

Interview of Etta Byers by Oonagh O'Connor, 1995

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He would pick up all the fruit and vegetables and the flowers from the fall fairs and the church harvest service and take them to Rock Bay Hospital and donate them to the hospital. And he'd go with a boatload. And then, oh Mrs. Jeffery, she was great for the young people. Of course, her people were all growing up, and her house was open. She had parties, Christmas parties, Halloween parties, always something going at the Jeffery house. Everybody was welcome. Mr. Jeffery was the cook, because that was his profession. He'd been a cook in the armed forces. And while the First World War, he'd contacted lung problems. So he was on pension and they were always considered the money people on Cortez Island, all through the hard times. So he done all the cooking at home which left Mrs. Jeffery quite free to do all her organizing. And oh she'd be away to conventions and then she organized the church guild to take care of the church affairs. And the church had been built by the Columbia Coast Mission.

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Which church is that?

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The little one that's beside the hall. And it's sad that it's neglected. Old Uncle John put in many days volunteering his help there, very faithful. And Mr. Hayes was hired from Reed Island to do the carpentry work. And he told me in later years, talking with Mr. Hayes, he said, Johnny Manson never missed a day. He was up early in the morning, done his chores at home, the chickens and the cow would be milked and fed and he would come to work with frost on his chest, he said, his shirt open and then put in his day's work and back home to his farm. And he lived all alone by then, he was widowed and his family was away.

But anyway, then of course Uncle John donated the window in memory of Aunt Maggie, that big stained glass window is in her memory, and she was a wonderful person. Yeah, we all loved Auntie Maggie. She was a dear soul. Everybody was welcome. She was home to everybody. And you know, you never heard her say a word against anybody. If somebody was out of place or something, she would find some credit to give to them, to cover it up sort of thing. She was just that kind of a person. So it was too bad, her life was too short really.

And of course she had come from Shetland Islands, she'd lost her mother and dad with TB and this relative of King Bruce of Scotland, he'd been exiled through some of the battles he'd lost in Scotland, and he was the laird of Shetland, and they took Auntie Maggie and her sister in and raised them there with the notion that they would help, but Auntie Maggie was rather delicate, so it ended up they waited on her. And she was terribly homesick when she came out here, because there was nothing but the Indians. There were no white people when she came out. 1894, I think it was, somewhere around there. And Uncle John ended up getting her Middenatch Island. He thought, well, it was sort of Shetland in miniature, maybe she would be

happy there. And she was two years there, had her one baby and expecting the second one while she was there. And yet he would be out ten days at a time because he was caretaker for the Hastings Mill interests. I don't know, he called on the camps by rowboat, and she would be all by herself, just the odd Indian around. And of course, they would come and hide, she couldn't speak their language and I think, oh that poor soul, what a time she must have put in.

Do you remember any stories of Native interaction with your relatives? Nothing but terrific friendship. Yes, all the Indians had a great respect for both Uncle John and my grandfather and when Uncle John was buried or had his funeral, the church was packed to overflowing. People stood outside and a lot of Indians were there and the chief Mitchell, he went up to the pulpit. I don't know if he'd been asked or if he'd just done it on his own. He went up and spoke and the man, he had tears in his eyes and he said, word has not reached all my people that we have lost Uncle Johnny. He said if it had there'd be many more here. And when the service was over, this young Indian and his wife were sitting and I didn't know what was going on, they were muttering and kind of talking and whatnot. When it came time to take the coffin out of the church, of course the pallbearers were all my cousins, all relatives of Uncle John's. This one young Indian, he jumped up and he went up and he took the handle of the casket to help carry it out. And it was a place that Wilf Freeman was to take and Wilf looked kind of surprised and then he realized what was going on so Wilf just stepped behind and walked behind but he was so determined he was going to be with Johnny to the last that an uncle or a grandpa too, of course he ended up in politics and he'd be a way to Victoria to sitting in these plush seats and debating all these big issues and what not but his greatest joy was back to court he'd sit on a log and the old Indians had come to talk to him and he'd powwow with them in their old jargon, you know, they talked Chinook. Grandpa and Uncle John, both us kids, didn't know what they were saying, but he really enjoyed those those Indians, yeah, and the old stories they had to tell.

And Uncle Wilf, and that's Mike Manson's son, he was a a pilot in the First World War. He flew the planes and when he came home, the Indians got word that he was home from the Great White War and he said the canoes come rolling up on the beach to talk to him about this Great White War. And Uncle Wilf, he told him about the airplanes and how they would drop bombs and this sort of thing and the old Indians to him, no, no, no, no. He said, white man, no good. He said, I take my, I don't know, sawed-off shotgun he had or something, he says, pow, pow, pow, pow, he says, flatten him the enemy. He'd get them all with his gun. Of course, guns were new to the Indians, the white people had brought these in. But Uncle Will said, no way could you convince them that these planes were destructive. They had nothing against the Indians' gun.

Yeah, but there was great. And of course, a book May got through the library written by Duncan. He'd come out to visit relatives here, and he went up to visit with Grandpa. And he tells in the book about them sitting down to dinner at the table, and all the Manson children. And in came this old tattered Indian and this man was quite taken to see he was invited to join the family at the dinner table. Coming from Scotland I guess this was something shouldn't be done, I don't know, but in the end he said this man, this Indian came especially to hear Duncan play his violin

and he said he heard after he got home that the Indian really missed him with his violin. So he'd won over, the old Indian had won him over I guess.

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So you mentioned that when you were describing the neighbourhood at Manson's, and so you had mentioned up the road. What was the road like?

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It was a wagon road and of course Uncle John had first put it in. It was rough in places, other places was good where there was good gravel, but there were no graders, no road equipment to take care of the road. *Any roads department?* No. Well, Mr. Petznick I think was what they called the road foreman and all he had was a shovel and a wheelbarrow. That was it. So nothing much was done. And I don't know what they'd done when bridges were, bridges were all in when I was there and there was never any replacement done. But they must have had some, oh hired some loggers or something. I guess everyone was so apt and able at anything that came up to do it, the people on the island, they could do all these things. So probably they just hired someone to do this bridging.

How would you get around? Oh, on foot. We walked everywhere. And of course we had a horse and wagon. Occasionally we went, took the wagon. The most I remember using the wagon for was the summertime when Wilf would come up from Vancouver and I'd go up there and hitch that old horse, I'd be about 12 years old, hitch him up to the wagon and him, Hazy and Wilf and I would ride in the wagon up to the Soldier Settlement Board. They had three places that had been developed after the First World War and deserted, but there were orchards left.

So what did you mean by the Soldier Settlement Board? This was a government, it wasn't a gift or some deal they had to set up the returning soldiers after the First World War, and there were three places, there was Hemrick's and Bob Smith's and Quimby's, all in a row there, just where the road turns off the Seaford Road to go to Squirrel Cove, that corner and to south. But there was one big Astrahkan apple tree on this Bob Smith's place, we called it, beautiful apples and they were always ripe in August. So we'd drive the old horse under that apple tree and we'd give the limb a shake and the wagon would be full of these apples. So we'd turn the old horse for home and I'd take the reins and hook over the hames and let him take us home. We'd sit in the back eating apples, telling stories, singing songs, all kinds of wonderful times we had. And the old horse would take us right home. So that was the most the wagon got used for, other than my mum used to use it more. But mostly on foot, go out to get the mail, like we walked right to Manson's Landing, it was three miles. And Hazy and I walked to school, it was a three mile walk.

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To Manson's as well?

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Mm-hmm, to Manson's. *At some point you went to the Seaford School.* Yes, yes. They had a very good teacher at Seaford, and I was in my grade sixth year. So Dad said, you'll go to Seaford

School. So we went two years and then somebody burnt the teacherage down, the little place they lived in, so that ended the Seaford School. But it was three miles.

Was there a story of that? The story of the burning of the Seaford School? It was never given out, no. No one knew who had done it. Probably some kids that didn't want to go to school or something. But anyway, but he was a wonderful teacher and that's where I got my ability to pass the grade 8 government term because then I went back to Manson's, we had a Mr. Pollock and he didn't seem to care about teaching the kids anything. And I know, I remember one day I was stuck on a mathematics problem and I love mathematics, I was quite good at it, but I asked him about this question. He looked at it through his eyes. He put the book down. They won't ask anything like that. So I guess he didn't know how to do it and he just omitted it. But I just drifted through grade 8, but I just managed to pass my grade 8 exam on what I'd taken in grade 7, really, with Mr. Eckert. He was such a really good teacher. And the only teacher on the island that ever taught to grade 9, he would take the first year high school.

So were you at school with some of the same kids when you went to Manson's?

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Did all the Seaford kids then go to Manson's?

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No, no, completely different. At Seaford school there were only the Smiths and the Cowans. Manson's, the Hayes', the Jefferys, Morris', Morris' lived beside Uncle John's place there, there was Ralph Morris, Patsy McLennan, she lived down, who's on their place now? I call it Trader Valley. *Trader Valley?* Trader Valley, because I think there were a lot of wives and husbands trading around the 60s or something, the hippie era. I wonder, Ilman owned it after, it was up and across the road from where Jefferys were in Chris' Lagoon. There's a meadow there and that's where McClennans lived. You had forgotten about them. They moved to Salt Spring Island. Patsy was only about grade four I think when they moved there. Hazy and I, oh and there was Bernadette **Petznick**, the one Petznick girl. There was only about 14 kids in the school, taught from grade 1 to 8.

And we had a Miss Langley as a teacher the years I went, the younger grades there. And she was a good teacher, but she was inclined to have her favorites. And she was deaf, and that was against her, really. But Dolly had a brother, Charlie, and poor Charlie was killed in the woods when he was 21, but he was a comic. Oh gosh, he was full of fun. But Miss Langley would take, you know, offense of some of his doings, and he'd be in trouble with the teacher a lot. But this one day he she called him up to the front and they were to read "The Little Boy Dominique" and it was a French Canadian story about this little boy Dominique. Well, Charlie got the giggles reading this, it was kind of funny, you know. And then something about the old man's pipe made such a smoke up there and it put you through the roof, and Charlie, he'd pass on little comments under, you see, Mrs. Langley was deaf, but he'd have all us kids laughing at the back. And you know, Mrs. Langley ended up laughing until the tears were rolling down her eyes at him

reading that. And Charlie, of course, he'd try to read it, but he burst out into giggles and it was so funny but that was the first time I ever saw her let loose because she was rather strict and stern. You could hear a pin drop in the classroom, she wouldn't have any noise. No they were a lively bunch of kids but everybody got along so well at Manson's school. But Seaford, there was always Jack and his brother Jim. They were always on the aggressive side. And we were scared of them. Yeah. So now they're a great bunch of kids down at Manson's.

Do you remember the stores? Were there stores? The only store we had on the island for years was old Mr. Ewart at Squirrel Cove and he had a thriving business all through the hungry 30s and serviced the fishermen a lot. And there was a lot of boats, you know individual boats, gas boats around, and on a Sunday you couldn't get in his store. They'd all be lined up there and Sunday was the freight day and freight come in. But he was a good old-fashioned type of storekeeper and anybody on the island that had fruit or vegetables, he would take them rather than order them from off-island. Uncle John had a steady market for potatoes with old Mr. Ewart. My mom sold him carrots and parsnips, cabbage, anything she had to sell, he would take them. And that money meant a lot in those days. Just to send an order to Eaton's to get stockings for us kids to go to school or a pair of shoes or something and of course Eaton's was the big mail order place for dry goods. We could send an order out one boat and ten days later it would be back, our order from Eaton's. So that was always a big day when we got a parcel from Eaton's.

Did your mother order your clothing too? Or did she make your clothing? No, she, well a lot of it was hand-down from my Aunt Hazel. Auntie Hazel was a little better off. Uncle Hank was a fish buyer and he seemed to make pretty fair money. And all her clothes, of course she only had the one son.

So this is different from Hazel, your mom's sister then?

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That's right.

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Okay. Who's Hazel?

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Well, no, this Hazel Herrewig was my mom's sister. And Hazel Hansen is my sister. She's named after this Aunt Hazel. So it was Hazel Herrewig. And of course we got all her clothes. But Mom should have been a dressmaker, you know, having taken what she did in her course. But no, she had no sense of dressmaking. And we would wear Auntie Hazel's clothes and put them on. Oh, they just looked fine, they just fit. And of course they'd be hanging on us. We'd go to school in them anyway, it didn't matter. Nobody cared what anybody else wore it seemed. So she kept us well dressed and of course if Auntie Hazel made a trip to Vancouver she would come back with some of the latest in a sweater or oh, and I remember when 1932 this pajama craze was on. Beach pajamas were everything. And this was dress wear. I thought it was quite hideous but she'd come back with a pair of these each to Hazy and I. I wouldn't wear them at first because

they were all kind of loud print you know. Today they would be nothing I guess but in those and they had big sweeping legs they were just like long skirts really.

People would wear them to the beach? Wore them to the dances. Oh the country dances everybody come out in these darn beach pajamas yeah oh they were the real dress of the time. Fashion's crazy isn't it? But it only lasted one season and that was out and it never came back again. Today I guess anything goes, you see all kinds of fashions.

So when you were growing up, do you remember having dreams of who or what you wanted to be or do? Never give it a thought. No, never give it a thought. I just wanted to be on Cortez. I went away to high school to Vancouver. I was there a year. And I was so dreadfully homesick. If I'd have known my way down to Union Boat, I'd have been home. I just, oh, I just couldn't bear. And yet I'd done very well in school. But anyway, the next fall, I told Mom I didn't want to go back to Vancouver. But my Aunt Hazel Herrewig had a very good friend, Ina Hawkins. Now she was Ina Munro from Whaletown, another tragic life that woman had. My grandfather got her a job at Ocean Falls, so they had moved to Ocean Falls. So this Ina wrote down to my Aunt Hazel and she said, Don't let Etta drop her education, you send her up to me. So that's what happened, I went up to Ocean Falls. Well, I had a bit of a struggle there because their school was quite advanced and they were taking French, third-year French, and I hadn't had... well, the teacher tried to give us the basics in French because it started in grade seven with this junior high business, but we'd had just very bit in French. Well, here I fit into that. Oh, they were... all their subjects, they seemed to be quite ahead of what I had had. So I studied, hard. Well it came Christmas time. Dad was out of work, no money, so he wrote up and he said, I think you'll have to come home. He says, I have no money to put toward board. Well, Ina wasn't going to let me go. She didn't need board money. And I says, no dad has sent for me to come home. I'm going home. And of course I was happy I was going home. I was finding the studies really pretty heavy and oh if I could just scrub the floor and do something, give my head a rest. So I went to see the principal and it was Christmas holidays and he was away but I had to see this other guy. And he said you know we are betting that come June you are going to lead your class. Oh god my heart sunk I thought what an obligation I because the kids seem to be quite advanced although I kept up pretty well except with the French. That was the only thing that my marks were failing. Everything else I was passing. But then how did I see this science teach? Science was not one of my favorite subjects. I'd pass it, but I didn't care for it. But he pleaded with me to stay with him. His wife was kind of ailing, and he said that you could help my wife when you have time but he said don't let your studies drop and of course I turned him down I said no my dad has sent for me I was going home. He gave me a pile of this fool's cap paper sheets all on science - you keep up when you get home you study these papers and whatnot of course I never looked at the things. So of course I landed home alright halfway through grade 10 and that's when I went cooking for my dad when he started horse logging with Clarence's uncle and I made, what did I get? Five dollars a month per man so I made fifteen dollars a month cooking. I had no use for money other than Eaton's department store, that's where it would go for new coat or something. But I was just happy, I had no ambition to... and it was too bad really because I think

now when I look back, I did have qualifications to have done something with my life, but I had no ambition. And yet I was full of ambition as far as working, you know, doing things and what not, but I don't know, it just, the channel wasn't there I guess.

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Different kind of ambition.

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I guess. *It seems like you have done a lot with your life.* And the principal, no, not the principal, it was the traveling inspector come around to the schools. And he came to this grade 8 class, and that teacher that I was seeing didn't seem to be much interested in teaching. What does he do with this inspector? He gets me up to the front to sing to the inspector. So I sang. Well, the inspector went to my dad and he says it'll be a mistake if you never have that girl's voice trained. So I had the ability to be a singer, but that didn't interest me a bit. I thought, where do you go to sing? Down to Hollywood? I wasn't going to Hollywood, no way. That passed me by.

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Did you ever sing at the dances?

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No, no, I never sang anywhere other than just to myself. Oh, Clarence's dad, he'd get the guitar out and everybody would sing, and I'd shake my knees to pieces to sing in front of anyone. I did lack self-confidence, you know, I think I was too ready to hide rather than go ahead with anything. But then when we got to Courtenay, I often think I did seem to have some kind of an influence on teenagers. And over our years we had 15 boys stay with us going to school most of them and some Dolly's boys came and stayed with us but I had a heart too. I was very concerned about these kids getting on in their life and whatnot and we'd have some terrific conversations but I was teaching Sunday school which I said to them I do not have the qualifications as a teacher they were appealing for help and I've sent my little girls to Sunday school and I thought well I've got to give something for what I'm taking. Well they started me with a grade two class and I was a teacher but of course they had the little booklets and everything was from the books. It wasn't long till I had a grade 10 class of kids and the people that ran the church and whatnot they couldn't believe it. They said they couldn't remember when they had been able to hold grade 10 kids in Sunday school and they couldn't figure out what, how I could keep them interested and I remember one day and I didn't realize at the time they held an open session and we taught her lessons in the big hall. Everybody was there all the teachers and the whole bit and I kind of think they were assessing what I was giving the kids. Maybe they thought I needed censoring a bit, I don't know. But in the end, of course, our girls had grown and left Sunday School and what not. And Clarence was, well, we were looking for this land at Willow Point. And I was shopping at the Super Valu one day, or it wasn't Super-Valu it's another name, but this lady came up to me and she said she was one of the elders from the church, and she said, we're very interested, she said, in your capabilities. We would like you to go to Naramata for a youth program for, well I suppose it was to give me confidence or something, I don't know anyway, it

was to do with the youth. And I said to her, oh I said that would appeal to me, I would love that, but I said we're just in the throes of moving, and I said it would mean my husband going one way and me going another, and I said I don't think at our stage in life that's the way to go, so of course I passed that up. But I've often thought about it and I thought if that had come to me in younger years, of course when I had children it's not so easy, but I would have loved something like that to deal with. And even yet I think the teenagers today need so much help. They're getting funneled in the wrong directions too easy. But they need organization some way or another, but that's passed me by. I'm too old now to come up with the answer.

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What kind of things did you do when you were a teenager? Well besides cooking, it was a country dances, of course, we never missed a country dance.

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What dances would you go to? Manson's Landing and Squirrel Cove had built a hall by that time and there were dances there and Gorge Harbour. We all, many, a good dance we had at Gorge Harbour. The Read Island boys had formed an orchestra and they were really good. There was five of them. And of course from Heriot Bay came the Krooks [sp?] Orchestra. They were good. They played at Squirrel Cove a lot. But by this time Clarence's dad had given up playing. He was getting older. And that man had played from nine at night till six or seven the next morning, Henry Byers, and his fingers would be bleeding from strumming his, he had a banjo guitar, and so but he had given up the and these other orchestras took over so that was a great thing.

Community affairs; there's always a big summer picnic that was a great thing and a dance after that. Christmas parties were a big thing at the Hall. Rev. Green was the backbone behind those really. But the women would join in with them and they had a big supper and he would bring a picture show and usually Charlie Chaplin and young and old got a bang out of those. And then he would don his Santa Claus suit and sneak in somewhere and other little kids never seemed to... I think I was about 11 years old and I hadn't got wise to until Dolly said to me, don't you know who that is? But I thought it was Santa Claus. He was the best Santa Claus I've ever known. He'd come huffing, puffing in there. And that was a great time. And card parties. They used to have a lot of card parties at the hall. I always enjoyed those, whist usually.

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That's a game?

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Yeah, a card game, a table of four people. And of course, we'd trade tables. The winners would go one way and losers another and you know you'd get around and meet everybody through the evening but oh golly, Hazy and I'd go to those, we weren't very old, we took in those. Of course Dad was a terrific card player and he was a man that had a mind for figures like you wouldn't believe. Nick Manson said in all his years of teaching, and he had become a principal and then a correspondence supervisor, but he said he had never run into anyone that could mentally

handle figures like my dad could. He was just out of his mind. Give him a pencil and paper and he was lost. So cards, that was a big thing with him and we'd learn to play cards pretty young and to play wisely. We didn't trump the other fellow's trick or do silly things, you know, he was a good teacher.

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Did you have a best friend?

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Oh, Dolly was always not far away. Yeah, her and I, weekends when we were in school, we'd spend over the bluffs, hiking through the woods. And, you know, we did a lot together, Dolly and I. She was a spunky girl when she was young.

Was she adventurous? Oh, yes, quite adventurous, yeah. Which she seems to have lost, I think Harold has drowned it. Yeah, we went to a picnic out at Blind Creek, what they call it Cortes Bay, right out on Granite Point there. There was a big picnic out there one summer. Of course, we went by boat across the bay and when it come time to come home, Dolly said, there's no need you and I taking up space in the boat, we can walk around the edge. And then of course we'd come to the trail. Okay, sure, I was with her. Well, we went and followed the beach around until we come to a cliff straight down into the water. Oh, well, we can get up that, she said. So she goes clambering up there and we grab on a piece of salal and it had come out by the root and then all I could see was water below me and I had a terrible fear of water. Oh, I was scared out of my mind. I got up the top and I said, Dolly, we're never going here again. Well, it was nothing. She didn't think anything of it. Bless me if there wasn't another time we did do the same thing again. But that was Dolly. And oh, her mother had these parties at her place. Dolly would have to walk everybody home in the middle of the night, walk miles to take them home and she said to me, one of these dos, now she had to go to Manson's Landing Way with this Mrs. Heavener her name was, where she lived in the old Froud place, an Indian lady. She walked her home. She said to me, you wait till I get back, she says, and I'll walk you home. Now I had to go just by trail from her place around Blind Creek and over the trail to home and it was a long way in the dark and so I did, I waited for her and we got halfway home and then I said (oh gosh I was I was scared) but I said Dolly you don't need to go the rest of the way with me I can go myself because I was feeling guilty about her doing this. So we parted and she went back. But of course, every bush, there's a cougar by the way.

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Did you have a light?

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We had what we called bugs. And that was a candle shoved through a tobacco can or a coffee can with a handle over the top and holes punched in the bottom at the back. You had to have that or else the candle would blow out. It's funny that you just had to keep watching and keep

pushing the candle up as it burned. But that was everybody's light on them trails. We walked miles with those bugs.

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And I guess you made it home okay that night?

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Oh sure, yes, yeah. Yeah, we thought nothing of walking. It just seemed... and Hazy, you know, she was always small. But Clarence's uncle, he was a terrific walker too. He walked with her once and he says, by gosh, she had me beat. And she was just a kid, you know. She was a quick walker. She was a quick walker. Yes, yeah.

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