

Beth (Martin) Slater in conversation with Sue (Bone) Ellingsen and Doreen (Huck) Thompson, at her home in Campbell River. February 2005.

I was in grade nine when my family moved into Manson's Lagoon in 1955. We lived in a floathouse near where the creek comes out of the lake; my father and mother, Ted and Ruth Martin, and my younger siblings - Judy, Joyce and Jay. Our older brother, Bill was already working in logging camps. The move to Manson's was made in order to be close to a school.

We'd lived in several places in the area, as dad's work took him from one logging show or job to another. We went to school when there was one, did correspondence courses when there wasn't. It was a way of life for many people in the early days on the coast. Dad's machine shop was also on a float and travelled with us. We'd been farther up the coast, in Ramsay Arm (where there was a school), in VonDonop and in Whaletown at various times. The Weiler house was being built while we were living at Whaletown in 1948, Dad did the electrical wiring in it.

We didn't really settle in the lagoon either. We were there for about two years. Mabel and Buster Christensen were living across the lagoon, and Doris Hawkins in the big place opposite the end of the spit. Morg May had a little place up closer to the base of the spit.

Jack and Ev Summers and Mrs Lowes had the store at the head of the government wharf. Mail days, boat day, was always a big deal. All of the goods for the store arrived, mail came in, people gathered and waited for the mail to be sorted and socializing with neighbours. Mom and dad ordered basic supplies from Woodward's in Vancouver two or three times a year. Everything was shipped up on the Union boat, arriving in cardboard boxes that were stored in the wharfshed if we couldn't be there to meet the boat.

Mrs. Lowes ran the Coffee Shop across the parking lot from the store. I worked for her in the school holidays in 1955 and 1956. Her pies were famous. She taught me how to make pastry, always using lard. I was paid five dollars a day for long days of waiting table and generally helping out. It was a busy place in the summertime with tourists staying in the tourist cabins Lowes and Summers rented out. There were also a lot of boaters, the lake was a big draw for them. They'd walk up the hill for a swim and often stop at the coffee shop on their way back down. Planes stopped frequently for fuel, low tide made fueling up at the spit in Campbell River difficult so they often stopped at Manson's rather than fueling up in town. The pilots were always ready for a coffee and maybe a piece of pie. There were always a few locals who hung out there as well, but not enough to keep the place open in the winter.

Life was pretty simple. We didn't have a generator or running water. Kerosene or gas lamps provided light, we carried water from the creek, heated it on the woodstove and washed clothes by hand on a scrubboard in a tin tub. The same tub was used for bathing. Like most floathouses, ours had an outhouse out on the end of the float, perched over a wide gap in the big cedars that the float was built with. We had no refrigeration. Mom canned deer meat and fish. Dad didn't hunt, he'd rather go hungry than kill a deer but friends were generous with their venison. There were no large oyster beds in the lagoon back then, there may have been a few but certainly nothing compared to what came later. I don't recall ever eating oysters or clams while we were there. Having dry wood was pretty much of a necessity, mom cooked all of our meals on the woodstove in the kitchen. I liked chopping wood and did plenty of it.

Canasta was big in those days. People got together in the evening and played cards. For the younger set there was Teen Town up at the school and dances for everyone at the hall. Dances in those days were family oriented, kids eventually went to sleep in the cloakroom. Where we lived had an influence on what we did. I was never much of a water person but I liked beachcombing and hiking.

Dad had an old '39 Chrysler that he pulled off of the float at the bottom of the trail up to the lake corner. It never ran, its bits and pieces are still down there, just up off of the beach.

We walked to the school up the hill, at that time it had three classrooms, about 60 students, and went to grade twelve. I quit school in grade 11. Violet Herrewig was my teacher when I started there, followed by Don Levy and Reg Chapin. Other students about my age included Bernie and Eddie Layton, Freddie and Carolyn Reedel from Squirrel Cove; Lillian Rexford, Janet and Roy Anderson, Shirley, Bruce and Andy Ellingsen, Judy Jeffery, Dennis Hansen, Freddie Morris, and Ron Borland from Manson's and Nancy Molrude who was from Stuart Island but boarded with a local family because she had outgrown the school at Stuart Island.

Mom moved us to Surrey in 1957 while Dad continued logging on Cortes. In April of 1958 he was working in Gorge Harbour and drowned in a logging accident.

I eloped and married Robbie Graham in 1957. We lived in Surrey for a short time then moved back to Cortes. Steven was born in 1957, Victor arrived in 1958, Anita was born in 1960. Robbie and I eventually built a house at Belwood Road.

When we first came back to the island Robbie was logging, working for Joe Christoff who was from Courtenay but boarded with Pat and Dunc Robertson at Whaletown. Later on he got into fishing, trucking and barging and the oyster industry. Like many other young families, we did whatever we could to make a living. The kids and I picked oysters. One of the fellows we picked for (Fred Vey) would come up from Okeover Arm and drop 45 gallon drums off along the beach south of the wharf. He came back at high tide and hoisted them up onto his landing barge. We got a dollar a drum for clusters of soup oysters. Soup oysters were fast, they were huge, sometimes clustered together, sometimes clustered on a small rock. The whole cluster went in the drum, rocks and all. I also picked salal and for a few years in the sixties Judy Christensen (.....Smelt Bay Road) and I sorted, bunched and packed it in a salal shed built on our place. George Stephenson was the buyer, Robbie trucked it out to Campbell River on his barge until the ferry came in November of 1969.

Colin Stokes and Noreen and Rudy Kvello from Whaletown along with Shirley Beaulieu, Judy Christensen and Emelia Hansen from Manson's and Smelt Bay were some of the original salal pickers.

The entertainment scene had changed by the time our kids were big enough to take to dances. I only remember going to dances once or twice as a family. Then liquor licences for the hall came into being, there was a bar in the hall, drinking was done inside and kids weren't allowed.

Robby and I divorced in 1977. I was still salal picking and also worked as a cook for the ferry crew who had a cookhouse and camp in trailers near the ferry landing at Whaletown.

I married Gil Slater, one of the ferry skippers in 1979. Salal picking continued to be a fall-winter-spring enterprise. I picked with Judy Christensen and sometimes Shirley Beaulieu, in the mid eighties I was picking with Judy Christensen and Doreen Thompson, who was living with Real Dufresne (589 Sutil Point Road). That was when we began using ATC's and were able to pick farther away from the roads in places like the Hydro trail between Seaford and Cortes Bay and up on Green Mountain. George had moved on to other things, Phil Jamieson from Campbell River Evergreens had taken over the buying on Cortes, coming around once a week to truck it back to town. Notable among the pickers at this time were Dolly and Harold Hansen and Noreen Kvello.

Gil and I left Cortes in 1986, moving to Campbell River. I had seen a lot of changes, the arrival of hydro and the ferry, a growth in population, the decline of fishing and logging and the beginning of the oyster

industry, gravel roads were being paved and for most people making a living seemed to be easier than it was in the "old days". Neighbourhood kids were growing up, marrying and starting families of their own. Leaving wasn't easy for me, my roots were there. But it was time to go and in some small way I welcomed it.