

Fred and Maikee (Galloway) Tomlinson in conversation with Susan (Bone) Ellingsen, Dianne (Theal) Hentschel and Doreen (Huck) Thompson. At their home in Royston. January 2005.

"I was fresh out of UBC in 1958, looking for my first job as a teacher. I met the Inspector from Campbell River at a recruiting drive in one of the big downtown hotels. All of the school superintendents came there during the Easter holiday. They had all kinds of things to entice teachers to their particular districts - movies, drinks, you name it.

I talked to this guy. Cortes Island. I'd flown in there when I worked for my father as a boomman in Bute Inlet, Bear Bay and on Redonda Island when I was going to school. I remember the plane I was on dropped into Manson's, the pilot said we'd be there for an hour. We went up to the little restaurant for a coffee.....so I'd been on Cortes Island, it seemed like an interesting place and I knew what I was in for. Though I'd grown up in Ladysmith I'd been living in logging camps, away from the amenities found in town, I felt that I was prepared for country living. It was going to be different, that's what sold me on it. It wasn't the idea that I was going to be a principal, I never followed that up.

I had a student loan to pay off. I'd be getting three thousand dollars a year plus five hundred dollars to cover my administrative duties as principal. We got a teacherage, a house down near Elmer Ellingsen's (now 1118 Kwa'as Bay Road), for which the community paid the rent. They also delivered some wood. Wood was important since we had a wood stove. There was a little one-cylinder diesel light plant. The lights always flickered, it had a power stroke, every stroke causing the lights to blink. We had a seventeen-inch black and white TV, when Mame ironed the picture shrank.

We arrived there at the end of July because we really had nowhere else to go. It's a good thing we did because the fellow who had left, Reg Chapin, had done no ordering for the next term. Nothing, he'd done nothing at all. With Mame's help, good thing I had Mame, we ordered what we thought would be needed in the way of supplies. The school board's secretary-treasurer, a Mr. Holloway, gave us what we ordered. Chalk, paper, coloured paper - we had enough coloured paper to last for 10 years. There were boxes of it that still hadn't been opened when we left 4 years later. Some of it might still be there! We sure didn't get what we ordered in the next few years, we'd had it!

We didn't have a car when we first got there. We'd walk from the house down along a trail by the edge of the lake and up through the bushes to the school. I remember walking through that bush in a howling south-easter, we could hear trees falling all around us. My dad eventually found us a car in Nanaimo. A 1947 Chev. It came over from Campbell River on a barge. I can remember Mame and I driving around in it for quite some time after we got it, learning how to drive the damn thing. It did us very well, it had a radio, three-on-a-tree (column) shift.

I helped string a phone line. I think our ring was two longs and a short or something like that. They had a ring for emergencies and one to let people know when the boat was coming in. You could always expect that call on Wednesday morning, then it seemed like almost everyone headed down to the wharf. At first we thought it was quite a novelty, everyone going to the wharf and the store for groceries once a week on boat day. After the first year we were just like everybody else. It was island living. It was our home. Wednesday, store day. Mail one day a week. We've never forgotten, it was the best thing we ever did. I remember looking out the classroom window, seeing Mame go by in the '47 Chev. The dog hanging out the window, headed for the store. Wednesday. Mail day. If we didn't get the fresh stuff that day we wouldn't get it. I swear all they did was order enough fresh meat and vegetables for one day, maybe enough to last til noon the next day. Miss out and you could always open a can. There were lots of cans.

The school was at the corner of Charlotte and Sutil Point Roads (806 Sutil Point Road). Manson's Landing Elementary Junior Secondary. There were three classrooms each with their own cloakroom plus a wide hallway, small library and office/staff room on the main floor. Downstairs there was a workshop for the used by Ernie Guthrie, the handyman/busdriver/mechanic; a janitorial supply room where Pearl Graham kept her mops, brooms and cleaning supplies; a covered outdoor play area and an indoor playroom. A locked closet space off of the playroom housed the supplies for the Chemistry 91 class. There were sixty students. Joan Guthrie was teaching the primary grades, May Freeman was teaching the intermediate grades, I had the high school grades from nine through twelve. May was to teach English in my room, I would teach math in her class.

May, who had quit teaching to raise a family but come back for a year when Ray Miller left the district, went back to raising her son at the end of the first year that I was there. A Mr. Fred Gowing was hired to take her place. He arrived on the island accompanied by his aged and unwell mother with whom he lived. Neither of them was cut out for rural living. He did not fare well at school either. His days started with fits of nervousness over marking his register and went downhill from there. I didn't know what to do with him. By Christmas he was gone...moved off to Stuart Island. May Freeman once again picked up the slack, returning to her former job teaching grades four through eight. Peter Winter was hired in her place the following year (1960).

I taught every subject to three grades, no secretary, no teacher's aide, no time off for administrative work. I had eighteen students in those three grades. Eighteen kids with a wide variety of capabilities. I didn't have time for sending letters off to the school board office. I can remember Mr. Holloway, in his nice way, wondering if maybe one afternoon I would sit down and write him a letter just to let him know how things were going. I didn't have time to write him a letter. My number one job was what was going on in the classroom. The other side of the school could have collapsed and I don't think I'd have noticed. I had my one job, and my one job was those eighteen kids.

I worked after school. I had to, it was the only way to get things done. I didn't have time to supervise the Chemistry Labs in the basement. I had to trust those kids to go down there and conduct their experiments with bunsen burners, test tubes, chemicals and acids. I couldn't be in two places at once, I didn't know what was going on down there. I had to trust them, if I couldn't trust them I didn't want them, it was as simple as that. Most of those students passed the government exams so it couldn't have all been fooling around. The inspector was impressed with some of the lab books they turned out, Mike Kelly's in particular."

Maimee tells a story that fully illustrates the pressures, and lack of spare moments, that doing a good job of multi-grade classroom teaching entails. "It was after Doug was born, Mary Ward was babysitting him. I was teaching then and we gave Mary's son, David, a ride to school after dropping Doug off. We got to school, I got out of the car and there, right where I had been sitting, was a dead mouse. I'd been sitting on it.....I was horrified, there was obviously a family of them living in the car. David took the mouse and somewhere along the way he dropped it into Fred's pocket. The kids waited all day for Fred to put his hand in his pocket and come out with a dead mouse! It never happened. There was no time for putting hands in pockets." Fred adds, "It's a good thing I was young. I'd never do it now. Wouldn't have the energy."

Fred continues. "There were extra curricular activities too. Sports Day at Smelt Bay in June with Surge Narrows (Read Island) and Whaletown School competing with us for the trophy, which was often won by Surge Narrows. Christmas Concerts at Manson's Hall in December. There were a bunch of brass musical instruments at the school. Pearl Graham, the janitor, had some of the kids playing in *The Brass Band*. They practiced after school. What can I say? They played in the Christmas concert, Pearl up there conducting. The rest of us thinking maybe we recognized the songs they were playing.

The strap was still in use. Former principals had left the corporal punishment book in the office. Looking through it I noticed that the strap had been used frequently, one kid's name occurred over and over. I was going to use it once in the four years that I was there.....one of the kids had taken the deodorant block out of a urinal, unscrewed the vent cover on the heating duct where it came into the classroom and put the block inside. The furnace kicked in and an overpowering stench invaded the classroom. I took him into the office, lifted up the strap to swing and knew I couldn't do it. I didn't use the strap once in my four years there. There was no occasion to, nor was there a discipline problem.

I worked for Elton Anderson, who was logging his tree farm, every summer while we were there. He had me help him fall a huge old fir once, a giant of a tree. It must have been four hundred feet tall, it was HUMONGOUS! I was on one end of one of those old two-man power saws and cut just a little farther past the undercut than I should have. I could see what happened in my dreams for weeks afterward.....this big tree kind of turned on the butt, we scrambled like hell to get out of there, Elton's cap fell off. The tree didn't land on us but it did get his cap. I didn't fall any more trees after that. He gave me the small power saw and sent me out to cut all the limbs off, limbs as big around as a small tree. Then he sent me down to the beach to do the booming, I'd done that before, knew what I was doing and liked the work. Elton always paid for a full day, even if I only worked six hours, and he paid for July First though I don't think I worked it. He was a generous man, a good man and a good friend.

I also did a bit of work for Bob Borland who lived in a big white house near the school (821 Sutil Point Road) and for the fellow who owned the little island beyond Cat Island. He was buiding a little cabin out there, and a dock for which we peeled a lot of poles.

Elton sold us a lot on Potlatch Road for \$500.00 in 1960 (569 Potlatch Road). We tore down a chicken house and reused the lumber to get a start on the house. Then went to work in at one of the local sawmills to get some more lumber. I made all of the windows in the woodshed, with the lighting plant going in there, at the lake. Johnny Hansen called it the chicken house.....so much for the chicken house, the last time I was over there it was on sale for \$420,000.00."

Maimee talks about social activities. "We went to the hall on Saturday nights and either played badminton or bowled. We had plastic bowling sets, the pins were filled with sawdust or something to give them some weight. It was fun. One weekend we all got on the mission boat and he took us over to Campbell River so we could go to a real bowling alley! The wind came up while we were there, when it came time to leave the mission boat headed out bravely into the rough seas, bound for Manson's Landing and a wrap-up turkey dinner at Don and Lottie McDevitt's. One by one people turned green and headed out the door. Looking forward, no doubt, to turkey dinner.

May Freeman and Peg Pyner had a little theatre group. I remember being in one of their plays. Then there was the Ladies Guild, it was a hoot. The women gathered in each others houses and had a lot of fun. I learned to play a lot of hilarious games that I later used at birthday parties for my kids. I can't remember the meetings being serious in any way.....it was the first time I'd ever played charades. At first I didn't know WHAT they were doing but I soon caught on to it. It was a lot of fun, wouldn't have missed it. I remember Hazel and Dolly Hansen, Peggy Pyner and May Freeman as some of the others who were there."

Maimee also tells about child-delivery in November, Cortes style. "There were no doctors here. There was a howling south-easter blowing. Fred said I wouldn't be getting out of there that day, I told him I thought it might be necessary. We called for a plane that did make it in at about noon, the pilot was just a bit jumpy....hoping to make Campbell River in time.....Doug was born at three. Then we had to come back. Same scenario. Howling south-easter. The plane landed in the head of the Gorge where we had to walk the boomsticks to shore with this little baby and drive across the island to get home."

Fred continues. "Then there was the time, a year or so later, that Doug was being so quiet and good that we could scarcely believe it. He was actually sitting still. What we didn't know was that he had tonsilitus, he went into convulsions and scared the living daylights out of us. We had no idea what was going on. His eyes rolled back in his head. We had to fly him out.

A trip off-island seldom failed to be an adventure. It seemed like every time we had to go to town the wind howled and the rain blew in sideways. I remember trying to go out to visit our parents for the Christmas holidays. It took us three days to get off the island. We packed up our stuff, baby things and real diapers, went down to the wharf and bothered the Summers until we realised the plane was never going to make it. Go back home, start the fire, try again the next day. The little guy messed his pants on the way to the wharf, Mame changed him on the backseat, said "What'll we do with the diaper?" I said "Give it to me." I rolled down the window and hucked it out. Another day of waiting, relighting the fire and hoping the wind would go down. It was three days before we got out of there. Then we'd get to the other side, take a bus down to Ladysmith or Chemainus. More diaper changes, pins lost down the side of the bus seat, diaper clumsily wrapped and held up, hopefully, by plastic pants. We had to keep smiling."

Maimee tells about her mother's reaction to her new island lifestyle. "My mother was English background. She was not too impressed with her daughter living on this island with no electricity. She'd come to visit in her fur jacket, fur hat and gloves. She'd get in the plane in Campbell River and shut her eyes until it landed. The kids on the wharf would watch this woman in furs get off the plane and be dumbstruck. I'd tell her not to dress up quite so much to come over here. Her reply was, "Well, what'll I wear?" When I first came to the island I was sort of aware of style but soon dressed just like everyone else in jeans and sweaters or whatever the season demanded. Gumboots. Mom came over then and said, "I don't know what's the matter, something's different, you look funny!"

Fred concludes: "We wanted at least one more addition to the family, what we didn't want was going through it all without medical services. The next time we were pregnant, in 1962, it was time to move on. We wouldn't have missed it for the world but there did come a time when we just had to pack up and go, that's all there was to it."