

Memories of Manson's Landing. 2005

Don and Edith Levey, from their home in Vernon BC, in a telephone conversation with Doreen Thompson. May 2005.

Edith: Don and I were 26 and 28 years old when Don, who had been teaching at a small school in Invermere BC, accepted a job as Principal at Manson's Landing Superior School.

We arrived at Manson's Landing aboard Tidewater Shipping's *Jervis Express*, a converted WW2 Fairmile subchaser that ran out of Vancouver with northbound freight and passengers. Don, myself and our 4-month old baby, Bill. We'd met Carl Robinson, who lived on Hague Lake, aboard ship(**He didn't live on Hague Lake but I' not sure where he lived**) He extolled the virtues of Cortes Island. It was a great place to live, friendly people, far away from the bustle of the city.

I took one look at the place.....a dock over the water, a few boats at the float, a couple of buildings ashore.....desolate, isolated. I wanted to stay on board and go back to Vancouver. All of that was to change. We spent our first few days at the Lodge then moved into one of several cottages down by the beach. It was an attractive little place, the first one that had been built there. Nice woodwork, even a plate rail around the living room. It had a cosy little kitchen with a wood-burning stove but without running water, a bedroom and a living room, all lit by coal oil lamps come nightfall. The outhouse was out back. A little small, definitely rustic, but attractive. Then we discovered the leaky roof. Jim Henderson, the former principal,

had lived in the same house. Pauline Helikoski(**Halikowski**), the intermediate teacher, lived in a neighbouring cabin.

Elmer and May Ellingsen were among the first island folk that we met. They were in the process of moving their floathouse home, which had been in Von Donop Creek and was then in Manson's Lagoon, up to their property on the far side of Hague Lake. It was an interesting move, the float was towed up to the head of the lagoon, the house pulled off with a cat, the float taken apart. The cat dragged both the house and some of the float logs up the hill, across the road and to the lakeshore. Part of the float was re-assembled and the house moved onto it, float and house were towed across the lake where the house was pulled off and moved to the site on which it still sits. (1079 Freeman Road)

There was an existing house (781 Hague Road) at Elmer and May's place, we felt very lucky to be able to rent it. It seemed like a palace after the little cabin with its lack of running water, little space and outdoor plumbing! Suddenly we had 2 bedrooms, running water - cold AND hot. Electricity from Elmer's generator. I had to learn how to start that generator, with its terrifying big flywheel, in order to do the laundry in a wringer washing machine. A small price to pay after washing diapers by hand at the cabin. Drying was a different story. I don't believe anyone had dryers in those days, the laundry was hung outside on the clothesline in good weather, on a rack over the wood cookstove in the kitchen in bad. May had a kerosene fridge, turned up high it acted as a short-term freezer, she kindly allowed us to use some space in it.

Cortes WAS a friendly place. We got to know many people. Among our friends were the Ellingsens, Peggy and Jim Pyner, Elton Anderson, Carl Robinson, Mike and Vi Herrewig: Dolly and Harold, Ken and Hazel Hansen; Barron and Nellie Jeffery, Ev and Jack Summers, **Wilf and May Freeman, Mary and ? Ward.**

Cortes Island's economy during the four years we were there was based on the logging and commercial fishing industries. There were three teachers, a couple of men on the road crew, three family-run stores and a small confectionery (conveniently located next to the school). Some of the families living there had arrived during the Depression, escaping from cities to find a place where they could survive. People were resourceful, utilizing local clams and oysters, hunting deer and grouse, picking fruit (often from long-abandoned orchards) and wild berries, gardening. I felt pretty good about my first foray into the huckleberry patch. My bounty produced 9 small jars of jam. I was later to realize that some housewives canned/preserved as many as 1100 jars of fruit, meat (domestic and wild), salmon, vegetables, jam, pickles and chutney.

We, like most islanders, shopped locally for weekly requirements - bread, eggs, produce, meat and milk, small things we'd run out of - and ordered bulk items like toilet paper and laundry soap from suppliers in Vancouver. Those items were shipped up on the freight boat. I recall a time when the suppliers were out of "Item #1" on their list. We had to substitute the wrappers from a box of Japanese oranges for toilet paper! Boat day was always a bit of an event. People gathered to wait for the boat to come in, picked up their orders, bought

fresh groceries at the store and often socialized while waiting for the mail to be sorted.

I'd been teaching school before I came to Cortes, and had done very little cooking. I was good at opening cans. Within months of our arrival the bakeries in Vancouver went on strike. No store bread. I had to learn to make my own, one of the many skills I would learn there. Lighting a cookstove and keeping it going, operating the light plant and the water pump, driving a car. I felt highly disadvantaged when I arrived but left knowing I had the skills required to live in a rural community.

The Ellingsens were wonderful neighbours. Elmer claimed that his boys didn't have enough chores, things had gotten too easy since he was a child, they needed a few more responsibilities. They could keep our woodbox full, he said. We paid them, on a week-about basis. Bruce was very methodical, every day after school he filled the box exactly level with the top. I never ran out of wood. Andy had a different approach. He'd fill the box whenever he felt like it, heaping as much up over the top as he could. Then he'd disappear for a few days, I'd sometimes have to let him know when I was down to the last few sticks. Shirley babysat whenever we needed a sitter, she was very reliable.

I had worried about being so far from medical help when we went to Cortes. I had a young child, and had another (Mark) while we were there. My worries proved unfounded. There was a "clinic" at Whaletown once a month. Rollo Boas, and later Joe Titus, of the Columbia Coast Mission brought the doctor over from Campbell River. That arrangement proved to

be adequate. If I could arrange dental appointments in Campbell River on the day after Clinic Day it was possible to get a ride to town on the mission boat when the doctor returned to town.

I went to the clinic when I was pregnant with Mark. About a month before he was born a new young doctor, Pat Maloney, was locum(**actually he was coming into the practice**) for Dr. John Depew who was on holiday. Mark, he discovered, was in breech position. I'd better go to town he said, where he'd try to manually turn the baby. So.....off to town I went, with Billy(**Don's mother came to look after Billy and Don**), to stay with someone who often boarded women from outlying area while they awaited childbirth. Dr. Maloney tried to turn the baby.....several times. It refused to turn. So I had to stay. I was two weeks overdue when Dr. Depew returned. One attempt and he had the baby turned, Mark was born that night.

When it came time for his 6-week check-up we went to town with several other people, in Elmer's little boat. The wind came up before we left Campbell River and none of us had the courage to say that we didn't really need to go home, couldn't we stay til the storm went down? It seems that each of us thought the others HAD to get home. Well, that was some trip with Don and Elmer watching for chunks of driftwood and deadheads as waves washed right over the boat. Judy Jeffery, who was one of the senior students at school, had elected to stay out on the back deck until a wave washed right over her. She came inside, almost hysterical with fear.

We did use BC Airlines seaplane service at times. Bob

Langdon and Wally Wiggins both flew Seabees for them, an airplane ride was a treat and much faster than a boat. After the stormy trip in Elmer's boat they seemed safer, too!

On the social scene there were occasional dances at the hall, badminton on Saturday nights and events surrounding holidays. Both Don and I played badminton, it was great fun getting together with friends for an evening that was as much hilarity as it was sport. May Freemana and Bob and Doreen Borland were among the "regulars".

Then there was the Ladies Guild, aka "The Guilty Ladies". I joined that group, they were actually The Ladies Guild to St. James Church but seemed to be more of a social club than anything else. We had a lot of fun just getting out for the evening, playing silly games and letting our hair down. They did have a bit of a serious side, but even that was fun. They held a bazaar each fall, I think money raised from it went towards buying gifts for the children's Christmas party. There were lots of home-made items. Sewing and baking featured highly. I was about as good at sewing as I was at baking. I was, however, asked to make an apron. I remember cutting the material crooked (**and the apron I submitted turned up at the sale as a pair of pot holders**) and ending up with something like a pair of pot holders!

At home, we sometimes entertained friends for dinner or for the evening. On our own we listened to CBC programming on a battery-operated radio. It was a great source of information as well as cultural entertainment.

The winter that the lake froze over proved to be a big event. The ice was thick enough to skate on, crystal clear and smooth. Folks skated all over it, off into the bays on the far shore and around Turtle Island. Most winters it just got a skim of ice around the edges, always tempting for small children. Because we lived so close to it I always had to keep an eye on Billy, I was watching him closely the day he climbed over a log onto the ice and fell through. I was quick to snatch him out of the cold water and no harm was done.

Don: I came to the Principalship at Manson's Landing Superior School after teaching in a similar -size school at Invermere so the school itself was no surprise for me. Three classrooms, three teachers and about 60 students.

I taught the senior room grades nine through eleven. (Normally, Superior Schools went only through grade 10, I had agreed to teach grade 11). (**I had to seek permission to teach grade 11 so that students could stay on the island.**) A miss Helikoski(**Halikowski**) taught the intermediate students.....that woman was a mental case. I ended up telling the superintendent, Chris Taylor, that either she went or I went. He told me I'd lose my certificate if I quit in the middle of the year. "It's my certificate or my sanity," I told him. She was relocated to a north Vancouver Island school. May Freeman returned to teaching to take her place. Violet Herrewig was teaching in the primary room. (**Violet taught the intermediate and May the primary**).

I enjoyed teaching and during my final year at Manson's welcomed the challenge of teaching a particularly bright

student, Shirley Ellingsen, who was the only student returning after grade 11, twelfth grade. I managed to convince Chris Taylor that it was the right thing to do. Those were the days of government exams for grades 11 and 12. The school wasn't big enough for "recommendation", a process whereby teachers "recommended" students with good marks, making them exempt from the government tests. I wasn't supposed to see government exams but Chris sent them over for me to administer. I took a look, a preview. And realized that the science exam had a whole section on botany, a subject I had barely touched upon. There just wasn't time in a multi-grade classroom to do in-depth studies of every topic covered by the text. I warned the kids that they'd better bone up on botany.....everyone passed and Shirley graduated in June of 1956.

Science classes were a bit of a problem with no real place to do Chemistry experiments. I coerced the board into paying for a small sink, cupboards and counter at the back of the classroom. That became our chemistry "lab". At one point we were making clouds in bottles. A few drops of water, a cork and heat from a bunsen burner. Worked like a charm. Until I shoved the cork in too tight, applied the heat.....and the bottle burst like a bomb, scattering bits of glass all over the classroom. It was a bit of a shock but no one was hurt, things like that were taken for what they were back then. No harm done, no complaining parents.

I was involved with the students outside of school hours as well as in the classroom. There was an old piano in the school that we managed to move into the senior room. Teen-town was

held there one evenibng a week, I played the piano and the kids square danced, wearing a big circle in the varnished floor.

Plays were a big part of Christmas concerts, with every student having a part. I had an awful time trying to find something suitable and settled for doing a minstrel show in blackface for the first one. The make-up was done down at the school, using black shoe polish. It's impossible to make-up all of those kids without mucking up the floor. It took Pearl Graham a week to clean up the shoe polish! I finally wrote my own productions, always taking a humorous stab at island life. I remember doing a take-off on the Ladies Guild, I was up there in my best suit as MC when the Guild Ladies, who had heard about it from their kids, began pelting me with tomatoes. Edith was horrified.....until she realized the tomatoes were sawdust wrapped in red tissue. (Frugal housewives don't waste the real thing!) Another play capitalized on Boat Day. It always seemed to me that the freight boat unloaded more boom chains than anything else. Island imports were described as "toilet pa! per, boomchains, groceries, boomchains, bleach, boomchains.....boomchains.....boomchains.....boomchains.....boomchains," you get the idea.

Pearl Graham did the janitor work during the four years I was at the school. Ernie Guthrie was the bus driver/handyman. And handy he was. Ernie could fix almost anything. Keeping the bus running over roads ran between stumps, had brush growing up the middle and became little more than mudholes in winter was almost a full-time job. Many a day he spent all of his time between bus runs putting the thing back together so he could get the kids home at night.

Neither Edith nor I had a driver's licence when we arrived on Cortes. We did find that we needed a car and got Ernie to get us one, a '39(**'36**) Pontiac that was barged over from Campbell River. Both of us attempted to drive it home and both of us bumped into something. I went to Courtenay to get a drivers licence and failed the test.....lanes were a whole new concept to me! The examiner decided that I could have a licence "restricted to Cortes Island and environs". It puzzles me yet.....the "environs" part when surrounded by an environs of water. Every once in awhile Ernie would say to me "car sounds kind of funny, better let me look at it". He'd spend a few hours tinkering with it.....and the funny sounds would disappear.

Union Steamships ran for a short time after our arrival then were replaced by Tidewater Shipping, owners of several small freighters cum passenger vessels. Airplanes were fast taking over boat transport between communities, a fast and efficient way to get to Campbell River. Going to "town" had always meant catching the boat to Vancouver. Increasingly, "town" was becoming Campbell River.