

Interview of Etta and Clarence Byers by Oonagh O'Connor, 1995

Interview with Etta Byers (cont.)

0:00:00

In the end of life, we have another sense kicks in within our own system. It must be something. I could find no feeling of any outer connection. It was something within myself. But what? I hope someday there will be an answer. I don't know. But I'm a doubting Thomas. Nobody could ever tell me ESP all this sort of stuff. You know this is a mental condition and I guess it is a mental condition somehow or another but yet how was that told to me in advance and to be so accurate. It was quite a mysterious experience really but I worried about that little girl that was born out now you know is she going to be healthy? She was the bounciest happiest little baby baby never needed a mother. The whole world loved her. And when we moved to Courtenay, she was two and a half years old, and a girl came from Courtenay, she used to go to high school. On the weekend, she'd dress that little girl up and take her up to visit the neighbours, and the neighbours stood fascinated, listening to her vocabulary. She had such a command of the English language, you wouldn't believe it, and the words she could say. And of course, my dad, he was fascinated with her. He'd put these words to her, she'd say them right after him. The one he stuck her on was, what was that word, incendiary. It was a great word during the war, these incendiary bombs. And he visited us just about, she was two and a half, and he gave her chrysanthemum, she said that right after him. He says, ha ha, I bet you can't say incendiary. She tried it and she couldn't. Now, that word I'm sure was never spoken again in our house. He went home and he was back the following spring. And the first thing he said when he'd seen her, she went to him and she says, Ha ha, Granpa, I can say incendiary. And she said it right off. But she was... And of course there was friction, you know, with me, because I had rules for the kids and I wanted them to grow up to be accepted in the world to do their part make the world a better place for you being here and this sort of thing. Louise didn't need to listen to a mother, no she didn't need mother, and I'd worry you know. Going out to play she needed a sweater on. No way, she didn't need a sweater, and she.. The other two girls abided by every word I'd say but not Louise, she was on her own. She didn't need me. And it seemed rather a funny state of affairs because that was you know supposed to be her future, all right, she was on her own. But no, she grew up a bouncy girl.

And kind of sounds independent. Very independent, rather domineering. Wonderful grandmother now. She's got two dear little grandkids and one needs special attention, but oh, Louise is absolutely wonderful with her, which amazes me because she always was very impatient with anyone. They walked her road, nobody went off it, you know, or they heard from her. Like the teachers in school, they gave me quite a bit of static too because they just put her up on a pedestal and I didn't like that. It doesn't do to put a child above the rest. But they idolized Louise. And the little brat, she wasn't getting home after school. And I think, now why is she not getting home? I couldn't get an answer. Oh, she's laughing, she's doing things, you know, and I couldn't get an answer. So I finally went to the teacher. Oh, he says, I know you're worried. He says, well, where Louise is concerned you haven't worry in the world. So then I was

annoyed with the teacher. I wasn't satisfied with that. But then finally she said to me one night, she come home laughing, and I said well what are you laughing at? Oh she says, I even got old Edwards out tonight. Well tonight what were you doing? Oh she says, after school I go down in the auditorium and I get the records on and she says, I've been teaching them all to old-time dance. Because we took them to the old time dance and she loved dancing. And here she was, getting those teachers. And of course they were getting the bang out of this, I guess. Oh, she just had them right around her little finger. So she grew up thinking she was kind of important. You know, just give her that attitude, which wasn't good. And it made her marriage hard. She married a guy that was quite strong-minded too. And they really had difficulty, but she won out. Oh, that tongue of hers. And Alan's quite subdued today. Yeah, it's funny. But they'd race each other to the car because they'd get mad and they'd take the car keys so the other fella couldn't have the car. All these kind of stupid things. But she's got a terrific sense of humor. She's really a different kind of a person, but capable, spotlessly clean. She likes to garden, and as I say, a wonderful grandmother, which pleases me. I'm just so glad to see these little kids taken care of. And this is Lorraine, too, my second girl. She's just a wonderful person. She's been at Irene's side through all her problems, just, you know, so wonderful.

0:05:12

How old was your youngest daughter when you moved off, Cortez?

0:05:15

She was just two. Two in the April and we moved in October. She'd be about two and a half.

Were you sad to leave Cortez? Not really. If I'd have moved anywhere to of my choice, I'd have been back to Manson's Landing, I guess. But school for the little kids was important and I was very anxious that I could be with them through their high school years. With me having to be away, I didn't like that ide And I was happy to go where I could get high school for them. But schooling, to me, fell through the drain, their years of schooling, it was dreadful. After the war, everything was dropped and all that seemed to matter was the theatrical. The principal they had, it was the first half of the school term was singing and the second half was dram And I went to him because I said my girls are not singers, they haven't a voice. I said what mother is interested in drama? I said Hollywood is the outcome, who wants their daughters at Hollywood? And I would rather them have a little schooling. Spelling, grammar, these things are going to be more important to them, their arithmetic. And then when they got into high school, I wanted them to take a business course. They weren't interested in nursing or teaching, and I felt their schooling up to that point was lacking. So just at that time, the business school we had in Courtenay closed. The school was teaching some program through the school. But anyway, the older girl, she opted to go to Victoria and take a business course. And she said, Mum, in six months at that business school, I learned more than the ten years I was in school. And I said, well, I quite understand it. So, you know, schooling was kind of a disappointment.

But Louise was the one that I thought was going to make something of herself in the world. She was outgoing, independent, forthgoing and whatnot. She done nothing. She got married and it

was home. Where Irene, the older girl, had had such a struggle with her health, she took the business course. She ended up getting a job at Safeway. It wasn't what she'd trained for, but she got there. And she's worked, she just retired last Christmas from Safeway, which paid her well all the years financially, and she's ended up with a good pension, and made wonderful friends. The Safeway was wonderfully good to her, and especially these last few years here. But she's the one that went ahead when I thought she was the one that was going to have a struggle because of her health. She just had had such a problem. Yes, and of course she was left with her heart affected from the rheumatic fever and she's just had the most terrible things happen to her. But anyway, I said I hope now it's all okay.

0:08:16

I'm worried about taking you over the time.

0:08:18

Oh well, can we just stop a minute and I'll get that on?

Okay, sure. But there's just one thing I realized is that if you're a great-grandmother, then your mother is still alive. Great-great-grandmother, yes, that's right, two greats. And her great-great-granddaughter is 16. It's January, yes. Do you have a photograph of all the different generations together? Yes, I have got one. I put it in that daughter's album. Irene's, well we have her son, that's a great-great-grandmother to them, well to all the daughters she's a great-great-grandmother, they've all got grandchildren. Okay.

You mentioned a character earlier called Cougar Smith, who is he? Cougar Smith was from Quadra Island and he was, like at that time they were paid a bounty for cougars, and I guess he was a government man.

When was that?

0:09:22

1930s.

0:09:23

Because Uncle John Manson ran sheep on Cortes Island, and as soon as the cougar got on the island they headed for his sheep, and he would phone over right away to get Cougar Smith to come over. And he would be there, oh, it's only taking about one day, and he'd track down his cougar. But he always stayed with Auntie Hazel Herrewig. She had room to accommodate him, and they would sit in the evening and talk over these cougar stories. And the thing that always fascinated me was the night he was talking about the danger of cougars, and he said, the average cougar you have no worry of. But he said don't trust a young one or a very old one. He said the young one is like a kitten. They're playful and they will bounce at anything that moves. He said an old one is maybe blind, there may be lost teeth and they're starving. But as far as Cortes was concerned, the cougars that got on there had to swim across Lewis Channel to get there. And as my dad always tried to take the fear out of our minds walking to school, he said

any cougar that gets on Cortes is going to be an able cougar. It's not going to be one that's starving. And he says, you've got nothing to worry about. But on the other hand, it was always in kids' minds, you know, walking the roads. But he was an interesting man. He'd tell us about his dogs. He had one lead dog that trained the others, and he had one little terrier, and he said, that little terrier is the one, he says, I depend on for holding the cougar. Because the others, the hounds and that, they'll tree the cougar, but they won't hold the tree. For that little terrier, he won't give up until Cougar Smith would get there and land that Cougar. He just, yeah. Thanks.

Interview with Clarence Byers

So, Clarence, I'll just take this microphone off and put it...

0:11:18

Okay, you're going to come and sit up here? And answer a few questions.

0:11:20

Oh, I'm not very good at that.

0:11:21

Well, we'll just see what comes up. Do you mind if I put it on your suspenders?

0:11:23

No, no.

0:11:24

You've been out working the sawmill this morning?

0:11:25

Oh, yeah.

I could hear your saw.

0:11:27

Cutting the lumber, yeah.

0:11:28

Have you been logging a long time? Yes.

0:11:32

And you've been logging since you were a kid?

0:11:33

Yes.

0:11:41

I guess since, well, I was about 13, 14 when I first started with my dad and uncle in Von Donop Creek. I don't know. That would be in the 20s. Yeah.

Did they have an operation there?

Yeah, just a little, you know, haywire outfit.

0:12:05

What was your first job? What did you do as your first job?

Oh, I was bucking the logs. They had a falling saw that had got bent on the end, so they cut it off and drilled another hole, put the handle on there, and that was the one I was able to handle that.

So how big was the saw you were using?

It had been a 7'6", but it was down to, oh, I guess 6'6".

Did you hold that yourself?

0:12:31

Yeah, you pull it, you know, back and forth.

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There wasn't another person on the other side?

0:12:33

No, no, no, no. In the woods, they never did that because a lot of times when you were bucking, you had to underbuck, and you used your axe. You drove your axe in, and then the back of the saw as it rode on the axe, and then you ---- because if it started to bind real hard, you had to come up from underneath, and then that would open up and she would ---- and you also had to do that when you ---- if there was an overhang, it was hanging over, you underbuck first, and then be sure and cut on the right side of the cut. When he got down there, it would break right off clean and it wouldn't split your log. They didn't like, the sawmills, didn't like them split in the log.

What were your wages like? Do you remember how much you were making? Oh, no. Not then.

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You worked for the family when you were with your dad. Yeah, yeah. We just sold a boom. But when I worked at Ramsey Arm in about 1934, I got \$2.40 a day bucking wood for a steam donkey, and that was the same as a 7 foot 6 crop. And I was 15 then.

0:13:58

Wow. But then you had to pay board over that.

0:14:01

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it was a dollar fifty for board. The nearest I remember, I used to get about thirty, thirty-four dollars at the end of the month.

0:14:10

Wow. Did you feel like your job was dangerous?

0:14:14

Oh, not really. You never seemed to worry about that. There was, you know, rigging, flying all around. And these steam donkeys in them days, they threw out a lot of sparks when you ---- Gosh, my hat was all full of burnt holes from these sparks because they had what they called exhaust into the stack so it would steam better, and that would ---- *Would it throw off the sparks?* Yeah, it would throw off more sparks. But then when summertime come, they had to put a cap in this pipe, plug in where the exhaust was coming out, so it wouldn't throw the sparks. And then it was harder to steam.

0:15:04

So were there just some months of the year that you could log and others...?

0:15:09

Oh, no. They logged year-round. Year-round. Yeah, yeah. But it was just dangerous in the summer for starting fires. They had to have a man after hours sit on a stump and watch in case there was a fire started after the crew went home.

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Do you ever remember any accidents that occurred around logging?

0:15:35

Not, no other than just our own when Etta's dad got hurt at Seaford when we were logging there. That was the only, yeah. No, I never seen ... it seemed to be pretty good up at that camp at Ramsey Arm.

0:15:50

Do you remember when chainsaws came in?

0:15:53

Yes.

0:15:54

When was that?

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That was about in the early 50s. Yeah, we were falling at Royston and down at Courtenay for Van West.

0:16:09

And that was the first time you started using chainsaws? Right. Yeah. Nothing like today.

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Did it seem like a great invention?

0:16:16

Oh, yes, it did. But some of the others, though, you know, the older type, Swedish and foreign fellows, they weren't for these. I guess they made so much money with the old hand saws, you know. They were always on contract so much.

0:16:32

[Etta: Well, I remember when you were horse-logging, but am I going to interrupt? *No, just a little bit louder so we can hear you.* The first write-ups came out about chainsaws, and your uncle and my dad were talking about them, and Uncle Andrew said, I don't think I want anything to do with those animals. He says, they get away on you and you can't stop them. So they were quite leery of those.]

0:16:57

Oh, yeah, there was a lot. But they're not like the ones today, you know. They were so cantankerous to get going sometimes, to keep them going, you know. But these nowadays, they're a lot better.

0:17:12

So did you horse log? Yes.

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So you've see all the different stages. Yes, right up to the end. We were the last horse loggers on Cortez and the first truck loggers.

So were you involved with the first truck coming to Cortez?

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Yeah.

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Was that your family?

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Yeah. I was the driver.

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How did you know how to drive?

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Oh, we'd learned a bit going to Powell River and getting the odd U-drive and that type of thing,

you know. And I had a Model T, Model T Ford, but then that's different again. No gears on a Model T. You just used your feet.

0:17:51

No gas? Was there a gas engine?

0:17:54

Yes, there was a gas engine, but it was like the automatic transmission today. That's where it arrived from, from the Model T. To go into low gear, you just pressed on this pedal, and it grabbed the band. And then when you wanted higher gear, you just let your foot off. There was only two speeds, low and fast. And 30 mile an hour was fast. That was fast as it would go.

0:18:22

Do you remember when the first car came to Cortes?

0:18:25

Not really. It was my uncle that had it, and it was way early. It was, I think, a 1914 Model T. My uncle Cy. [note: James Cyrus Aldrich]

Do you know how it got there? They brought it up on the Union steamship. Yeah. That's how all the cars got there in them days. Yeah. They just had a sort of a basket that went over the wheels and a spreader out to keep it away from the body. You just pick it up and flung it out and down on the... But my first car I got from Powell River, my first Model T.

You brought it over to Cortes? Yeah, we ran it to Lund and then a friend of mine had a little float there and a fish boat and he towed it to Squirrel Cove for me. And we rolled it off the beach there. How many fun times we had with that thing. And the lights burned out. You had to always have a flashlight, steered with a flashlight, but the roads were nothing like they are today. It took us an hour from Squirrel Cove to go to Manson's.

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[Etta: It was just a rut, and you stayed in the rut, and you didn't get out.]

0:19:47

I remember it was just narrow and dirt roads, you know. Best roads was around when you got close to Manson's Wharf. That was always pretty good up to the hall. Oh yeah, you could really open her up there. It was always fairly smooth, narrow. *Do you remember going to dances?* Oh gosh, yeah, that's still my favorite thing.

Yeah? Still going to dances or that memory?

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No, no. I never like to miss them.

0:20:21

Oh yeah. Yeah.

0:20:23

That was the old time dancing, not the modern.

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Yeah. It's altogether different than the stuff today.

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Did you ever play music at them?

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No, my dad did, but he was a guitar player. It was usually just a fiddle and a guitar until Elmer got on the scene, Elmer Ellingsen, and of course Elmer was our main musician.

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That's in the late years, but then there was the Reed Island Orchestra and the Beresbee
[?]Orchestra

0:20:52

They were both very good. They were about four-piece orchestras. They'd play all night for, I guess, lucky if they got \$50.

0:21:02

[Etta: I don't think they did.]

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You used to take a second collection, just pass the hat around, put in what you could afford. But it was fun, because that was our only recreation, really, was dancing.

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Do you remember?

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[Etta:Basketball games, remember?] Yeah. *Basketball games?* Oh, yeah. Yeah.

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Yeah, Manson's used to play Squirrel Cove. Oh, yeah. It was the two.

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Where would you play?

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Well, they had quite a nice hall at Squirrel Cove. It burned down. Yeah.

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And Manson's Hall.

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since we all used to go over there one week and...

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And you lived in... did you grow up in Squirrel Cove?

0:21:43

Right.

0:21:46

So who were some of the people that were around there when you were growing up?

Oh, the Forrests.

0:21:49

Oh, yeah. They were the postmaster, Forrests. And then Mr. Ewart, Mr. and Mrs. Ewart had the store where Reedel's are now. And a hotel. Well, yeah, they used to keep boarders there.

0:22:05

And the Jardines were your neighbors?

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Yes, Jardines were neighbors. Mr. Harry Middleton, the machinist, and Val Nichols, the boat builder, both very good at their jobs. Oh, yeah. Yeah. And who else was around, all the Morrisons.

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Were the Cowans there?

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Yes, Cowans.

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When did your family go to Squirrel Cove?

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I guess it was around - we went up to Cortes in 1916. I was four months old. We went there, but it wasn't...

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[Etta: You lived at Seaford for a while.]

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Yeah. That would be... I was five years old when we lived at Seaford, so it'd be about 21, 22. And

then we moved to Squirrel Cove around 23. My dad built a road up to, you know where Mr. Stitch lives now? Well, that was our place.

0:23:13

Oh, really?

0:23:14

Yeah. And the school was just on the corner there then because there was people coming from what we call Barrett Lake. It's Blue Jay Lake now. That was Barrett.

Were the Barretts living there then? Yes.

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And the Taits. That was the son-in-law. He was a head, he was a fishery guardian.

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Do you remember when the Hucks were there?

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Yes. Yeah. They were just about left, I guess, when I first ---- See, to me there was one they called Ood. Ood, I don't know, was the nickname. And he was one of the younger ones.

0:23:52

Oh, one of the younger Hucks?

0:23:54

Yeah. Yeah. But I don't know too much about the Hucks, no.

0:23:59

Do you remember stories about any of these other people that catches their character?

[Etta: Well, Jardine down at Ewart's store.]

0:24:08

Oh, yeah. He was a Scotch fellow. He was a bit of a character. He liked to pull a little bit of fun, you know.

0:24:16

Jardine did?

0:24:17

Yes.

0:24:19

And he was [indistinguishable]? Oh, yeah. He'd go down, and the old Mr. Ewart that ran the store was very deaf. He had to hold his hand. So you had to holler quite loud. And then his wife was in the back. She'd always hear what was going on. She was kind of nosy, you know. And so

they'd say to her, I'm a little short, George. I need a loan today. Oh, we're not, she'd holler from the back, we're not loaning any money out today. Just because he had a bit of money.

Did he do it just to get her going? Oh, yes, yeah. But he was a great old guy. You know, he helped everybody. You know, it was credit for the hand loggers. Yeah, a wonderful storekeeper. And he'd buy stuff from the people. You know, my dad used to have extra cabbage he'd take down, anything that he had extra in the garden, you know.

0:25:16

Did your family have a big farm or a big garden?

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Yes, it was quite good there because at Stitches it was swampy land, you know. Yeah, it's a lot different than it is today. They had more ground cleared. They don't seem to do much with it there now. No.

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[Etta: and the front was roses over the archway, sweet peas down...; it was quite pretty.]

0:25:38

Yeah.

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Just all going left now.

0:25:41

Were any of the original houses there? There's quite a few houses on that property.

None of them were there. Ours burned down after we left, somebody... it was burned down. It was quite a big frame lumber house. [Etta: It was the only house there.] Yeah. Other than the school. And then Jardines or Proctors lived right by the school going to Von Donop, that road. And then there was an old fellow that lived just below us on the Gorge, going to the Gorge Harbor-way. I thought the name was Joe Monroe.

0:26:19

He lived there when my dad ...well, he'd come up. He didn't seem to be there steady. He'd come up. And he had a little log cabin that we lived in for a while. It was down just not far, down right off where the Gorge road is now. I think you can still see odd bits of it.

Of the house?

The log cabin. It was cedar poles about so big around on end. And we lived in there for quite a while when my dad built the house. This Mr. Ewart, he was a carpenter, too, and he helped my dad build this house.

0:26:54

How many children were there in your family?

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Three. There was two older sisters and myself. My one sister lives in Campbell River, and the other one passed away when she was only in her 50s. She lived in Powell River. Yeah. So that was...

0:27:17

So you must have gone to school in the Squirrel Cove school?

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Yeah. I started at Seaford when I was five to open the school. It was a nice log school there. And I believe the government still holds that property. Have you been up that...

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I've been up the Seaford Road, but I don't know...

0:27:34

Up that hill. You know, that steep hill that goes to what we used to call Jim's Bay, Butler's Bay. And I think there's an American lives out there now, Tornby. *Yeah.*

0:27:49

[unintelligible]

0:27:51

Yeah, and I went two years, I think it was, to that log school to open it. I went to open it, but I didn't learn anything the first year.

0:28:00

So they didn't have enough students?

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Yeah, they had to have ten, I think it was, in them days. Yeah. But then it got quite big, the Seaford School, after the Hayes girls. And Hazel went there after I left, the Calwell boys. Yeah.

0:28:17

So was the Reserve there?

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Yes. Yes.

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Did you ever go there?

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Well, no. We used to walk through, but they didn't like you to walk through, you know, because they had a sign on Ewart's store that you weren't to go through before sunrise or after sundown. Yeah, you see. And some of the old ladies, they'd tell you to go back. But when we were living in Von Donop Creek, that was the easy way to go, you know. And if the...we had a boat at the head of the cove, but it was hard to...if the tide was out, you couldn't get it. It was flat beaches in there. So we'd walk along the beach and go through the Indian Reserve to go to Squirrel Cove store and the machine shop. Yeah.

0:29:08

So did you ever, did you meet some of the people who lived on the reserve?

0:29:14

Oh, yeah. I used to know pretty near all of them. *Oh, yeah?* Yeah. I went to school with them.

0:29:20

Some of them went to school. But not too many. The only ones that really went, well, Jimmy Pielle did go for a while, but he was the only one that went when I was there. And the Seville or Seabolt, as we called them, and that was their ---- they changed it to Seville. And I went with all of them, but all but the young ones, I went to school with them. Yeah. I don't think there's anything of them left around Squirrel Cove, no. Sarah ran the post office. She was a Forrest.

0:29:57

So were the Forrest boys your age?

0:30:02

No, they were older than me. Yeah, yes. Yeah, there was Burke [Bert??] was the oldest and then Doug, Laurie.

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Did you know them very well?

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Oh, yes, and Margaret. Margaret, she married a Morrison. The Morrisons. He was our fiddle player.

0:30:20

Oh, yeah.

0:30:21

Yeah. And she still lives in Victoria with her daughter. She was the youngest. But Laurie, he was very sick when he was younger. He had that rheumatic fever when he spent months in bed. I can remember that when I was about seven or eight.

0:30:41

Did you get any of those sicknesses?

0:30:44

No.

0:30:45

That were around then?

0:30:46

Well, no. I had measles and chicken pox. That's the only thing. Maybe. I don't know if I had whooping cough or not, some of them coughs going around. But that's about all, I guess. And I don't know what else.

0:31:07

So you went to grade 8? Is that what you were doing?

0:31:09

Yeah, yeah. I just started grade 8, and that was the end of my school.

0:31:13

And then you began learning in the woods?

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Yeah, yeah. Another interesting place I worked was Teakerne Arm, and during the war, the start of the war, they were hauling them big spruce down from Queen Charlotte's, and they had a big saw that split them in half, and if the ones were too big, you had to quarter them. It was quite an interesting job. It was a big steam saw, and it went this way.

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