One of the former Nebraskans, Kirk Johnson of Lincoln, rented a hotel room for his fellow exiles. Johnson is office manager of the North Star.

THE GROUP huddled in Winnipeg probably had more in common with their native state at that moment than at any other time since their immigration to Canada.

Not that they're brooding over their alienation from Nebraska or America. They're not.

As one ex-Nebraskan now living in Waterloo, Ontario, says, "I used to go to football games and actually care who won. I used to..."

The Nebraskans haven't completely severed their ties with home. There are still letters and phone calls, an occasional bundle of the Elm Creek Beacon for Mary Milander, wife of Doug Milander, and visits from friends and family.

THE GROUP gets together often, like the huddle on New Year's Eve or when a visiting friend passes through Winnipeg. They all remember the "Love and Peace Reunion" at Kenora, Man., where friends Tom and Gloria Pluta, formerly of Lincoln, invited the Nebraska colony for a get together.

However, their everyday lives center around Canada and their jobs, not Nebraska or their hometowns.

Unlike some Americans in Vancouver or Montreal who are standing in welfare lines, the Nebraska group in Winnipeg all have jobs and seem to be making it okay.

Doug Milander, 24, formerly of Norfolk, says: "It hits you. Hey, here I am in Canada. Other people around me were born in another country, and here I am wanted in the states on a federal warrant."

HE AND his friends sort of blend in with the woodwork—and they like it that way.

At a party at the Milander apartment for staff members of the Winnipeg Tribune (where Doug is assistant city editor) and the Nebraska dodger, one of the Canadians expressed surprise that a visiting American reporter wasn't the only "Yankee" in the group.

"You can't tell the difference, really, between an American and Canadian," she said. "I wouldn't have known if you hadn't told me."

Her reaction to the Americans:

"I FEEL honored that we are here for their refuge. I

don't think it should be compulsory to go to war."

But they knew the consequences before they left the States—\$10,000 or a maximum of five years in prison if caught.

Nebraskans Doug and Mary Milander, who made the trip by car in August 1969, made their first home in Morris, Man., where Milander got a job as the editor of a weekly newspaper.

MARY, 23, of Elm Creek, said her biggest problem at first was having no furniture. Their first piece of furniture was a 50-cent stove Mary bargained for at an auction. Now it sits in their living room—and Mary says "all it's good for now is a conversation piece and to put things on."

"We were so poor when we came up. I'm proud of everything we have now," Mary said.

While her husband was working long overtime hours at the newspaper office, Mary was commuting to Winnipeg, a 50-mile drive, to get a teaching certificate at the University of Manitoba.

When Doug wasn't working, he was a high school basketball coach and hockey league official, although he says he knew little about hockey.

SINCE MARCH 1971, they have been living in their six-room basement apartment at 195 Furby St. And there's a story behind every piece of furniture they've collected the last two years.

As economy-minded as they are—hitting auctions and decorating their apartment with home-made creations—it bothers Mary that the American economic influence is so prominent. Although a Safeway store is just down the alley and around the corner, she generally avoids shopping there.

Pondering the bargains, Mary said, "Anything over 30 cents was a luxury for us at first."

NOW, Mary and Doug are both working—Mary is a second grade school teacher in suburban Transcona, and Doug is at the Winnipeg Tribune.

"I don't really like Winnipeg," Doug said, "There's so much of the city to see. It's so big. But I guess I haven't really given it a chance."

After the Milanders crossed the U.S.-Canadian border to begin making their home in Canada, their first friend, from Nebraska, was John Dietz of Omaha, who already had been in Winnipeg since March of that year when he made the trip by bus.

DIETZ housed the

and he says he's been getting back to religion.

"I've been going to an older church, Augustine United. It's a get-acquainted thing where you shake hands after the service, and get together and share each other's burdens."

If there's one thing he considers "stupid", it is the night he and five-others poked hesitantly across the border into the States near Montreal to buy beer.

"WHAT IF I would have gotten caught?" he said.

Dietz corresponds with friends from the University of Nebraska, including George and Deanna Kaufman, now of Waterloo, Ontario.

Kaufman, of Hastings, deserted from the Army and he and his wife, the former Deanna Groetzing of Grand Island, fled to Canada. Their first stop was at Peterborough, Ont., where they both landed jobs at the Peterborough Examiner.

DEANNA Kaufman's reaction to Canada: "It is rather difficult now...to remember back two years ago when Canada was a vague color on a map somewhere north of Michigan and North Dakota...Canada is not a land of perpetual forests and eskimos..."

The Kaufmans graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1969, entered Canada in January of 1970 as visitors, and stayed with friends in Kitchener, Ont., while they sorted out thoughts and documents.

George Kaufman said in a letter: "I lost my political virginity at the University when I realized the American government was no longer responsive to the people of America, that it had become a giant military-driven machine running out of control all over the world, controlling people's lives it had no right to."

HE WAS drafted into the Army at Omaha, Sept. 4, 1969,

and was sent to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, for basic and medical training.

During Christmas leave that year, the Kaufmans flew to Omaha, visited friends in Lincoln and their families in Hastings and Grand Island and left Jan. 1 for Des Moines.

Kaufmans told Dietz in a letter: "We packed our '61 Buick and along with our cat Topa we headed for Canada—not knowing any more about it than the Army."

They crossed the border Jan. 3, 1970.

THEIR attitude: "We don't regret leaving the U.S. but have no illusions that we have presented shining examples that will enlighten Nebraskans and Americans someday."

They said they think the U.S. deliberately makes the possibility of escape to Canada very easy to provide itself a safety valve.

Since there were no problems at their jobs, Deanna said, they had an opportunity "to find out about Canada's differences, for despite its superficial similarity to the States, there are profound differences, and I hope, permanent ones."

NOW MRS. Kaufman is working on a masters degree and her husband is production manager for the University of Waterloo student newspaper.

Another Nebraska family living near the Kaufmans, Paul and Sylvia Norton of North Platte, and their son Ezekiel, is in Toronto, where he is a graduate student at the University of Toronto.

Norton says he was indicted without really knowing where he stood.

The Nortons had served in the Peace Corps, and he still had a job deferment. He says he notified his draft board of his change of status and was ordered to report for induction.

HE THEN appealed to the state board and was granted a Turn to page 7.



Milanders for 11 days before they found a place to live. When Dietz came to Canada, however, he was by himself.

During his first two or three weeks, he said, he was lonely and wrote lots of letters to friends and parents and kept the telephone lines busy.

"My room was bare of furniture. I had a desk, mattress on the floor, chair, drawer, and lived out of a suitcase."

Dietz' first job was with the Winnipeg Free-Press as a reporter-photographer.

HIS NEXT job, starting in October 1969, was a public information job position with the Manitoba Centennial Corp. Now he's free-lance writing,

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