

Interview of Etta Byers by Oonagh O'Connor, 1995

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*This is April 13, 1995, and I'm speaking with Etta Byers in her home on Quadra Island, and my name is Oonagh O'Connor.*

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*Etta, could you begin by talking about your grandparents? On my mother's side, Michael and Jane Manson. Well, they were interesting people. My grandfather came from Shetland Islands at the age of 17. He came to New York on a cross-country train and he was robbed on the train. Landed in San Francisco without a penny to his name. But he thought, what would he do? So he was aiming to get to Comox where he had a favorite aunt, his father's twin sister Robina Duncan, and she was married to Oliver Duncan and they had come with the first white settlers to the Comox Valley. So when he didn't have the money to, he had to go by ship up to Comox from San San Francisco, but he thought he would walk the street and see if he could find a man who he felt he could trust, who would trust him, and so he did. He stopped this man on the street, told him his plight. The man recognized his accent, wanted to know where he was from. He was from the Shetland Islands, and this man was from Shetland Islands. He ended up taking him home to work in his garden. He had to wait about, I think it was ten days before his ship left to go north. So he said they had a great time talking over times on Shetland Island. And it happened that he had a trunk. That was the only thing he had landed in San Francisco was this trunk. In this trunk was a shawl given to him by a friend in Shetland to find her son in San Francisco and give this shawl to him. This man happened to be the son who he had the shawl for in the trunk. So they parted great friends, he said, and he took his ship for Comox. There he wanted to buy land, but he couldn't buy land, it was all held by the collieries. So he ended up going to Nanaimo. He worked in a grocery store there and it was at Nanaimo he met his wife Jane Renwick. Now Jane's parents came from Dalry, Scotland and he was interested in the gold fields of California. So they had come. Now how they traveled I don't know, but my grandmother was born in the hills of Montezuma in Nevada. Now that poor mother of hers, what kind of hardship she faced in those days, it was 1862 when she was born. So the gold didn't seem to be too profitable for old John Renwick, so he decided he would take his family and come to Nanaimo because there was great rumors of black gold in Nanaimo, and this was the coal fields. So in 1865 they moved to Nanaimo and of course my grandmother and grandfather met there. 1878 they were married. 1878? Mm-hmm 1878. Now there again I just may have told you the story. Old Grandpa Renwick, John Renwick, was a very severe man, hard. And my grandmother came home all proud to show her engagement ring Grandpa had given her. He took the poker and he hit her so hard over the hand she never wore the ring again. He broke it. And no way was she to get married. She was needed at home. There was work to be done. So Grandpa, of course, this upset him, he wouldn't see her abused. So he hired six Indians in a big canoe, and they eloped. And it was in the evening, Grandma was heading down to the boat when she passed her father on the trail going home. And her father said, Are you going to*

Bible study? And she said, Yes. And she kept on going. So here she went into the canoe and they rowed all night. They stopped at Salt Spring Island and picked up a relative of his to witness their wedding. And they went to, I think it was Sydney. And then they got a horse and wagon and drove into Victoria and were married August 6, 1878. *How old was she then?* She was 16. *And how old was he?* He was born in 1878 and he was born in 1854? No, 1857 he was born. So what would that make him? So that would make him 21. 21, yeah, that would be about it I guess. *That's a pretty exciting beginning.* Well yes, for early days I thought, well, romance certainly bloomed.

*When did they come to Cortez?* Now he had, oh dear, I don't know what, May probably would have the dates he came, he first opened a trading post with the Indians and I believe he had one at Hernando Island too. And he must have opened those before he married, but Grandma was up there at Manson's Landing post there when their, as they call the first family, she had some of those kids with her, the ones that died with diphtheria. They had a hired man too, worked for him. I haven't got the sequence of dates because he bought the meadowland out at the lake and I guess he bought the Clytosin property too where the trading post was but anyway..

*So Clytosin was Manson's Landing?* Yes, Clytosin was the Indian name for it and it's something to do with the Neck of land with water on both sides is what Clytosin referred to. He left and went back to Nanaimo. He had such a busy life, I don't know how he'd done what he did really, because he had a big boat, the Thistle, he freighted and stowed, he had that boat too, and he freighted around the areas. He went sailing in Alaska, with I think it was the Thistle he had up there, but somewhere along the line they were back in Nanaimo, and he, what did he do there? Because the kids of course were born, Grandma would go down to her mother. She went into a nursing home to have her sixth child, and she came home to one. This is when diphtheria wiped them out. She herself nearly died with diphtheria. But there's a little stretch in there that May would fill out, no doubt, because I know he was up at Union Bay about 1898.

*Well, when was your mother born?* In 1900 and she was born at Union Bay. Okay. She and her twin sister both arrived in 1900 and in 1902 the youngest one. *What was your mother's name?* Florence. Florence and Flossie were the twins and then Gwendolyn she was the youngest and she arrived at Union Bay in 1902 and there grandpa was running the coal trains from Cumberland. He was an engineer on the train. And in Nanaimo he was an engineer on the train for old Dunsmuir too. But anyway, in 1907, they left Union Bay and he took his family to Manson's Landing.

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*That's when your mother first came to the island?*

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Yes, she first came then. *And where did she settle?* Well, she spent her school years at Manson's Landing, and when she was 16, her mother took she and her twin sister Flossie and Gwen to Vancouver and enrolled them. The twins were into a dressmaking school, and Auntie Gwen

went into a milliner's shop to learn millinery, because hats were the big thing in those days. But it wasn't long they all met young guys and they all married so their careers come to a halt. So mum lived in Vancouver then. My dad worked for the Vancouver Fire Department and they lived there. I was born there so was Hазie while they were there. And then his dad's brother had a big notion to go to Alberta. The government had some deal of growing wheat there, and they figured there was money to be made. So they went back to Alberta, and Dad just landed there and fell in with typhoid fever. It seemed to be an epidemic at the time. And he landed in a hospital 85 miles away. Mom couldn't get to the hospital to see him. He came down with double pneumonia and pleurisy, and he had nine sicknesses all at once with this typhoid and she said all the time he was there she never heard one word except she got a letter from a nurse to say if she had any possible means of getting there by all means to come and they figured he wasn't going to survive. But anyway he finally pulled through he hemorrhaged badly and it seems that this is what took their life that hemorrhage at the bowel. *This was Ervin?* Yes, Ervin. So as soon as he got back out of hospital and to Alberta, he left. He was back to BC as fast as he could come, but he was very weak and he came to Hernando Island because of course mum's grandma and grandpa Manson lived there at the time. They owned Hernando Island, or they finally did. But of course as soon as he got his strength up they all were logging and that was a picture of him and Uncle Wilf and Jack and Nick Manson logging at Hernando. Then from there it was Cortes and he logged all his life, but every nine years Ervin was in the hospital fighting for his life and the doctors giving him no hope and yet he come through. Yeah, oh he had some terrible episodes. But he had no time for sickness and I guess that's why he recovered, because he just was so impatient, you know, he just... and his last accident was a logging accident. He bent down to pick a chain up on the logging truck. It was underneath the carriage, and a log slipped off and came down, crushed him to the ground. His pelvis was all fractured, his legs, ankle was broken, kidneys were damaged inwardly. So he was nine days in Powell River and the doctor worked and set his bones but he couldn't get the pelvis in place. He talked to specialists in Vancouver for advice and finally Dr. Lyons said to my mother, I've done what they have advised me but he said, I can't get the results I want. He said I'm going to send him down to Vancouver. Maybe when they see him they can figure out what to do. As it was they said he would never walk with his pelvis. You know in those days hospitals you paid before you got into them, but good old Dr. Lyons. He said to my mother. Do you have the money? He said to go to Vancouver. He was ready to give her money to go and she said well I have a brother lives there I'll be all right I can stay with him. *What year would this have been?* That was 1939 the year that Dolly and Harold were married no wait a minute 38, 1938. April, because I was Dolly's bridesmaid and Dad was hurt the day before her wedding and on her wedding day we were waiting word to hear was he okay and just as I was going into the church, I asked my cousin Mike Herrewig if it had any word from Dad. He said, yes, it's not good. So it was kind of a heavy day, but anyway, the next day we went to Powell River, Dolly and Harold, and we went to get pictures taken. I went to see Dad in the hospital. But he laid in Vancouver. They finally strung him up by one leg and weights on the end. He went out of his mind, he didn't know my mum. But he was there from April the 18th, he was hurt, he came out of hospital on July the 10th. And

he went home to bed at my aunt's place in Vancouver and the doctor said, now be prepared, you're not going to walk again. He says, what do you mean I got two legs? He says, I'll walk. So they gave him two crutches, and when you feel able you try the crutches. Well he just no sooner home and he was trying them crutches and it was a week later he came up on the Union boat to home on these crutches. And oh I remember so plain him walking up the driveway with me and he was saying they tell me I'm not going to walk again. He says they're nuts, he said, I'll throw them crutches away he says, I'll get a couple of canes and he says, I'll walk. And of course, every minute he was working them hips up and down off his chairs, he'd sit at the table and he'd walk and it was no time, he was walking again, all right. And he went back to work in the woods in October, which he never should have done. He struggled. He had kidney stones bothered him, and the kidneys never functioned properly afterwards, but he sure was a fighter. But you know to his last day, he was 84 when he passed away, he didn't have a limp and he had no arthritic problems, so it was amazing really. But it was sad for a man that was so ambitious and so vibrant of life to have to have gone through the ordeals he did, the suffering and what not. And yet he had no patience for it. I think that's all that got him over them is the fact that he had to get on with life, there's none of this sloughing around.

*So for medical emergencies then people were like your father was taken off the island and he was in Powell River?* Well he was hurt up in the woods and Clarence's father and uncle made a stretcher with a couple of poles to bring him down to the beach. It was about two miles down to Seaford Beach. Clarence ran down to the beach and along the shore to Squirrel Cove to get a man he knew there with a gas boat that would pick Dad up. So... *And where did he run?* Squirrel Cove to Seaford, along that beach. And while he was doing that, I ran back home to the lake, to phone, we had a little private phone, to the Danielses, who were the government telephone people, and the only contact with the outside world was through the government telephone by message. So I relayed a message to Mrs. Daniels to send to Dr. Lyons in Powell River, that my father was seriously hurt, send ambulance to meet boat arriving at Lund. So this is what happened, the boat came down and picked Dad up. Oh, he was wanting so much to sit up, but he couldn't. Oh, it hurt. But he got to Lund. When he got there, Dr. Lyons had come with the ambulance, and he was waiting for him, and took him to Powell River. So it was always emergencies was dependent upon a friend with a gas boat to get them out of there.

*So maybe we'll just go back a little bit then to when you were growing up. Did you grow up on Cortez or Hernando or both of those places?* When I was three, we went to Hernando Island. How long I don't know. But from Hernando we went to Lamberts. Hm. Hernando and then Uncle John's I guess. We stayed at Uncle John's place while Dad was horse logging. And then back to Hernando.

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*So, okay, well let's stop for a minute and talk about the Lamberts.*

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*They were people who lived on Cortez?*

0:16:26

They owned Reef Point.

*And do you remember anything about them, the Lamberts?* Oh yes, I remember Gertie quite well. *Was that the mother?* Yes, Gertie, she was the daughter of Mrs. Augustus Tiber. Tibers owned the property that Andy Ellingson has now at the lake, if you know that property. She had been married twice before. Her first husband was Mundigal, and that's where Bill Mundigal and Gertie Lambert was a Mundigal that married the Lambert. And then Mrs. Tiber had married a Doering, and she had Carl and Fidelma, were both Doerings. And then she married old Augustus Tiber, and she had one daughter Veronica with her and she was blind in her old years and she was our neighbor at the lake. This end of the lake where Hazy is now and then Mrs. Tiber was up at the top end. That was our only neighbor, closest neighbor. But then...

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*But at this point she was at Reef Point?*

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Gertie married Jack Lambert, yeah, and lived down at Reef Point. And they were there until 1927. They moved to Powell River. He had a lot of goats. He was very interested in goat ranching. And he took his goats to Powell River, and they made a mint with their goat milk. The doctor got behind them and promoted this goat milk. So he had a great business down in Paradise Valley in Powell River.

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*So did they have an extra house for you to stay in when you...*

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Well, we stayed in that little shack that was in the picture there. Oh, yeah. Yeah, the Lamberts had their own house, which was quite a nice log built place. But the little shack, no, we lived in that for, I don't know, it's just a matter of months, I think, that Dad was horse logging there. And then Clarence's mother and dad, when they came to the island, they started out, they logged for Jack Lambert too. It seems everybody that came up there started out with him.

0:18:34

*Did he have a big business?*

0:18:35

No, no, it was just a little horse logging. And Clarence's dad helped build, I guess the remains are still there, of that big log dump down there on the beach. And then horses would pull them down and dump the logs in. But his dad, I used to laugh at him telling about his days at Lamberts because he said they had a billy goat there that disliked Henry and he said one day was busy with the grease dauber daubbin the skids and Gertie happened to come along and she let a holler out of it. She says Henry look out! Well right away thought that darn billy goat and he jumped aside the old goat was just a whirr went right past missed him. But he said another day

wasn't so lucky. He was down booming on the logs out in the water and he wasn't paying any attention and the old billy goat come right down that log and he dumped him into the water. He said that goat had something in for him, he didn't know what it was. No doubt he'd teased him or something. But then we were there, oh golly I can remember riding in the horse and wagon with my mum and Gertie too, I wonder how old we'd be. And then...

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*Where would you go in the horse and wagon?*

0:19:42

Oh, down to the Manson's... the post office of course was down at Manson's Landing. Maybe they'd go visit somebody. In 1923 the hall opened and I know my mother and May's mother, they were sisters, had done a lot of cooking and taking up to the volunteer workers at the hall when they were building the hall. And that would be horse and wagon. I can remember one night very vividly Wilfred and Hazy and I riding in the back of that wagon. We had our blanket and pillow and it was dark because we were studying the stars in the sky. Oh, they were so bright and singing songs and oh gosh, we were just having a great time.

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*Is that the hall where it stands now?*

0:20:28

Mm-hmm, still where it stands today, yeah. Yeah, I don't know when they started that, but... *They finished it in 1923?* 1923 it opened, yeah, they had the opening deal.

*Do you remember the names of any other people that were on the island in those days?* 1927 we moved... 1925 we moved from Hernando Island to Seaford because I started school that year and at Seaford lived the Smith family. A father with his five children, his wife had left him and beside him were the two Warren brothers lived. Then way up the road up to on the way to Squirrel Cove was the Cowans. The Cowans lived up there. So that was the only neighbors at Seaford. Then a year later we moved to Manson's Landing and of course the people that lived there then, of course there was the Hawkins down at the landing. My aunt Hazel Herrewig lived in Mike Manson's home, the one that's demolished now. That was her home.

0:21:46

*The old lodge?*

0:21:47

Yes, the old lodge, yes. That was her home. And she had only one son, but he grew up there. Grandpa turned that place over to Aunty Hazel. Then up the road was Mrs. Petznick. She was a Miss Richards and she married old Frank Petznick. Up the road from them my Aunt Ethel lived in a little house but they had gone to Powell River just about that same year.

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*What was her last name?*

0:22:22

Hurren, because Hurren had been hired by my grandfather from Nanaimo as a carpenter to build his the lodge, his home, and that's where he met Aunt Ethel and of course they were married. They had gone to Powell River so my mother and dad moved into their place. After, they had lived in little Billy Hawkins's place, a neighbor right beside, which was vacant. Across the road was Mr. and Mrs. Froud. I don't know what year they came to the island.

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*Where is this in relation to, say, Manson's Hall?*

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Straight up from the hall, the first building you'd come to on the same side on the left was the Froud place. On the right it would be going up from the...

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*Going towards...*

0:23:12

Going towards... *Smelt Bay?* Yes, mm-hmm. Yeah, from the hall up to Smelt Bay. That's the road that went up behind the hall. There was a Mr. and Mrs. McQueen lived up there, really lovely Scotch people, and Mr. Beesley. They both lived up at the end of that road. Then, the settlement seemed to be close around the hall there. There's the Frouds and this Willie Hawkins, I don't know that. He was a brother of old Dadda Hawkins as we called him, but he wasn't around there when I was there. He'd been and gone I guess. Then the couple that lived there, what was their name? They were related to the Frouds somehow. I should know, they had two boys and one nearly drowned me one day. But anyway, I'd have to think to come up with a name. May might have known their name. But after that you went on towards Smelt Bay. On the right-hand side of the road was old Mr. Montine *[sp?]*. He was a man from Finland and his sister lived with him, Amelia. And poor little soul, she was very lonely, she couldn't speak English. She would come to my mum with her book, she had English and Finnish language in it, and mum would get kind of excited and she had quite a loud voice, she used to call on cows I guess, but Miss Monton *[sp?]* would say, oh please, please, Mrs. Me no deaf. But she was a sweet little person.

Then, along the road to the left, the road took off to the Jap camp, we called it. The old Nakasui, the Jap, lived there. The meanest man with horses. It was sad. Poor horses. He'd get them up there and the next thing, he'd have to shoot them. They'd break legs, but he was brutal with them. Then, a little... *Did that family, did they have children in that family?* No. He did marry later on. A woman came out from Japan and she had a little boy, but I don't know what the connection was, I don't think it was Nakasui's, I think she brought him, I'm not too sure about that. May might know too. But then his neighbor of course, along up the road was Uncle John Manson.

And then you went along Smelt Bay, when I was young, nobody lived at Smelt Bay. Conlin had lived there that had a still, and he bootlegged during the Prohibition days, and there were some great stories about that Conlin household.

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*Do you remember any?*

0:25:53

Oh, Clarence's uncle told us all about them, because he had the job of running the liquor to Vancouver in his boat called the Hobo. And in Vancouver this Conlin's sister had the hotel. And this is where they would deliver this liquor to and it went on to the States from there somehow or another. But Conlin, oh they were drinkers themselves and him and the boys, there was always a fight going on. And Mrs. Conlin, she was supposed to be in Hawaii and she was a big woman. I have a picture of her, May has too. Wally said he went there one day and Mrs. Conlin had the biggest black eye and he says, who gave you that black eye? She says, listen here Wally Aldrich, she says, nobody give me that, I fought like hell to get it. And then young Mike Conlin, you see he was drinking and that, oh Wally says a whole bunch of them, they'd all been fighting and out one door and in the window and carrying on. It was just kind of a wild bunch. Then they left the... I never knew them. They had gone and people by the name of Cullens lived there and of course the very previous owners before my time too was Padgett, a very refined English gentleman and they lost the child, quite young, fell into a post hole, broke its neck and so they ended up down near the Lamberts in Powell River, but I never met them, never knew them, but my mum had told me all about the Padgetts. They had gone, so there was nobody in Smelt Bay when I was growing up.

The Jefferys, they landed on Cortes in 1925 at Seaford and that's where I first met Dolly. They came to the Seaford school only a few months because Mrs. Jeffery had quite a difficult time. She landed up there, property her husband had bought, sight unseen, and she'd come from England to Winnipeg and to over here in Saskatchewan they had a restaurant, and then to North Vancouver where they had been burned out, lost their home and sight unseen from a friend, old Jeff bought this property at Seaford. Well she landed up there, there was no grocery store, there was just a trail to get out of the place and she was beside herself so she ended up moving, she rented a place at Squirrel Cove where they were beside a school and there was a store there of course but, oh I wrote Dolly up a piece on her mother. I used to talk with Mrs. Jeffery about her early episodes there. And I told her all about what she had told me. And they should put that in the museum, really, because Mrs. Jeffery was a marvelous person, a real organizer. And when she finally got established on the island, after she rented at Squirrel Cove, Jeff went looking for a more convenient place and he found this place at Chris' Lagoon. So he, there was a cabin on it but he didn't know who owned it so he went to old Uncle John Manson and Uncle John told him and gave him the address of the man that owned it. So this man was glad to sell it to Jeff. So the family moved there and that was, I met up with Dolly again at Manson's school after they settled there. Now that was, you know where Chris Lagoon is? *Yeah.*

0:29:16

*Off of Jeffery Road?*

0:29:17

Is that what they call it now?

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*There's a road called Jeffery Road.*

0:29:20

Oh, well that would be, yes, off Bartholomew, that would be named for the Jefferys. So at that time, they were the only ones that lived in that area beside the Hayes. Or Daddy Hayes, we called him. That'll be Frank Hayes' grandfather lived there, and their family. He raised his family there, what, seven of a family they had.

*So can you tell a story about Mrs. Jeffery? You said she was a wonderful person.* Oh yes, when she got to Manson's Landing, she was around organizing the ladies. A community worker, great community worker. So she organized the Women's Institute. Everybody belonged to the Women's Institute. She got all the ladies coming out to these meetings. Well, she had dances going. Of course, there always had been the country dances. Like Clare's uncle said, any time there were six people gathered anywhere, out come the instruments and there was a dance, even on the wharf shed or anywhere. And the Manson's home, I can remember them dancing there. But she, after the Women's Institute, well, they did a lot with that. She got fall fairs going, beautiful fall fairs, and artwork that went into that. One outstanding exhibit was a model of the Union steamship "Lady Cecilia", done by a 14-year-old boy, Harold Pickles. Old Pickles lived down at the end of Potlatch Road. They were the nearest resident to Smelt Bay. They lived there. Charles and Ems, he always called his wife, and they had three boys and a daughter. But this young Harold had done this, just a exact replica, and color painted the whole thing. It was a beautiful model he put in there. So he had great praises for that ship. But she'd have flower arranging and needlework, vegetables of course, there were all kinds of agricultural displays. Wonderful fall fair she put on. And of course after the fair was over, old Reverend Green, the minister, he was a wonderful character too, called on all the communities. But he gathered all the fruit and vegetables, apples and...

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