

Transcription of recorded interview with Emilie Hansen by Bernice McGowan and Jill Milton, November 21, 2022, with Jan Hansen joining at the end.

Collateral information inserted in italics

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Bernice: Okay, so it is November, we decided it was the 21st, 2022 and we are here with Emilie Hansen and she's going to tell us about her time here on Cortez and how she got here and everything. So maybe you could introduce yourself?

Emilie: I'm Emilie Hansen and I came to Cortez in 1961 and I have lived in many places but I'll tell a little bit more about that. I came to Canada in 1958 at age 19 and I had just been married to Gunnar and we decided to immigrate to Canada and we were living in Vancouver and it was a mighty hard find work because there was absolutely not too many who wanted to have a person who couldn't speak good English. So we learned that as well after we came and then we met various people in Vancouver including Finn Jensen who was about the same age as us and we got introduced to his wife and then we got to know each other quite well and Finn Jensen was of Danish extraction and Doreen (?) was Canadian. There was a boatyard for sale in Squirrel Cove. Finn was the one that came with that announcement and so Gunnar says "Squirrel Cove, where the heck is that?"

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So then, that was the first April in 1961 and we actually moved here one month later but we had bought the boatyard and it was for sale at that time for \$5,000.

Bernice: This was from the Nichols family.

Yes, the Nichols family. Then we moved up with everything. We came over Powell River and we got a barge and it took us into Cortez Bay.

Bernice: and you bought this sight unseen?

No we had been here, we had been here once on the first April and then we got snowed in so we had to stay overnight. But the funny part, I think that's actually what sold us on it because it was very cosy sitting in front of a fireplace. And so anyway, we were there a month later.

Bernice: Can I just go back a little bit? You and Gunnar were both born in Denmark?

Emilie: Yeah

Bernice: And neither of you spoke English when you came to Canada?

I did not but Gunnar had a little bit and so that was kind of hard.

Bernice : You were very adventurous!

I guess you could say that but it was mostly Gunnar, I must admit, because of course I wanted to go where he went so when he came.

0:03:44

Bernice: And was Jan born in Denmark or was he born here?

Emilie: No he was born here a year after, a good year after we came. And, oh boy, I don't know if I should tell about Jan because he had a tough beginning. He was born with diaphragmatic hernia and so he had to have an operation when he was six weeks old and he was very very ill but he pulled through it anyway.

Bernice: It must have been very scary from here- (note: Jan was actually born in Vancouver before they moved here).

Emilie: It was very scary especially when I couldn't speak English very well to the doctors. But I did have a friend who was speaking English well and so she would go with me when I had to go and see the doctor.

Bernice: I think you said that maybe you bought the Middletons place as well or you're friends did?

Emilie: No we rented the Middletons.

0:04:56

There'd been a machine shop there. So Gunnar rented that after a while but that was not till after we've been at the Nichols place for a year and then we decided to pull out because there was not enough business for two families. So then we moved out but Gunnar was still working in that shop.

Bernice: So Gunnar was a machinist?

Yeah. He was trained in Denmark. That was why I guess it was not very hard for him to come over here because he was a skilled worker.

Bernice: So he came with a trade but it was still hard to find work.

0:05:40

Yeah. It was. And then we moved from the Nichols place to Ken Hansen's old farmhouse and we lived there. We moved there in, let's see now that would be 62.

Bernice: So which place was that?

That's down by the garden.

Bernice: at Linnaea?

Yeah. And we moved up here with both Jan and Evan. Evan was born also in Vancouver. And then in 1962, Bettyann was born. And of course in those days you went over to Campbell River and stayed for a while. But that didn't happen because we had been down to Vancouver to unsign the papers.

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..... from the Nichols place and on the way up, then I was starting to feel a bit. Hmmmm. But she was not due for a whole month. So I thought I would have been okay traveling down there. Then we get on the water taxi and it goes like...Probably helped bring it on. So then I went in the water taxi and Dr. Hall came along with the water taxi of fellow because he didn't want to come on his own. And so luckily the weather was not too serious. So we went in the water taxi to Campbell River and we got in to Campbell River at midnight. And then Bettyann was born at 5 in the morning.

Bernice: Oh my goodness! Wow. Yeah, I think there was probably lots of those kinds of stories, you know, of women having adventurous boat rides.

0:07:45

Yeah, great. And then after that, well, we lived in Ken Hanson's place for a while but we were really, really poor. There was absolutely no money around. But then at the head of the Gorge where Ben Fulton lives, there was a store at the time and that was taken over by three guys from Vancouver and they needed someone to work there. And so Gunnar got a job at the store there, but there was also a little shop next to it. So that was mostly where he was working.

Bernice: Is that the building that was the store, like when I came in the 70s, it was called the store but it wasn't a store anymore? No. So was that building? Yeah, it was that building. And it burned down several years ago.

0:08:47

Jill: Maybe in the 90s.

Bernice: Yeah, I think when Bailey's were there. Okay. So you lived there? I didn't know about that one.

Emilie: So there were actually several houses there at the time and there was the house that Ian Disney now lives in, that was down there and we actually lived in that.

0:09:15

Bernice: it was on the same side of the creek as Fulton's house.?

Yeah. It was actually next to that one that Linda (Cartland) was in. That's where it was.

Bernice: Oh, I think I had heard that.

And of course the house down in front of the store, that was where Hal Baker lived and he was the storekeeper. Gunnar wasn't the storekeeper but he worked there. And anyway, let's see now. Then, yeah, that house is actually Freddy and Sandra Reedel's house now in Whaletown.

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Bernice: It's so interesting to know where all these houses came and went. You know, they were towed in here and towed in there.

And so we were there in that place for about, let's see now, for about two or three years. And then we decided that, well, that was our dream all along, you know, to have our own place. And then the Fred Smith place in Whaletown, which is now where, where...

Bernice: Is that at Thiel's place across? (from my house)

Emilie: And it was Fred Smith's. It was sort of just abandoned and so it was sort of an all gone old place.

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It was owned by two old ladies, Thornton and Kendrick.

Bernice: Oh, they owned that one as well?

Emilie: They owned that one because Fred Smith had willed it to them. And so then we looked at that old place and Gunnar figured he could do something about it. So we went up and asked if we could buy it off them. And they said sure. So then we would ask you, of course, what would a place would be. And they said, oh, \$1,500. So that gave us almost four acres and a dilapidated house.

Bernice: So that was that little log cabin-y house that Bill and Alice Thiel lived in?

0:12:09

Jill: No, that was Gypsy Hill.

Bernice: So that wasn't the house that you lived in?

Yes, we lived in the one that Thiel was in, we actually renovated it.

Jill: So you lived there.

Emilie: Yeah, right. So we lived there.

Bernice: But there was another house...

Emilie: Not on that property, though. No, there was one down further.

0:12:41

Where that house... I don't know who lived there, but you probably do. No, the one on the same side as Thiel's, but just a little beyond.

Bernice: Oh, right. That was Summer's place, Pat Robertson's daughter.

Emilie: Oh, no, that was on the other side.

Jill: Vicki and somebody from Vancouver, own it now, it was... Clem Bournazel, I think, lived there.

Bernice: But originally..

Emilie: No, that's in the one that Trude used to live in. That's where Clem....

Jill: No, she did used to live in that one also.

0:13:19

Emilie: Oh, did she?

Jill: But she also lived in that other one that kind of has a double driveway. And then, Fred Smith's place is just down the hill from that a bit in the swamp.

Bernice: That house was, before Clem Bournazel had it, I think it was was Ken and Lynn Summers place when they first got married.

Emilie: well, they lived to the left of us sort of across from Dunc and Pat...

Bernice: Anyway. So you lived where Bill and Alice lived...

(they are discussing the property 700 Whaletown Rd (Summers/ Bournazel). The property they originally bought is 640 Whaletown Rd. Fred Smith bought this from Mrs Ballantyne and lived there in his later years and left it to the Kendrick/Thornton sisters in his will)

0:14:00

Jill: So you were in Fred Smith's place. You bought that.

Emilie: Yeah. So when we got there, so then we said to the old ladies, because I'm sure they knew that we were poor. So, you know, Gunnar says, "so how much for cash?" And they said "a thousand." Oh. So we bought it for a thousand dollars. Of course, we went to the Credit Union and then got short loan. And then once we were down there at the Fred Smith place, Gunnar had in the meantime, gotten a job out with Teakerne Arm. And he was working on the booms first. But then when they found out he's a machinist and they asked him to come and work in the shop, which he did.

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And actually, he stayed with them from 1962 to 1970 in Teakearne. And he actually ended up being the shop foreman for a number of years. And that got us on our feet financially.

Bernice: A regular job.

Emilie: Yeah. Yeah.

Bernice: So would he go away for a period of time or were they going every day?

Emilie: In the beginning, he went every day when he was working on the Boom. But once he was in the shop and he was in management, you might say. Then he had to stay in camp during the week. He would come home on the weekends. And he would also come home on Wednesday. So he was not gone totally.

Bernice: So you were here with the three children.

Emilie: Yeah.

0:16:02

That was the way. But it was great. Like I say, we got on our feet. And in the meantime, yeah, I forgot that. In the meantime, my dad had taken out an insurance for me. And then he sent the money over and that was the big sum of \$300. And then I said to Gunnar, you know, we're going to have to put that into property. So we did. And that was about the same time as the Smith place. We had bought the place opposite you on Bodington Road on that side.

Bernice: On the other side from us. *(Bernice lives at 1387 Bodington Rd)*

0:16:50

Bernice: So Bodington Road was there at that point.

Emilie: No. Because we put that in. And Elmer Ellingsen. Because we had the \$300 that we put down and Elmer Ellingsen lent us the rest. And first off, we were wanting to live down there and build down there. But we couldn't find water on it.

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And that was how we ended up with the other place because there was a well on it. And so anyway, we were there for what? Four years in the Smith place. And then my mom and dad had come out from Denmark and visited us while we were there. And then we decided, well, we don't need two places. So we put that up for sale. Well, we bought it for \$1,800 and so we thought we could maybe, at that point, get \$5,000 for it.

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But, my dad was a bit of a wheeler dealer himself. So he always, you know, asked quite a bit more. So that you could, always go down a little bit. So Gunnar was in camp and these people came and asked if this place for sale. And I said, yes. And she says, how much? So I said \$10,000. Okay, when can we sign the papers?

Bernice: Good for you.

Emilie: So that was quite lovely. And then we decided that...

Bernice: So who was that that you sold that place to?

0:19:13

It was the woman with the parrot.

Bernice & Jill: Oh, this is Mary Ann

Emilie: Mary Ann. Yes Dennis and Mary Ann Pierce. Right. Now what happened after that? Oh, yeah. So then we had this lump sum money. And we had been in Canada for 12 years.

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And we, at that point, decided that we wanted to take a trip to Denmark. So we did, kids and all. That was in 1969. And we had bought the place here (*591 Potlatch Rd*) and Mike Talbot was building us a basement.

Bernice: Oh, you bought the house right here that you are in now, which is on Potlatch. What is your number on Potlatch?

Emilie: Five, nine, one. So we had bought that.

0:20:20

We bought this place and we had also taken a trip to Denmark. That sort of happened at the same time. And then Mike was building the basement. And so then when we came back from Denmark, guys, I thought that we were going to get started on building a house. I was so keen! But Gunnar says, "no, that'll have to wait until next year. I can't do it in the winter and also work in Teakerne." In the meantime, then up in Teakerne they had a new boss. And him and Gunnar didn't get along. So then, then he quit. And I thought, holy doodle, what do we do now? There's no money coming in. And so then Gunnar and Bruce Ellingsen got together and started a sawmill.

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And at one time, we had just moved into it. And Gunnar says, I think we're going to have to sell. I, of course, did not want to sell. And anyhow, with Elmer and Bruce's partnership, you might say, well, Elmer was funding it, they bought the sawmill. And then they worked really hard at it and cut lumber for people. And then after awhile, people said, "well, maybe could you build us a house too?" Not that they ever had done that any of them.

Bernice: an island tradition

Emilie: But they went ahead and built, several houses on the island here. Yeah. Now what happened after that?

Bernice: So you were living here by then?

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Yeah, and of course, the kids were getting older and going to high school and in Campbell River. And we didn't board them over there. We rented them a basement suite. And they looked after themselves and cooked their own food and everything. But it was actually a good training for them because they had to budget and live within their means. So yeah, they did that. ...

Bernice: Okay. So what year are we at?

Emilie: And now we are approximately... Well, the first one that went to Campbell River was actually Evan. Jan, he decided to quit school at grade 10. And so then he went to Denmark.

Bernice: Because the school here went through grade 10 and he just decided to stop and then he went to Denmark?

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He did, for a year and a half and then he came back and then he actually did upgrading and took his grade 12 at North Island College. But Evan was the first to move over to Campbell River and live in the basement suite and look after himself. And he graduated and BettyAnn did the same thing. Well, then of course you know, the kids are grown up and left home. What do I do?

Jill: About what year was that?

It would be in the 1980s. Then Betty Ann was finished.

Bernice: So you were bored?

Yeah, I thought, well, what do I do? So then there was a group of parents on the island who thought that they should have a preschool. And so they asked me what I thought of running it. So I said yes to it. Not knowing one bit about running a preschool.

Bernice: Oh, you didn't actually do like a course or something

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So what I did at the same time that I started the preschool, I also took a course at the North Island college. So I went to Campbell River twice a week full days and one day actually stayed over. And so then I came back and then as soon as I was back then I was doing preschool.

Bernice: This was in the hall?

Emilie: No, this was at... Well, we called the O'Donnell Place. That's where Fred Savage lives now.

Bernice: Oh, over by Linnaea.

Emilie: There was a little house there. But not the one that's there now though. And so that was the preschool which I started in 1978, I believe it was.

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And then... So in 1980 the Manson's Hall got renovated. And then they were making provision for the preschool. And so I got the job of, shall we say, furnishing the preschool and we got a \$10,000 grant from the Vancouver Foundation to do it with. That was a lot of fun and then there was, of course, some small furniture that had to be built. So Gunnar, being handy that way, when he built them all.

Bernice: So he built all those little tables and chairs? They're probably still there.

Emilie: The table I'm sure is.

Bernice: So how long did you do that for?

Emilie: So I did the preschool from 1978 to 1988. You know, I think I'm wrong there, because I did preschool for 12 years. So that would, I would have started in 1976 that would have been when it was...

Bernice: And you retired in '88?

Emilie: Yeah, I retired in 1988.

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And just prior to retiring in 1988, well I'm not quite done yet. So then I took the home support course.

Bernice: Oh right, I forgot that you had done that.

Emilie: So I did that in 1988 and it was taught by Joan Goring. It was about 10 of us doing it. And so I did that. I worked as a home support worker from 88 to 92. And at that point we had decided to do a business on my own. So I started a B&B, a bed and breakfast. And that carried on from... I guess it would have been 91 or something like that. And that carried on till 2005. And then we retired.

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Bernice: But did you really retire? You were the hall janitors in there somewhere too.

Emilie: Oh gosh, yeah. Now we were too, that's right. I forgot about that. We did that for quite a number of years. When did that start? It was not that long after the... After the hall was built that we took that on.

Bernice: Oh after the renovation.

Emilie: Yeah after the renovation. The year escapes me. But anyway, we carried on with that till...I would think it was in the early 2000s that we finished with that.

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We retired from that. And then just carried on with the bed and breakfast till 2005.

Bernice: And so did you ever go back to Denmark again?

Emilie: Yeah, we did several times. And so Jan, at one point, after... He'd been over there for year and a half and then he came back. And then he decided he wanted to go over there and take the machinist training. So he was over there in 79. So we went over that time. First off, we went in 69. Then we went again in 74. And then we went in 79. And then we went back to Denmark in 85. And then Gunnar said that was enough. He didn't want to go anymore.

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But I went for my mother's 95th birthday in 1983. No, 85th birthday? And then... So then we didn't go back to Denmark after that. But well, and then...Gunnar got ill in the first time in 2011. He had a heart attack. And my sisters, two sisters were visiting at the time. And he was feeling really lousy. And so Mary Jo were here at that point. And she came and looked and said, let's go up to the clinic. So she realized that he was having a heart attack. She called the air ambulance, which were able to come right away and pick him up.

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So he was flown to Victoria. And he was on the operating table at the quarter past two. And he had just, you know, taken off from here. I think it was about 10:30. He was lucky. So he had a couple of stents put in. And then in 2013, then he had a bowel obstruction. And so he got into the hospital in Campbell River and then they found that he had cancer of one kidney. So then he had to have that operated. They just removed it, that was all they did.

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That was in 2013. And then things were, yeah, going to worsen. After the heart attack, he was never really that healthy after that. And he died in 2017.

Bernice: Well, you've had a very varied life here on Cortes. And now you have, Jan lives close by.

Emilie: Jan lives close by and Evan decided this year that he was done with living in the city. So his dream has always been to come up here and develop this place. He's a professional landscape gardener for 25 years.

Bernice: So he's here doing that.

Emilie: And also he wants to build a cabin up here at the top of the road, on the other side of the garden, so the garden has to be moved down.

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That's why we're doing all this work.

Bernice: Oh right, you've ripped out the blackberries and taken out the giant rock. So do you still have your coffee mornings for the people on the road? You have a very active little mini community down here.

Emilie: Yeah. No, actually that in a way started because when Gunnar got kind of ill, then he couldn't get out and around. So then we invited our neighbors to come and have coffee. So we did that probably for a couple of years. And then everybody decided that okay, we better all be part of it. So that's why it's switched now so that we go around to everybody's house, but we still do it every Tuesday.

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Bernice: So you're not always here?

Emilie: No, it's not always here. It's not always here, but it was here continuously for, I would say, about two years.

Bernice: Right, because Gunnar wasn't able to get out.

Emilie: And then also, that's one thing I didn't mention, and that was more or less the same group as the coffee group. We used to have a supper club. And so that was five, let's see, there was Ed Piggott and that was ourselves, Del and Art, and Julia and Marcel, and also across the street was, Jan and Frank Curtis. So we had a supper club and that ran for a long time.

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And then they came to an end. And then I guess we sort started out with the coffee group after that. And you just want to be together again.

Bernice: Where did you buy this property from?

That was from Jimmy Christensen. And he was one of the original owners of it, when this place was subdivided in 61. He bought it at that time. And they were here up till 68. They lived in a little tiny house, up there where the garden area, is now. And his brother, Robert, he still owns a lot over here.

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Bernice: Oh, between you and Piggott's? I didn't realize that there was one there.

Emilie: But he's never lived in the house there, and it's just a shell. But he still owns it. From how I understand this, it's going to be up for sale one of these days because he's now so old that he needs to go into a home, so they need some money for that.

Bernice: Did you have any questions, Jill?

Jill: Yeah, just to go back to when you had the Fred Smith place.

0:36:50

Jill: Where were you living there? Were you living actually on the out property? Or were you living where Alice and Bill Thiel lived?

Well, that's actually the house that we owned.

Jill: Oh, you owned that house? Yeah. Oh, and that was part of that property.

Emilie: That was the Fred Smith property.

Jill: Oh, because I always thought that the Fred Smith property, well, he had quite a big chunk.

Emilie: Did he?

Jill: But I thought it was where you go into the gravel pit now, and it says Jimmy Smith Way,

Bernice: which is supposed to be Fred Smith

Jill: But there's a place like when you go down the road, if you're going towards Manson's, from the place you were living, where the Thiel's were, Ballantyne's place, Gypsy Hill.

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And then there's an 80 acre parcel that comes down to the road. And then after that was Summers, and then after that was Fred Smith's place. And that's where the old homestead was in there. Like it goes into, there's a big swamp. That's at the back of the 80 acres. (*SECTION 33, SAYWARD LAND DISTRICT, CORTES ISLAND E 1/2 OF SW 1/4*)

Bernice: I wonder if it ran all the way in behind there, all the way back to... But when did Mrs.... Was it Ballantyne's or Mrs. Corneille? Yeah, Ballantyne's. Yeah.

Jill: And she bought that place in the 30s.

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Emilie: Well, Fred Smith had died sometime before we bought it.

Jill: He died sometime in the 50's.

Bernice: and left it to...

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Emilie: to Kendrick and Thornton.

Jill: I'm still confused now.

Emilie: The 80 acres you're talking about, Jan, do you know anything about that?

Jan Hansen: No. I do remember when we lived there as kids we used to go in the property there. Past that driveway, past Ken and Lynn's, and it had grapevines. And we used to pick the grapes. And there was kind of a small

Jill: There was grapevines, and there was like an old pear tree and when I moved here, it still had pears. And then there were the remains of an old chicken coop and picket fence, like a bunch of fallen-down buildings near that big swamp.

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Jill: And in the woods was like a two-story root cellar and then his cabin was closer to the road but it had burned down.

Bernice: I think that like the road didn't, the road definitely in that area didn't follow the property lines. Our place, a piece of it was across the road and the place you had, a piece of it was across the road. Like that little pull out there is actually part of that property. And so Mrs. Robertson would have given that little piece which was across what's now the road but

there wasn't a road at that point. Well there was when you lived there, but before then there wasn't so they put the road through the properties. So maybe that's why his place was actually kind of behind?

(see above for clarification on this discussion)

Jill: What was the road system like when you first moved here?

Emilie: Well pretty well the same, I would say, as it is now.

Bernice: so the cutoff road was there between Linnaea and the Y?

Emilie: Yeah that was here. Yeah no it was it's pretty well the same I would say.

Bernice: So shall we maybe finish? Do you have anything you want to say Jan?

Jan: No

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