

Richthammer Family

Johann (John) Richthammer Sr.

- Johann Richthammer was born at home on the family farm in the village of Höchensee, province of Bavaria, West-Germany, on April 26, 1936.
- Richthammer walked three miles to school daily in the nearby town of Schmidmühlen, where his family also attended the Roman Catholic Church.
- The Second World War raged throughout his childhood.
- One of his earliest memories was of Nazi S.S. officers marching into his classroom and ordering the teacher and pupils out. His school was then used as a district headquarters for the Nazis. His class was forced to meet in a condemned, unheated former tavern in which the door did not close in winter. A Nazi who had lost his arm during a battle became their teacher, despite the fact that he appeared to have no training as a teacher. Richthammer watched in fear as this teacher horrendously abuse students, including one girl whose ear was nearly cut off as the class watched in horror.
- While his school life was a horror, Richthammer's home life was calm and loving.
- He was raised by his single-parent mother, Anna Richthammer, and her loving mother, Anna Sr. They took him from infancy to the fields while they worked side-by-side.
- Richthammer's father, Leonhard Weigl, was from a well to do family which owned breweries in the city of Amberg.
- When Anna and Leonhard began dating, their equally strong-willed mothers forbade the match. One said her son was not to marry a "farm girl", the other deemed a city man a harbinger of heartache. The couple surmised that pregnancy would change their mothers' minds. Neither mother relented.
- As a youngster, Richthammer used to ring a bell which was attached to the top of his mother's house. It was rung to signify lunch and supper times for farmers in nearby fields or when church services were beginning. The bell was forcibly taken near the end of the Second World War by the Nazis who intended to melt it down and make bullet casings out of the steel. The war ended shortly afterward and the greedy Nazis were forced to bury the bell in an undisclosed location.
- Throughout the Second World War and at great personal risk, Richthammer's mother courageously hid, fed and clothed people hunted by the Nazis. Despite the terror of being subjected to searches and the anguish of having her farm denuded of whatever supplies and livestock the soldiers wished to steal, those sheltered souls went undetected.
- Michael Gural, who had fled his native Poland, was one of the people Anna helped to protect. He and Anna fell in love under these unusual circumstances. They were married in 1946, a year after the Second World War ended.
- Richthammer yearned for adventure, and to escape what he felt was an inevitable life of farming.
- He had been dating a classmate, Annemarie, and both she and his mother were very unhappy with Richthammer's desire to immigrate to Canada. However, he was 20 years old and determined to see some of the world.
- In December 1956, Richthammer and a friend, Franz Klier, took a train to Bremerhaven, Germany, and walked onto the *M.S. Seven Seas*, the ship which would transport him to adventure and a new life.
- He remembered being dreadfully ill as the ship lurched and pitched in the Herculean waves of the Atlantic.
- Many of his fellow passengers were refugees fleeing the Hungarian Revolution.
- Richthammer arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on January 14, 1957.
- He was the first and only member of his family to immigrate to Canada. Many decades earlier, his great-uncle, another Johann Richthammer, had been the first of the family to settle in the United States at Alma, Michigan, where he was a chef.
- Richthammer knew no English and daily life was fraught with the unfamiliar. He remembered purchasing a banana and ate it while at the same time thinking that the outer layer was not tasty. A short time later, he noticed someone peeling a banana.
- His first employment in Canada was working on a tobacco farm at Delhi, Ontario.

- Richthammer next worked for the Canadian Vegetable Oil Company in Hamilton, Ontario.
- One day, a letter from his mother brought the news that Richthammer's girlfriend had given birth to their daughter, Anneliese. The news was unexpected and he made the very difficult decision of remaining in Canada.
- In 1958, Richthammer was heading to British Columbia when he met a salesman near Kenora, Ontario, who convinced him that the Red Lake District would be to his liking.
- He arrived in Red Lake a short time later and made it his permanent home.
- Franz Klier, with whom Richthammer had come to Canada, worked for a time at the Madsen Red Lake Gold Mines, Limited, before he was badly injured underground.
- Richthammer's entrepreneurial spirit led him to find several construction contracting businesses over several decades. He was one of the contractors who built, among others, the Bank of Nova Scotia Building and the Red Lake Madsen Public School.
- The head-frame shaped Red Lake District Mining monument at Harry's Corner was completed by Richthammer and Obert Tillenius (brother of Clarence, the celebrated wildlife artist) in November 1962.
- Shortly after the monuments completion, Richthammer was injured in hunting accident while on a deer hunting trip with Tillenius. They had parked on the Manitou Falls Road near Ear Falls and went their separate ways in search of game. Tillenius was myopic and lost his direction. Richthammer noticed his friend in the distance but chose not to call out to him, for fear of startling any nearby deer. When he moved, Tillenius raised his rifle and fired. The bullet shattered Richthammer's pelvis. He lost a great deal of blood before finally being brought to a nursing station in Ear Falls. He was then taken to hospital in Red Lake, and soon airlifted to Winnipeg.
- Richthammer received his Canadian Citizenship in December 1962, but, ironically, he was in a Winnipeg hospital recovering from the gunshot wound.
- Richthammer spent much of the next year in and out of hospital and had several operations to repair his hip and replace his thigh bone to the knee.
- When he could walk on crutches, Richthammer managed Jim Lindokken's camp after his best friend's untimely death in an air crash in 1964.
- In memory of his friend, Richthammer earned his private pilot's license from the Winnipeg Flying Club and purchased a CF-PEG, a Cessna 185. With this aircraft, he flew hundreds of guests to his tourist camps.
- Richthammer met his future wife Jeannette while he was recovering in hospital from his hunting accident. They were married in 1965.
- John Richthammer built his first tourist resort, the New Pine Island Camp on Nungesser Lake, and later established Bull Moose Camp on Upper Goose Lake.
- John also worked for a few years in Lincoln, Nebraska for the Commonwealth Electric Company – a large firm owned by good friend, Paul C. Schorr Jr., a multimillionaire who flew in his private jet to Canada every summer to the Richthammer tourist camps.
- After his separation with Jeannette in 1977, John remained in Red Lake. He continued with his contracting business and also began a guided canoe trip venture.
- Richthammer greatly enjoyed travelling, and often combined it with his fondness for hunting, fishing, and the outdoors. He fished in Alaska and hunted in South Africa.
- Richthammer was a long-time member of Chukuni Rod & Gun Club where he often delighted in besting policemen at target shooting.
- John was diagnosed with bladder cancer and struggled through many operations and chemotherapy treatments for some time to conquer the illness.
- Ultimately, the cancer metastasized, and he died at age 50 on October 31st, 1986 at the Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital.
- He was interred in Red Lake Cemetery.
- John's mother, Anna, died in 2001, after having outlived him by 15 years.

Marie Flore Jeannette Lavallee

- At the time she met John, Jeannette worked as an executive assistant to an ear, nose, and throat specialist at the Winnipeg General Hospital (now Health Sciences Centre).

- Jeannette visited John at New Pine Island Camp during the summer of 1965. She was accompanied by Mae and June Gustafson (later Yakiwchuk and McCammon, respectively).
- She married John in Winnipeg in October 1965.
- While on her honeymoon in Europe, Jeannette learned of the death of her mother, Marianne Lavallée. She and John rushed home to Canada, however, they missed a plane in Montreal and consequently the funeral mass.
- Jeannette was devastated as her mother was the most important woman in her life.
- Jeannette's impoverished childhood and youth was brightened by her mother. In her youth, scarlet fever nearly claimed Jeannette, but her mother's ingenuity and nursing care restored the child's health.
- Marianne Lavallée bore alone the burden of raising eight children while her husband, Albert, was in the army. It was especially tough when he met another woman and left his family. Though she would forever be short on money, Marianne was long on love, and her children benefitted greatly from her sacrifices.
- By 1966, Jeannette was expecting their first child. She was elated at the news, but, naturally, was still in deep mourning for her mother.
- Jeannette suffered a miscarriage in 1969, but gave birth to a healthy daughter, Marianne, a couple years later in 1971, and another son, Garth, in 1976.
- Jeannette lived for two years in Madsen after her separation with John in 1977.
- Jeannette developed a progressive neurological disorder and in 1980 had to reluctantly leave Red Lake to reside at Birchwood Terrace in Kenora.
- Though betrayed by her body, Jeannette's mind and spirit remained unchanged. Her quiet strength and perseverance were widely admired.
- Jeannette died on May 3rd, 1990 at Lake of the Woods District Hospital at age 50.
- She is buried in Red Lake Cemetery.

The Couple

- While John was recovering in hospital from a gunshot wound in 1964, he met Jeannette and the two began talking.
- When he returned to Red Lake, they corresponded and Jeannette even traveled up to visit.
- They were married at Sacred Heart Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba on October 23, 1965. The wedding was spoken entirely in French, and John understood very little of what was said.
- Ralph Yakiwchuk of Red Lake was the best man, and Jeannette's best friend, Carol Rebizant, was maid of honour.
- Their European honeymoon was cut short when Jeannette learned of her mother's death. They had already toured Italy, the Vatican, Switzerland and Germany and rushed home to Canada. A missed plane in Montreal ironically caused them to miss the funeral mass but they arrived at the cemetery.
- John and Jeannette established Bull Moose Camp on Upper Goose Lake at the headwaters of the mighty Berens River in Northwestern Ontario in 1971-1972.
- Their first child, John Jr., was born in 1966; daughter, Marianne Joy, in 1971; and son, Garth Paul, in 1976.
- The family enjoyed two or three winters in Lincoln, Nebraska, where John worked for the Commonwealth Electric Company.
- The Richthammers informally separated in 1977.
- Both are buried in the Red Lake Cemetery.

Children

John E. Richthammer Jr.

- John E. ('J.J.') Richthammer was born in the Red Lake Red Cross Memorial Hospital on September 15th, 1966.
- He was the eldest son of John Sr. and Jeannette.

- He grew up amidst the tourist camp business as his parents ran two tourist camps north of Red Lake for several years.
- His first home was in a trailer situated next to the Howey Bay Motel which was then across the street from the hospital.
- He had at least two of his first Christmases in Lincoln, Nebraska where John Sr. worked for the Commonwealth Electric Company.
- He attended St. John's Roman Catholic School and Red Lake District High School.
- He became interested in local history and its pioneers at the age of 12.
- At 15, he was writing a weekly column in the Red Lake District News entitled, "Voice of a Pioneer".
- He also began working as the founding Curator/Director of the Red Lake District Museum & Archives in 1981, a position which lasted for 12 years until 1993.
- In October 1983, John joined the staff of "The Regional", a local newspaper owned and operated by the Kenora Daily Miner & News as Red Lake correspondent, all while still attending Red Lake District High School.
- Several of his articles and photographs have appeared in publications such as "Island Memories—McKenzie Island 50th Anniversary," "The Squatchberry Journal", and "The Holidayer."
- He was nominated for the Ontario Junior Citizen of The Year award by long time resident Margaret McDougall, and was one of 12 youths chosen to receive the award.
- Together, with his family, John travelled to Toronto in March 1984 to formally accept the award from the Honorable John Aird, Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario.
- That same month, he accepted the position of Red Lake Correspondent for the Thunder Bay Times Journal newspaper.
- He has continued to submit regular historical and life features which run in the current "Northern Sun News" newspaper in Red Lake.
- John studied journalism and photography at Canadore College of Applied Arts & Technology in North Bay, Ontario.
- He achieved a B.A. in History and Film in 1996 at the University of Manitoba and went on to graduate in 2008 with a Master of Arts in Archival Studies. This is also where, in 2005, he completed his thesis on mortality in early Red Lake.
- John is the longest-serving journalist in the Red Lake District, having written and photographed for local publications for the past 23 years.
- Additionally, he continues to write columns for a wide range of international and national publications, such as "The Globe & Mail".
- He continued his career in Winnipeg in corporate, government, academic, and private archives. He has worked as archivist at the University of Manitoba Archives, James Richardson & Sons Archives, City of Winnipeg Archives, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, and the Archives of Manitoba.
- John greatly enjoyed three years in the Yukon Territory, where he worked as Klondike Centennial Archivist in Dawson City, Assistant Government Records Archivist at Yukon Archives in Whitehorse, YT, and at the Dawson City Community Library.
- He has written numerous books, manuscripts and academic papers on the history of the area and its people, the best-known being "The End of the Road: A History of the Red Lake District," a bestseller published in 1985.

Marianne Joy was born on February 24th, 1971 at the Red Lake Red Cross Memorial Hospital. She was married on September 6th, 1997 to Richard Feigl, son of Herwig and Aniela Feigl.

Garth Paul Garth was born on February 12th, 1976 at the Women's Pavilion, Health Sciences Centre, in Winnipeg.