

Memories of Manson's Landing: Bert Summers, in conversation with Susan (Bone) Ellingsen, Dianne (Theal) Hentschel and Doreen (Huck) Thompson. At his home on Sutil Point Road. January, 2005.

My parents, Jack and Ev Summers and my two-year-old brother, Ken, came to Manson's Landing in 1946. They arrived with Mom's parents, "Rosie" and Ella Lowes. I was born in 1947. I don't remember my grandfather, he died when I was pretty small but all of the older guys who were teenagers then, like Robbie Graham, remember him well. He was a short little guy, about the same size that they were and was a good shot with a gun. He was really popular with those guys. My grandmother lived until I was pretty well grown up.

Mom and Dad and my grandparents were business partners, operating the lodge, store and fuel dock on the property they had bought, 120 acres that included the area went from the government wharf about three quarters of a mile west of the government dock to the end of the spit and back to the Sandy Beach at Hague Lake. A large portion of it was west of the government road. The store building was there at the wharfhead, there was one small cabin along the beach, the big lodge up by the orchard and a couple of sheds. One of them was for kerosene and oil, stuff like that. One was the post office. The lodge had a big dining room, a huge living room, a very small kitchen, a library and six or seven small bedrooms that were sometimes rented out..

They set up a sawmill on the edge of the lagoon to cut lumber for an addition to the store for living quarters and to build 10 small cabins in the woods above the beach. Manson's, serviced by the Union Steamships, was just an overnight trip from Vancouver and became a summer destination for tourists who rented the cabins by the week or the month. Others arrived by boat and stayed at the wharf. All were attracted by the sandy beaches, the lagoon, the lake and sportfishing. Many of those people became "regulars", several eventually bought property on the island and moved here. Bill, Jean and Nancy Jenkins. Flo and Dick Dixon. Slim and Henrietta Barnard.

I remember the Union Steamship's *Cardena*. There was a little store on board. When I was about six I used to go aboard by myself to buy comic books, you couldn't buy comics anywhere on the island, and I got looking at things and next thing I knew somebody noticed I was aboard and the boat was out by Mary (Marina) Island. They had to turn around and take me back to the wharf. It takes a long time to turn one of those things around. They were not impressed. It's a good thing my dad and the skipper (Captain Harry Hunter) were pretty good friends by then. That was the end of the comic books for awhile. Boat days were a big deal, it seemed like everyone in the community came down to wait for the boat to come in.

There were some people who got big orders of groceries shipped up from Vancouver, mostly people with logging camps or something like that. In general, the store was well-supported by the local community. The whole business was run on credit. You couldn't have made a dime around here on cash. People charged everything, paid at the end of the month or whenever they could. Most people put in their orders for meat and fresh stuff a week in advance so Mom and Dad knew what to order from their suppliers. Dad delivered groceries for a long time, he started out with a 1928 Plymouth then went to a '49 Studebaker. He and Elmer Ellingsen and Wilf Freeman all bought one of those at the same time. We had a couple of cars over the years, a '49 Chrysler and a '55 Chev.

During the 1950s, seaplanes became the preferred method of travel, the Union Steamships ceased running and small freight boats with little in the way of passenger accommodation took over the delivery of freight to coastal ports. Seaplanes became a big part of our business.

Events on the north coast played a big part in the success of the store. The Aluminum Company of Canada. (ALCAN) began the construction of an aluminum smelter and of a community to house the workers at Kitimat in 1951. Work on a hydroelectric station to provide power for the smelter began at nearby Kemano in the same year. The smelter went into operation in 1954. The construction years were boom years, crews and materials were constantly being flown in from Vancouver, 400 miles to the south. The distance was too great for non-stop seaplane travel. Fuel stations would have to be available along the way. Dad saw the need and soon had gas tanks installed with lines running down to the airplane floats as well as a pump for car gas. We started selling aviation fuel, we got the business. There would be as many as twenty planes come in almost all at once.

Dad built a coffee shop across from the store, right where the parking area for the park is now. My grandmother ran it. I can remember both Betty Jeffery and Peggy Newsham worked with her at different times. The place would be just jammed with people when the planes came in. With flights restricted to daylight hours pilots and passengers sometimes had to layover at Manson's, staying in the lodge and dining at the coffee shop. At other times they'd take a break for lunch or coffee and a piece of

pie.

Poker games often filled the evening hours. (but not in my grandmother's Coffee Shop!) The stakes could be high, sometimes sending construction workers headed for the bright lights of Vancouver right back to work at Kitimat. My old man would have loved to get a liquor licence in those days but my grandmother wouldn't have anything to do with that. There was no liquor on her premises and the coffee shop was her baby. It was the only restaurant on the island and became popular with locals. My Grandmother made twelve pies every summer morning for ten years. I got spoiled eating pie, I can still taste it! I remember Ernie Guthrie, the school bus driver, used to sell her blackberries from his place.

Local airlines, out of Campbell River, were becoming well-established by the time the Kitimat/Kemano project was completed. BC Airlines had scheduled flights between virtually every coastal community and Campbell River. Isolated logging camps, often on floats, dotted the coastline. They, too, were serviced by floatplanes. Fuel sales did not lag. Bob Langdon, a BC Airlines' pilot became one of my Dad's closest friends. Bob was a legend on the coast. He started out flying a Sea Bee for BCA and ended up with his own company, Island Airlines, also based at the spit in Campbell River. During the heyday of those airlines the base at the spit was said to be one of the busiest in the world. Flights from Manson's to the River were about five bucks.

In those days the only way to get to town was by plane or private boat. Thor Peterson, from Campbell River, did operate a water taxi for a little while but it never really had much impact. The scheduled flight was so cheap a guy could order up his booze and have it be flown over from Campbell River. A thirsty drunk could even charter a plane to bring his booze in. There were no liquor stores on the island.

The pilots taught my dad how to fly. One of the biggest thrills of his life came when he was an old man. He had to have both legs amputated and spent a long time in the hospital, in Vancouver. Pilots from the old days used to come in and visit him. Near the end of his convalescence they took him out for the day and sneaked him into the flight simulator for a 747. It was strictly a no-no but they let him "fly" it. He said they were doing great then they were coming into Vancouver, through the narrows and when they got to where they could see Lions Gate Bridge the co-pilot said, "Are you going to go over it or under it?" The old man froze up and he swore he felt like he actually crashed into it. There were flames and fire and bells and whistles going off. Right until the day he died he never quit talking about that, he called it a stimulator.

A variety of people lived along the edge of the lagoon at one time or another. Most of them came in with float houses, stayed awhile then left again. Ted Martin and his family. Morg May lived over there, he was a fixture, kind of like one of the family. Jack and Jean McKenzie and their kids lived there for awhile, Bertha Reedel and her kids.

I remember Bob and Doreen Borland running the post office, then Morris and Ada Dronsfield.

When I was a kid the main garbage dump was on Bridge Hill. The road goes over part of it now. There are a lot of old cars at the bottom of that ravine.

We walked up the hill to school. I was in the last class that graduated from Manson's School. It was across the road from the community hall. (806 Sutil Point Road) That would have been about 1964. Blair Dixon from Powell River was the principal for a couple of years and taught grade 12. There had been some graduates in the early days, then grade 12 was cut out, after the class I graduated with they cut out both grade 11 and 12. Gail Bergman, Teddy and Wendy Hansen were in my graduating class.

Movies once a week and occasional dances at the hall were the main forms of entertainment. There was no drinking in the hall back then, everybody hid their liquor in the woodpile in the basement. I think that's how I started my drinking days. We'd go down there and look through the woodpile and find all these bottles. My dad played the banjo for a lot of those dances, Elmer Ellingsen played his accordion. Ken Hansen ran the movies, they started whenever he got through milking the cows. It could be seven o'clock or nine o'clock. They never started on time. There was always a big picnic at Smelt Bay on July 1.

I got my first car when I was 16. The day I went to get it MacMillan and Bloedel's Grumman Goose flew into Manson's. Dad told the pilot we were headed for Campbell River to look for a car. The pilot said he'd take us over so we hopped into the plane, flew over to Campbell River and taxied in behind the spit .....right past the floatplane docks. I wondered where in the world he was going and was amazed when he lowered the wheels and drove right up onto dry ground! So we got out onto the pavement, got into a taxi and went into town and bought a car. A '53 Ford. Somebody towed it across from Heriot Bay on a float, Bob Thompson or Robbie Graham. I lived at a store so my gas was free, once I got a car I just never stopped driving.

Sometimes I'd fill her up two or three times a day.

After graduation I went to Powell River and tried to get on at the pulp mill but that didn't happen. Then I went to Vancouver and I worked for one year at BC Packers in Steveston. The first day on the job they stuck me on an assembly line in the cannery, with a spoon. My job was to scrape the blood out from along the backbone of the gutted fish. I was the only guy in there with about a hundred Japanese ladies. I lasted three days. Then I went to work in the cold storage area for \$2.20 an hour.

My brother called me one day and said I could make as much in 2 days as I was making in two weeks back here on the oyster beach. So I came back and worked for Robbie Graham for awhile, picking and barging oysters. I started working for MacMillan Bloedel at their Teakerne Arm booming ground in 1967.. A lot of guys from the island worked at Teakerne, travelling by crummy to Squirrel Cove then a company boat to the booming ground five days a week. It was a decent living and we got home every night. Teakerne closed down in the late nineteen eighties, moving the operation to Stillwater on the mainland. My job moved with them, I commuted from Cortes Bay and lived on my boat in Lund during the week for the thirteen years that I worked down there. I just officially retired this year. I was a charge hand for most of those years.

I married Victoria Sampson in 1968. We bought this place from Ernie and Jessie Guthrie. It came with a house, which we added onto, and an old orchard that is still producing fruit. We adopted four children, Lyanna, Brent, Tyrone and Trina in 1972. We bought one of the Teakerne Bunkhouses when the camp closed down and had it towed down to the Landing. Robbie and Victor Graham and Dave Guthrie moved it up here for next to nothing. A couple of years later I had a guy from Campbell River move it about three blocks back down the road and it cost me five thousand dollars. We jacked it up, added a storie and that's the fourplex we have at the end of Gregg Road. (961 Gregg).

The area I grew up in has gone through a lot of changes including absentee owners who leased the store business out. The lodge and cabins fell into disuse. The land was eventually bought up by the government, the lodge torn down and the cabins moved away. The store remained within the park for a few years, then was shut down and the building moved to Beasley Road where it has become the museum. (957 Beasley).