

Growing Up in Tod Inlet

Told by Joyce Carrier Jacobsen

Having been born in Saanich and having lived on Keating Cross Road to the age of two and then at Tod Inlet until 1946, this area really is home.

In the 20s and 30s everything moved at a slower pace and our lives were very different. Very few people drove cars and all young people walked a lot more than they do today – or rode bikes if they had one. But we really had a marvellous childhood and teenage years.

Our family was lucky, we did have a car and both mother and father drove it. It's usual use was its weekly trip to Victoria on Saturday. The whole family would dress up for town. When we got there Dad would go his way and do his banking, and men's things, while the rest of us shopped for anything we needed. We always met Dad on the Mezzanine Floor of the Hudson Bay Store (Mezzanine is not there now) and, after talking it over, went to lunch somewhere. After lunch we all went to the movie matinee and after the movie we stopped at Jack Cross's Meat Market to buy the usual sausages for Saturday supper.

We lived in the Manager's house on Tod Inlet. We had a wharf, a row boat, a tennis court – what more could one want? Living on Tod Inlet we had to learn to swim – a must for children. Every weekday when warm enough, our mothers went down to the water with us until we learned to swim, and then for at least another year after that. But soon all the children in Tod Inlet became proficient swimmers and, of course, the older ones naturally looked after and kept track of the younger ones when necessary. So in the summer holidays, approximately one hour after lunch – in the old days you had to wait one hour after eating before you could go swimming – we would all troop down to what we called “the little wharf” where we would dive in, jump in, and swim until we decided it was time to dry off. We would then head for the unused bunk house veranda (this bunk house was from a period before Bamberton existed and when the Mill was on Tod Inlet and the now Butchart Sunken Garden was the quarry for the cement plant) and we would sit there and talk and dry off in the sun. Sun rays were not the same in those days – a lot less of the bad rays getting through. We would do this three or four times every afternoon. We quite often frightened any grown ups who may have been present as we would dive in and swim – underwater – right out to a big boathouse, go under it and come up inside it. But they got used to us doing it if they happened to see us.

If we got tired of this are of the Inlet, we would troop down to what we called “the big wharf” where we would do pile dives and in the deeper water until time to go home. We spent from 1:30 to 5:30 pm there nearly every weekday during our summer holidays.

Mind you, all was not always swimming. We also loved to fish off the big wharf – named such because it was high off the water and deep enough to accommodate the B.C. Cement Company's two ocean going freighters, the Shean and the Island King. I have had many trips from Tod Inlet to Coal Harbour, Vancouver on the Island King to see ex-

Tod Inleters who were then living in Vancouver. Re the fishing which is what I started out with in this paragraph, oh what fun. We would get mussels off the wharf pilings and put them on a hook to catch a minnow or perch. We would then put the minnows on a bigger hook to catch a cod. There were lots of rock cod and ling cod in the Inlet in these days. We usually ate the ling cod but used to sell the perch and rock cod to the Chinese community who lived in the Inlet and who worked at Butchart Gardens or the Mill. We sold the fish for 5¢ to 15¢ each.

One year Tod Inlet was truly full of herring. It was an odd year I remember because many many large salmon also came into the Inlet, more than usual. That year for two weeks both my brother and I were home from school because I had chicken pox – and in those days families were quarantined. So, Dad made us two, what we called, “rakes.” A rake is a long 2” x 2” x 8’ board with nails sticking out of the top foot and a half of it. We got in our row boat and out we went to where the herring were massed and, holding the bottom end of our stick, raked through the herring until we had enough for supper and then rowed home again. Fresh herring are very good to eat and guessing who would get the soft roe¹ and who would get the hard roe kept our supper lively.

There were lots of clams in the Inlet but I really did not like digging them up for chowder (which my father really liked) because they kept on squirting [after] every step you took. A gentleman who had a yacht moored in the Inlet planted an oyster bed at the entrance to a creek we called Jaylorn – we named this creek after my friend Lorna Pugh and myself (Jayce), hence Jaylorn. The oyster thrives and sometimes at low tide, which was usually around one AM, we would row over to the bed and get a few oysters to eat, leaving plenty to multiply. My brother liked them fried in butter and on toast. I am told that a few of these oysters have survived but have now moved to the entrance to Tod Inlet.

Besides swimming and fishing we had tennis and badminton. Many people of the community got together and made enough money to build the “Bretwood Community Hall” which was for badminton and basketball. Before the building of this hall we had been allowed to play badminton on a court made in one of the old buildings at Tod Inlet and later on a court which had been set up in the B.C. Electric plant on Brentwood Bay. (We played amongst the turbines). We were introduced to badminton in our early teens and at ages 14 or 15 were playing a pretty good game. When the Brentwood Hall was finished, we had three of the best badminton courts on the Island and we made good use of them. We played as often as we could, usually three evenings a week. Badminton in winter and swimming and tennis in summer made sure we kept in good physical condition. I will come to tennis later. But before, must say that our badminton club played in leagues with Victoria, Duncan and Nanaimo and that our players won many trophies. One year, at one tournament, I believe we took them all.

Now to tennis. Many people in those days had tennis courts and we were lucky enough to have our own at Tod Inlet. At first we had a grass court which was lovely but took a lot of upkeep, so Dad got together with the head of B.C. Cement Co. who wanted the weedless sod for his lawn in Victoria. In return he gave Dad the clay to make a clay

¹ Roe: fish eggs

court. That worked out well and we then had a red brickdust clay court just like the ones used for the French open tennis tournament. Our court was used by both the grown ups and by us, the teenagers. On Sunday afternoons our parents would have tennis parties and sometimes we were invited to play with them. When this happened we had to believe ourselves. In other words we didn't gorge ourselves at tea time. But after the obligatory one set of tennis after tea, and after all our parents' friends had gone home, we made a beeline for the tea table to eat!

Our tennis court also came in handy in winter. If we got enough frost, our father would flood the clay court with many thin skins of water until he had built up a good base of ice. When that was ready our friends from all over Brentwood and Tod Inlet would come down to skate. We used to put cardboard on our concrete walk so as not to ruin our skates on the way to the rink. When cold and tired we came into the kitchen and sat anywhere – chairs, floor or wherever we could park ourselves. Mother always had tea, coffee and cream for us to warm up on. Somewhere around midnight, when everyone had gone, I would go out with the ordinary house broom – all we had – and sweep the whole court so that Dad could resprinkle it again for the next night. We sometimes played hockey, boys and girls together. This ice sometimes lasted for up to two weeks.

There was a year, I believe about 1928 or 1989 (?), when we had a very cold winter and Tod Inlet (salt water) froze over. At first Dad tried to keep a passageway chopped out from the wharf and down the Inlet so that the mail boat could get out to Bamberton to deliver the mail and also the workers who worked at Bamberton but who lived on the Brentwood side of Saanich Inlet. But that year the cold weather continued and that didn't work and so the boat had to leave from Brentwood Bay instead of the Inlet. Thicker and thicker got the ice except at the head of the Inlet where Tod Creek ran in. Of course everyone wanted to skate on it as we didn't get to skate very often here. So Dad asked an employee, Mr. Stewart, to hitch up his team of horses to his wagon and they took onto the ice and all concerned finally decided it was safe to skate on. Only where the creek came in was forbidden to us. I was very young and learned to skate that year on salt water ice. In fact Dad took me for a skate right out to the buoy at the beginning of the Inlet by Fernie Beach. That phenomenon never happened again while we lived there – until spring 1957.

Lorna Pugh and I used to go for hikes across the Inlet from our house starting at Jaylorn. We would climb to the top of the hill and then walk along the ridge to what we called the "bluff" which was high and open and became our "ships bridge" from which we looked down onto the bow of our ship which was Willis Point and then on to Saanich Inlet, Brentwood Bay Senanus Island, etc. We were great explorers and seemed to find our way around the country through the woods. We scared deer and hoped not to meet a cougar. Once up there, after seeing the movie "Rose Marie," we thought we could be prima donnas and started singing "When I'm Calling You" and lo and behold from the Inlet came back an answering echo – it was the Brentwood College boys.

Hollywood made movies up here then as well as now, and what they call "Hollywood North." One we all really remembered was called "Stampede" with Charles Starett and a

lot of it was filmed on B.C. Cement Co. property – our back yard. I remember watching the filming for the heroine. When the good guys and the bad guys rolled down the ravine in a fight, my brother sprinkled debris all over them to make it more real. It was a short bank. Nevertheless when we saw the movie the bank turned out to be four times as high.

In those days hunting was allowed in this area in season – and lots of it was done. I remember one incident when my brother and Maurice (our refugee brother from England) wanted to go hunting duck. They were underage, so, they talked their big older sister into making it legal by accompanying them. WE went by bicycle for a mile or so to their “blind” from where they hoped to shoot their ducks. What upset me a bit was that after getting up very early and riding all that way I was told off for wearing light blue slacks that all the birds could see. So, I had to sit behind branches in the blind so as not to be seen.

I believe it was that same trip when we had a bit of an accident. Once each year the old Victoria/Sidney track (now known as the Interurban I think) was closed to keep it a private road by putting a gate across it. I have since learned that this ploy did not make it a private road even in those days but they thought it did. Anyway, in the dark, on our bikes, and not being too careful – wham! – into the gate went Maurice. He was not hurt and I can’t remember if they got any ducks?

We rode our bikes three miles to Mt. Newton High School everyday. Things were much different then – you either walked or rode a bike – there were no school buses and your parents certainly didn’t take you. There we were more independent and relied on ourselves to know how to do the right thing and to get on with others. Mind you I realize we didn’t have the crime that is rampant today. We would never have dreamed of stealing from someone else. In fact we never locked our doors and when we wanted to go on a holiday had to search around to find keys to lock the doors. Not fancy keys either – most homes had much the same keys.

Once at school of course we had the usual classes. Mt. Newton had a very good choir and put on good concerts. The girls played grass hockey on a gravel field – large rocks, small rocks, all hitting your ankles and shins – and with very little equipment with which to protect ourselves. WE played against North Saanich High a few times.

With regards to the Auditorium street rules were enforced. Girls and boys were never in the auditorium at the same time. So when we girls got the auditorium we tried to learn to dance and practiced as often as we could. There were three or four good dancers in our school and we all tried to imitate them and be as good.

Also we were living in a farming community so we were allowed to get out of school early in June (except Grade 12) to pick strawberries – and we didn’t get paid by the hour, we got paid by the number of hallocks² we picked, so we worked hard for our money.

On Sundays we usually went for a walk either for tea at a friends, or also just for the love of walking – you see a lot when you walk – more even than when you ride a bike and a

² Hallocks: berry containers

lot more than when you drive. Once while walking up along Tod Creek we heard the bagpiper. On investigation we found a lone piper practicing in the, more or less, wilderness. We heard him from home quite often after that first time.

At Christmas the B.C. Cement Co. used to hold a party for all the children at Bamberton and Tod Inlet. For many years it was held at Bamberton and we were taken there by boat from Tod Inlet and then up the hoist³ to the recreation hall for the party. The Bamberton school choir sang carols and we all had dinner and goodies and a present from Santa (Mrs. Butchart). Later on when there were not as many children, my mother and I arranged the Christmas party for the Tod Inlet children in the old Cook House which had been used when the Tod Inlet Mill was in operation.

We used to have wonderful house parties as teenagers. We would have a group of our friends over at the drop of a hat. As one of these “drop of a hat” deals eight or so teenagers were over for tennis in the afternoon and stayed on for waffles. We had one very small waffle iron. But I kept making them and they kept eating them til everyone had enough. We had Halloween parties where we would turn out the lights and pass around skinned grapes for eyes, cold long macaroni for intestines, etc., etc. Gordon Ballantyne (nicknamed Turps) was wonderful on the piano. He could play anything. So we sang and sang – once until 4:02 AM because we were singing Alouette and if we didn’t get it right Turps would say “from the beginning” until we did get it right. A good time was had and no drugs. We had masquerade parties also. These were held at first in the West Road hall which was at the corner of the West Road and Benvenuto, where the Butchart Garden sign is today. Later these masquerades were held in the Women’s Institute Hall on the West Road near Wallace Drive. Our mothers were fantastic seamstresses and made us the most elaborate costumes.

As teenagers we danced at the Agricultural Hall, and at the Badminton Hall for the strawberry dance in June and the annual big one at New Years. Later on, at the beginning of the war we danced at the Crystal Gardens in Victoria (it had a lovely spring floor) and at the Empress Gull, and the Empress Ballroom for the Snowball each Boxing Day. Of course we were always all dressed up in our long gowns and had corsages, etc. It was fun.

We were the first teenagers as a large group, to learn to drive. As a large group we were probably the first to drive to dances and movies unchaperoned. We could go to Midnight movies on New Years Eve if one had nothing else more interesting to do. During the war we lived with rationing. When I took my first drivers test they all of a sudden came up with a blackout regulation drivers test on top of the regular testing because the Japanese were supposed to have shelled the Oregon coast. It was a good job I had read all about the blackouts in the paper and so was up on things or I wouldn’t have passed.

³ There were no roads in Bamberton, and a hoist was built to move employees of the BC Cement Company and supplies up and down the incline. The alternate route included over 380 stairs!
<http://www.bambertonhistoricalsociety.org/history.htm>

My friend Sylvia Monckton had a Model "A" Ford. She was the only girl in our crowd to own a car then and she certainly made use of it. She would pick me up and we would go to play tennis at one of our other friends' homes. In those days one of our parents usually taught us to drive. I do not remember there being any driving schools around then. My mother taught me to drive on a 1932 Ford V-8 – a very powerful car.

We lived through a real recession (1929-31), we lived through a war and all it entails and we lived through the post-war time. We've lived from ice boxes to computers and all that came in between. When we were young there was not very much money but we didn't need much, we made our own fun. After the war and marriage we still didn't have any money. My husband went to U.B.C. and we lived in H-huts at Little Mountain Army Camp with two children and \$123.00 per month for rent, heat, food, gas – everything. It would be fun to see the teenagers of today (my grandchildren included) live on that amount today even with the inflation upgrade. I can tell you you eat a lot differently and you make everything from scratch. We were married in 1946 but didn't have our own house until 1964 or a holiday until 1972. And then finally, in 1972 we were able to start saving for our retirement – after the children were in University and we were both working in Ottawa.