

Autobiographical Material: My Life with Gertrude (Part 2)

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October 31, 1978

The life at the ranch was at first focused upon the mundane or practical. We lived in the ranch house. The larger portion of the furniture was stored in a temporary structure that had been put up by those who had rented the property during the period when Sherifa was no longer able to come up to the camp in Tuttle Creek Canyon where we were building the *ashram*. We secured from these people three bovines; and I used the tractor to build a series of terraces as a better way to handle the irrigation problem on land of too great a slope for running water without terraces. I planted some alfalfa, and in a terraced area, produced a substantial vegetable and berry garden. We had to correct damage produced by the stream breaking out of its normal course, and this was duly accomplished and the stream was replaced back in the course which it formerly occupied.

I do not remember what part of the work we continued except that we did have the annual conferences or Conventions. On one Convention period, either 1960 or '61 as near as I can remember, we did have, about Convention time, a picnic meal out in the orchard. During that time, Gertrude felt a serious condition in her body. She got up suddenly and walked away, and I followed her. And she said that she felt the need to go down to the emergency room of the hospital. Now, Gertrude had a certain tendency to be a hypochondriac. If she talked a good deal about feeling ill, it usually was not serious; but when she acted without much complaint, it was very likely to be serious, and this was the case in point.

I took her down to the hospital and the doctor gave her a room and submitted her problem to a study. He told me that if it called for operation, word would be sent up to the ranch. After I had retired that night, having returned from town, a deputy sheriff arrived and announced the fact that there would be an operation on Gertrude at about midnight that night. So, as I had retired, I got up and went down with one of the associated students who was there at the time. It so happened that it was an occasion of a rare thunder storm for this area. The lightning was very prominent and it was a stormy night such as we have not experienced since. Actually, it cut out the light that was in the hospital and they had to turn on their emergency system. An operation was arranged at midnight, and it was found that she had what was called a wandering ovary, and that it had so far twisted itself as to cut off the circulation. This was cut out along with the corresponding fallopian tube. After the operation, I remained with Gertrude throughout the rest of the night and slept later in the day. This was the first serious incident in our association.

Gertrude readily recovered from this operation and proceeded to draw up plans for our proposed house. As I have said, I had built a flat on the order of 500 to 600 feet long and with adequate width. We were able to lay out the house on cut rather than on fill so that it was soundly placed. One of our longtime associates, Peter DeCono, had been forcibly retired because he had reached the age of 65, so he came up to the ranch area with his wife, Margaret DeCono, for his retirement location. He occupied a garage

which Gertrude and I had built. Meanwhile, we decided upon a location for him and he subsequently built his residence upon that location. But with respect to our own proposed new domicile, he, with myself and Gertrude, began the work upon it. He worked on it throughout the whole period of framing and ultimately in finishing work on the inside. But as for the rest, Gertrude and I performed most of the work—like putting down the plyscore for the floor, the plyscore for the walls and on the roof, and the putting on of the roofing and the insulation inside, the ultimate putting up of the finishing on the walls and on the ceiling. This occupied quite a bit of time, but in 1963 we had reached a point where it was possible to move in and occupy the house while completing it, and this we did.

There is an incident that I forgot to relate at the appropriate time which throws a sidelight upon Gertrude's character. Soon after we had returned to Santa Barbara from Chicago, we were the guests at the DeCono home in San Fernando Valley, and Herman Graves was also another guest. The purpose was to have Herman Graves meet Gertrude. They got into a conversation in which Gertrude was talking of milling and lathe operations involving a precision of a thousandth of an inch. Now, it so happened that Herman Graves had discontinued his hypnotherapy practice and had gone into light manufacturing in which he specialized on high precision work and had certain employees that had well-nigh genius capacity in this field. And so he was now talking virtually shop to this young woman, who looked very feminine indeed, and yet this was more like man-talk. Herman was impressed; it was obvious. And a little later he took me aside into a corn field that Peter DeCono had and said he was amazed. Obviously, in the strongest terms, he approved of Gertrude.

Gertrude was also a lover of cats. And I, for my part, rather prefer cats to dogs because of their self-contained independence, their cleanliness, and their less degree of dependence upon man, and also because their emotional life is more restrained; the dog I find overly emotional. We had at Santa Barbara, two cats as I remember: a male named Grayling and a female called Lorelei, and she also had some kittens. These we transported to the ranch, and we've had cats up there throughout the whole period. As a matter of fact, there's a practical reason because we are in an area where there are mice and rats normally abiding in the wild country around us. Well, the story of cats involves a good deal that is humorous and also some elements that are tragic. This is wild country. There are coyotes in the area and also wildcats. It is a dangerous country for domestic cats. And if cats are left outside at night they are vulnerable. Often we'd have the experience of hearing either a kitten or a full-grown cat wailing and crying out and the sound disappearing in the distance, and then there would be a cat missing the next day which never appeared again. In the time that we have been up here to the present, there have been probably 40 or 50 cats and kittens that have been lost in this way.

At the present time, we have one male cat which Gertrude enabled to survive. We had been out of cats at a certain time in the past and she had acquired a couple from the Alabama Hill area. One of these had kittens; and by the time the kittens were two weeks old, she had wandered around and had been caught by some wild animal. The kittens, then, became a charge for Gertrude. She happened to have a small doll's nursing bottle, and this we found could be used for giving the kittens their necessary food. For a time, she fed five kittens five times a day, and they became more closely associated with her and oriented to her than is normal, for she was indeed their mother.

Four of these kittens were ultimately given away and we retained one called Harvey, which we still have today. Harvey was very close to Gertrude and slept on a chair near where she slept, and he's shown signs that he has strongly missed Gertrude since she passed in. He is an unusually tractable cat. We do not let him wander at night, for that is dangerous. So if he is outside toward evening, we call him—and we call him by his name—and he is very good at responding. You may walk along wondering where he is and turn around and find that he's been following you. At any rate, he has now lived a longer time than is usually the case.

There is one cat incident that is amusing. One of the kittens that was born upon the ranch was a male called Henry. Even while a kitten, he showed a rugged disposition. There was an Afghan Hound which was an heir from the previous renters on the place, and that animal, having been kicked once by a horse in the head, was mentally peculiar. And he behaved, also, in a very peculiar way. He'd dash around the house without reason, and when he'd pass near where these kittens were, Henry, though a little kitten, with great spunk would pretend to attack him while his sister ran away. Thus Henry grew up to be a large tomcat and learned how to survive here. He was with us at the time of many of our trips to a distance, and whenever he saw us packing up our baggage for a trip, he would also show disapproval, for he knew that this meant that we would be away for a time. He lived his life to a natural death. He just wandered away when the time came and died. We do have pictures of him, particularly moving pictures, but he was a cat of character.

There is a funny story connected with Henry which I shall relate at this time. At one time, when we had the insulation in the ceiling but had not yet placed up the finishing material, Henry was up in the attic part of the house. We, below, were either reading or discussing the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, and one of us, perhaps myself, had just uttered or read a statement of Sri Aurobindo's concerning the descent of Supermind. At just precisely that moment, the insulating material on the ceiling in vestibule broke away and Henry fell down. I don't think this is what Sri Aurobindo had in mind.

While I'm speaking of the animals, I might refer to some other animal experiences we have had here. Among the three pieces of cattle which we acquired from the renters who had been here, there was a substantially sized steer by the name of Louis. He was a rather friendly animal and almost seemed to have a sense of humor. One time when I was putting up some fence with Gertrude's aid near what was called the cow barn, Louis was sneaking up behind her as she was holding a rod for the purpose of sighting. I called out to warn her what was happening. She looked around, and then Louis, who had been approaching her, turned around and danced away just like a small boy who had been caught in some trick. He also has stared into her window at the kitchen of the ranch house looking with his glassy eyes at her only a couple of feet away. One time he was in the orchard and I was proceeding to try to get him out. I was chasing him in a certain direction and Gertrude was a ways behind me. He would not move at all rapidly towards the exit and so I shouted at him in as gruff a voice I could, "Gotterdammerung!" and he began to run, and we got him out. Now, Gotterdammerung means the twilight of the gods. The reader may draw his own conclusion as to whether it was the meaning of the word or the sound of the word that made Louis run.

One time we had three burros, or donkeys, here—one, a female, was Hyacinth and there was a male, two males. Hyacinth was very tame. One time we saw them

gathering together just to the north of the house and looking south, so we looked south and we saw a cougar going up a ridge. Donkeys seem to understand that when dealing with danger it is well to combine their forces. Hyacinth had a peculiar trick; she was fond of cigarettes. So I frequently gave her a lighted cigarette and she ate it with aplomb.

One day in early morning Gertrude looked out the window from our bedroom and saw Henry make a sudden dash and also saw another animal. She went to the back of the house and there was on one side of the little garden out there, a lynx, and on the other side, Henry. She tried to call Henry in; he wouldn't move. He was staring at the lynx, and the lynx was staring at him. Then the lynx noticed Gertrude, and after staring awhile, moved away. Also, at one time when there was heavy snow on the ground, we were then up at our new house, we saw out our window a group of three or four bobcats who had been driven down by the snow.

There are wild creatures here, generally not dangerous, but except one, and that is the rattlesnake. Our general rule is not to destroy animals if it can be avoided. When one goes forth into the brush, we recommend the wearing of high boots sufficiently tough not to be penetrable by a rattlesnake bite. But we do not destroy even rattlesnakes unless they are in the yard where people are, then the danger is too great, and the rule is, in that case, to destroy them. But we try to let wild creatures live. We do not like to raise stock to be killed, so today we have none. And we avoid any destruction of life that can be avoided. The killing of a rattlesnake in dangerous proximity to human beings is the one exception.

There were two or three other animal experiences that are worth recording. At one time the three bovines that we had had gotten out of our fenced area and wandered away. I did not succeed in finding them at first, but after some days a deputy sheriff came up and reported that these animals had trespassed upon the yard of a person who had property several miles away. Now, this is range area, and as a matter of fact, each individual who has property has the responsibility of protecting himself from any range animals; however, I did not know that at the time. Gertrude and I took the car and went over to this location. The party in question complained about the animals coming in and eating at foliage and so forth on her property. I asked what the damage was and she said about \$200, and I made out a check for her, though as I learned later, I did not need to assume responsibility. She, however, was pretty angry. I proceeded to drive the animals, walking behind them a way across the wild country toward our place—a distance of perhaps four miles. It proved to be quite a hot day. I found that the animals had less endurance traveling in the heat than I had. At times they'd lie down regardless of the fact that I was trying to place force upon them to make them move. Ultimately, we came to Tuttle Creek, and there I let them rest for awhile. And then when I tried to drive them on, I had real trouble getting them to move. However, I did succeed and in due course reached our road and was driving them up. Gertrude, meanwhile, had gained some material, such as water and the umbrella, and had come down with the car to the gate of the ranch. And as I approached with the animals, she came toward me and opened up the umbrella and spooked the bovines. They turned and ran, and I had to go and round them up again. Her thoughtfulness I appreciated, but she also revealed the fact that she was not too greatly acquainted with the psychology of cattle.

We've also had cattle invade our area. Since this is range area, the animals have the right to range where they can, and the owners of private property have to protect themselves by fence. They sometimes got into our fenced area. In one case, I drove

them off on foot. My presence on foot tended to spook them, and so one time I thought I would really spook them in earnest. So I got the tractor out and used it to drive them away; and I was astonished to find that they'd let me come up almost upon them before they'd move from the tractor. I, on foot, tended to spook them, but on a noisy tractor moving as fast as I could make it move, they were indifferent. I learned something then about cattle psychology.

There is another incident that I find of interest. At one time, with the bulldozer, I was plowing out willows in an area just below our home; and as I was approaching a bank of willows that I was not removing, there a coyote ran up just not more than 20 or 30 feet in front of the tractor to a bit of high ground and stood up there. He utterly ignored the tractor and myself. I shouted at him until finally he gave me a quick glance as though he had a bit of scorn for me. He evidently had evaluated the situation and decided that I on a tractor was not a danger to him. These animals are supposed to be pretty intelligent. As a matter of fact, they have learned to survive with man, as the wolf has not so learned.

In 1962, while we were still in the process of constructing our home, word had come to Gertrude that her brother was seriously, and possibly terminally, ill at their home in Kansas City, Kansas, so she wanted to go to see him. I had learned of her brother, who was her oldest brother, four years her senior, who was a medical doctor. She had told me a good deal about him. It seems that he had a good reputation on the professional side, but the picture that she drew was that on the personal side he was a bit wild and that she'd been in the habit of writing letters of motherly advice to him. There was one incident that tended to confirm his unconventional habit. While still in Santa Barbara, one night at three o'clock in the morning I heard the telephone ring. I supposed it must be something of very serious import as I got up to answer the telephone. But it proved to be Archibald, and that he had been reunited to his wife after a period of estrangement, and he said that this was his night to howl. So we got a message at that hour from way off in Kansas City. That tends to confirm Gertrude's evaluation that Archibald was personally a bit on the erratic and impulsive side.

And on another occasion, Gertrude had been writing a letter to him while I was driving the car down our dirt road to the highway. Usually, it seems that she used to write him letters of motherly advice suggesting that he mend his ways, but this time she had determined to attempt another tack; so, she was writing a letter that was commendatory. And, furthermore, since the road was rough and her writing was modified from its usual form, it would be more or less crude writing while writing in a car going over a dirt road. This letter shocked Archibald. He wasn't used to being complimented by Gertrude, and the writing indicated something was very wrong indeed; so, he jumped to the conclusion that she had gotten into a bad psychological condition. So he wrote a letter in which he gave her an examination by reference to many incidents in past life which he wanted her to recall to him, and also suggested that he might fly out to rescue her from me. Gertrude's reaction was that he had gone crazy, and she was inclined to write accordingly; but I advised her not to do that, that in point of fact such a letter would tend to confirm him in his position. And I suggested that she answer his test questions very seriously. She was able to answer them in a satisfactory way and he was satisfied, and, in fact, virtually apologized in saying that he had been insulting to me. Well, at any rate, we did pack up the car, which at that time was a Patrician Packard—a firm that had already

failed so that this car was an orphan, but it was a highly sophisticated car and a very comfortable one in which to ride. So we traveled east by one of the middle routes through Utah, and Kansas, and so on, to Kansas City, Kansas. There we found that Archie was indeed very ill, and Gertrude and he had there last meeting, for within a month after we had returned, he passed in. I got acquainted with his wife at that time, and once on a later trip, I think in 1960,¹ once again we stopped at her home in Kansas City, Kansas.

In the summer of 1963, after we had moved to our new home, which was not yet completely finished, Gertrude and I decided to take a vacation trip with the Packard. What our ultimate destination had been, I do not now remember, but we went up 395 to the junction with Sonora Pass, turned over on the Sonora Pass, which is the second highest pass in the Sierras at 9600 feet, and drove down to Sonora itself where we got a motel room. The next morning the car would not start. So we called up the local individual who was in the book of the Auto Club of Southern California. He sent around a mechanic who could not start it either, and finally the result was that the car was towed over to his shop. The Packard was a very technical car and he was totally unable to handle the problem, and there was no mechanic in a neighboring town who would attempt to handle it, as he checked on the telephone. I knew where there was such a mechanic, namely, at Monterey, California, about 100 miles distant. I asked his price for towing us there and it was in the normal range; so, we had the car towed to Monterey and drove into the shop of an agent for just that car, but who also had become the agent for the Mercedes, as the Packard was becoming an orphan. The shop foreman arranged for a room in an adjacent motel, and we spent the night there. The next morning we ate breakfast at a restaurant not far away, and as we had finished breakfast the owner of the agency, Mr. Stahl, arrived and sat down with us picking up the meal's check. He paid it and then suggested that we take a ride. He had a brand new Mercedes outside. I was ready to be sold. I realized with the Packard that the absence of mechanics who were qualified to handle problems which might arise in connection with driving it, might lead to our losing the car if we were at a considerable distance. We might even have to abandon it. So I was ready and had the necessary funds. We were genuinely sold on the Mercedes, and the ultimate result was that we purchased a red Mercedes later that day. The Packard was turned in at a price offered by the proprietor of the shop and we paid an additional sum. I had the cash available and it cost \$6,100.00, which today would be very much of a bargain price. As a matter of fact, this was the best car I have ever owned and has given us faithful service over fifteen years. It was the one car which Gertrude and I together had come to own. So I think of it even today as Gertrude's and my car.

Having finished the paperwork connected with the purchase of the new car and the sale of the old Packard, Gertrude and I continued our vacation trip up the Coast Road of California, or Number 1, California, until it united with 101 at Leggett. This was one of our earliest, maybe our first trip, on the coast north of San Francisco, a portion of the California highway system and scenic roads that was not too much traveled in those days. The road north of San Francisco is narrow and goes far back in every canyon to avoid heavy bridge construction, so it is a very crooked road and imposes a relatively low speed, but in compensation it is highly scenic. We continued up 101 through portions of northern California with which I had been formerly familiar. It takes one through the best of the coast redwood belt, and, in fact, we have returned year after year to this area. With

¹ Wolff apparently misspoke regarding the year of this later trip.

Sherifa and myself, we had made contact up here with certain people that we came to regard as friends of the family who were motel owners and this contact had been made some twenty-five or thirty years before, and the country is such that we have always liked to return to it. There is something that deeply impresses one with the remnants of the redwood forests that are still there—the tallest trees in the world. On this trip with Gertrude, we went up through Crescent City, and into Oregon, and then as far north on the Coast Road, or 101, as Coquille, as I remember, where there is a road that goes over to 99 in the interior. So we turned over here and returned to Monterey by way of 99, ultimately turning over to Monterey. It was enough of a drive to earn the first free inspection. After this inspection, we returned back to our home, just 10 miles out of Lone Pine.

This was a minor trip. From the next year, for six years we had a series of major trips which will become an important part of this record. My memory of our activities during the years 1964 and '65 is very hazy except for the two trips we had in those years up to Alaska, of which we have photographic records.

The area around the house in the beginning was rather bleak because the ground had been bulldozed and all native vegetation was absent. When we made the cut in the bank, we opened up the flow of seepage water that was coming down underground from the melted snows of a year or so earlier. In order to control this water, I made a ditch with the bulldozer next to the bank and had a fall of about 1 percent ranging downward south to north. This is a grade that leads to a modest flowage in water. This ditch carried the seepage back of our house and to the north of it and from there on out into certain fields. But there were willows along the route and their seeds had evidently been picked up in the stream and were distributed along its course, and as a result a thick growth of willows began to develop along this course. They became a positive asset and serve as a rather low windbreak to the west and to the north of the house and give something like a woody effect. Subsequently, certain black locusts were planted within this area and have added to the windbreak effect. But the only hope of having a delightful environment around the house was to plant trees, flowers, and shrubs of various kinds, and Gertrude gave a good deal of time to this activity. She put in a lawn, as well as shrubs next to the house, and also shrubs along the course of the bank to the east of us where there were trees of various sorts were planted, shrubs, and flowers. Pictures of her taken at various times show the development of the area. In the beginning it was fairly bleak, then gradually small growth, and as of now it is almost positively woody. In fact, this is physically the most delightful period in connection with our whole home development.

To the south of the house there is a little garden. It is surrounded by a fence which Gertrude put together and established. In this garden, we have trees, shrubs, and flowers—including roses and bulb plants. One time when we were in the San Joaquin Valley, north of Porterville, we ran upon a nursery which had trees—among these trees specimens of the Sierra Nevada redwoods, the *sequoia gigantea*. We secured three of these, and two of them were planted in that little garden and one on the outer strip where the bank is. The two in the garden took hold and have grown into substantial young trees, and these are evergreens. At another time we did secure half a dozen of the *sequoia sempervirens*, the variety that grows along the coast, but we had no success whatsoever in getting these to grow. Actually, they grow naturally only in the fog belt along the coast and I have heard it said that they depend upon the fog for part of their moisture absorbed

through the leaves. The coast variety is a slimmer tree than the variety that grows in the Sierra Nevada and is taller, but the *sequoia gigantea* in the Sierra Nevada are much more massive. In fact, it is said that the largest trees in the world are to be found in the Sequoia National Park. This variety will grow on our side of the mountain if it is adequately watered. This garden in the beginning naturally had only small items in it, but they have grown until the garden is now a place where one can get in the shade in summertime, and it is a pleasant place to be. It is principally the result of Gertrude's work.

As I look around the house both inside and outside today, I tend to marvel at the amount of work accomplished by Gertrude. This was in addition to the basic chores, for she did the cooking, kept the house and all the details that went with it, along with this outside addition and inside addition to the house. Also, she kept up the correspondence, she did the typing, and when I produced taped lectures, she spent considerable time in transcribing some of them into typewritten form. She seemed to like to do this. I did much on the house itself. I did a great deal of bulldozing work, and at one time attempted to raise some stock feed and food for the household. But I was primarily a thinker, and my contribution was much more in the field of formulated thought, and in our later days my physical activity was much less than that of Gertrude. Gertrude was very conscientious. In fact, may have been so even to a fault, in other words, over conscientious. And as this involves a certain amount of tension, I have wondered that if she had been more relaxed if she would not have continued to live today.

In 1964, the Perellas came to live in Lone Pine. They had been for a brief period located in Hawaii. I had contacted Paul Perella as a result of his reading my volume *Pathways Through to Space*, that is, the first edition of it. He had been impressed with it and ultimately secured a group of thirty volumes of it, and paid me for them. He was in the Middle West at the time, but he ultimately came west, and I had contact with him. We had been in correspondence, and I looked up a possible house for him to acquire; and he ultimately did come here to live for a few years. They were frequently guests at our house up on the ranch, and we were in turn frequently guests at their place in town. He had a very active mind. And when we started on the trip this year, actually we went down first to their house and the photographic record shows us starting from that place.

Now, concerning the trip that we made in 1964, it was our first major adventure with the automobile. Way back in the days of Santa Barbara, even while Sherifa was still with us, I had somehow acquired a book giving the record of a trip up the Alcan Highway to Alaska. It was in fairly rugged times but it fascinated me, and I studied the book at considerable length and had the hope that sometime I would be able to duplicate that trip. And now in 1964, we had the opportunity. We had some idea of cost and we had the funds to handle the trip. We packed the car well with adequate baggage. We had secured maps from the auto club to which we belonged, and had learned the requirements of entering another country like Canada. Also we had learned from our study of the literature that there were only four months in which a trip to Alaska was recommended, and those months were June, July, August, and September. And we also understood that a trip to Alaska should be planned for not less than two months, as it takes a month to go and return and another month to cover the area in Alaska. So with everything ready, we finally started out early in June selecting the period June and July, as it offered a possibility of perhaps seeing the midnight sun.

I did nearly all the driving and Gertrude handled the camera and the maps. She was very competent in the reading of maps, as she had been engaged in map making while in the Park District. Very often women are not very competent in the interpretation of maps, but not so Gertrude. She was highly efficient, and in the case of any dispute between her and myself, she was most apt to be correct.

Arrangements had been made for someone on the ranch—I think it was very likely the DeConos—to keep an eye on the house and to feed the cat. So one morning early in June, with the car packed, I got into it and drove it outside the gate, Gertrude remaining outside the car to close the gate. Here she made a mistake, she duly closed the gate, but with herself on the wrong side of it. She looked dazed for a moment, then quickly opened the gate, passed through, closed it again, and came and took her seat in the car. Meanwhile, I had the camera out and took a picture of the whole thing. We went down to Lone Pine and to the Perellas to say goodbye. This was duly done, and so we started on our trip from their house, which was not far from the Lone Pine School. We went north on 395, and toward the northern part of the state, turned over, I think, to California 97. At any rate it, was a route which passes through the town of Canby. We duly entered into Oregon east of Crater Lake and Bend, and traveled up that way crossing the Columbia River at a fairly eastern crossing. We entered the apple country of Washington and then turned west traveling north of Rainier. Here we passed through a town that was deep in snow, although it was June. I think the town's name was Snohomish. We traveled westward until we reached a north and south road that was east of the U.S. 99. It was a lightly traveled road, but it went the same course as a railroad, and frequently crossed that railroad back and forth. There was a freight train on the railroad, and we met that freight train regularly at the crossings and had to wait for it to pass. Ultimately, the engine crew seemed to recognize us and we got a wave from the engine cab.

In due course we came to the border and entered Canada. This was my first experience with entering another country. We had become familiar with the rules from the literature we had from the auto club, so we were not surprised at the questions asked. First asked if we had any firearms; we had none. Then asked if we had any alcoholic beverages; but we had none. Then asked how many cigarettes we had; and we were within the allowed quantity. And they asked to see if we had adequate funds; I showed them my bunch of travelers checks and they were satisfied. So they waved us on and wished us good luck.

The reason for checking on the amount of money is that the Canadian authorities are concerned that anyone who is planning to Alaska should have enough funds to get through to Alaska and not become financially dependent while on Canadian territory.