

Before the Road

a project of the



TOFINO
POET LAUREATE



Road into Tofino. Tofino Motors would be on the right, across from the Allards' house, which was built in the 1920s by Bill Sharp.

Photo by Bill Sharp, courtesy of the District of Tofino Archives.



Boat day in Tofino in the 1930s. The Princess Nora arriving with mail and supplies.

Photo: Sloman, courtesy District of Tofino Archives

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TOFINO
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in conjunction with

Ah-Neets-Nas (Tom Curley)

& Ellen Kimoto

Mr McPherson & the Grade Nine Students of Ucluelet Secondary School

The Grades 3-7 students (Buds) of Heartwood School

With thanks also to Kenji Shimizu



Chief Joseph and Queen Mary in front of their cabin
at Indian River. 1930

Honouring those who came before. And in recognition of the Tla-o-qui-aht, whose unceded traditional territory is rich with the stories and voices of the past.

Photo by Wingen, courtesy of the District of Tofino Archives

Before The Road

The past may be all around us, but it rarely becomes tangible without direct human experience—the exchange of stories and the emotions they carry with them. For the purpose of this album, “Before The Road” refers more to an era on the west coast than to the specifics of creating a road between Tofino and Port Alberni.

Before The Road set out to connect young people to story-holders from Tla-o-qui-aht, Japanese-Canadian and European settler communities. Circumstances prevented several speakers from being able to attend; however, the enthusiasm of Ah-Neets-Nas (Tom Curley) and Ellen Kimoto has more than made up for this lack. They shared vivid details of their experiences on the coast. Their stories ranged from the practicalities of life prior to electricity and roads, to the heartbreak of residential school and wartime internment.

Before The Road was inspired by BC poet, Wendy Morton, who has worked with school districts and other agencies on The Elder Project since 2010. With guidance, First Nations and Inuit youth participating in The Elder Project connect with their family elders and bear witness to those life stories through poetry. After seeing such a group present the poems to their elders on stage in Nanaimo, I was struck by the way the project brought young people closer to understanding and “knowing” the stories of the past.

Writing poems based on the stories of others required a discussion on the topic of cultural appropriation—that while it is meaningful to honour the speakers by reflecting their life stories, it is also important not to exploit the stories of others for personal gain. As a result, the students have written their poems specifically for the speakers, to echo the stories they heard and express them in their own words. The resulting poems show that these stories have indeed been seeded in the minds and hearts of the students.

—Joanna Streetly, April 2019
Tofino Poet Laureate

Ah-Neets-Nas (Tom Curley)

Tom Curley was born in August 1939, when his parents were working at the Kildonan fish cannery in Uchuckleset Inlet. In those years, the Kildonan plant was a big operation and Tom's parents often worked around the clock in the processing and reduction plant in peak season, sleeping only for short periods of time before the whistle blew again.

Tom is one of 12 children, and while "Tom" is his Canadian name, the name he was given by his grandfather (and the name that is most meaningful to him,) is Ah-Neets-Nas, meaning The Day Belongs To You. At his request the students all called him by his real name.

Ah-Neets-Nas grew up in an era of seasonal work, when families moved from place to place, finding work where work was available. Families moved from fish canneries, to fruit- or hops-picking areas in the states.

The Curley family were based in Opitsaht, but spent many summers up at Oochmin (Cannery Bay) swimming in the warm waters of the bay. The inflowing lake water attracts swimmers and fish alike.

Ah-Neets-Nas recalls swimming among the sockeye salmon, feeling them brush by him on their way upriver to spawn. "They were everywhere. It was amazing. You'd hear them all night long, jumping and flipping."

His grandfather had at one point lived in Tofino where Fourth Street dock is now. Several Tla-o-qui-aht people had small houses there before the European homesteaders arrived and they were asked to leave.



Ah-Neets-Nas left Christie school when he was sixteen after eleven years of sub-standard education. The name his grandfather had given him had been taken from him and replaced by his new name, Tom. His memories are of loneliness, hunger, and of cruelty. "Brother O'Brien was the only nice person," he recalls. "Everyone wanted to be near him because Brother MacDonald and Brother Samson were so mean."



Photo of Kildonan Cannery by Ken Marzoff of Nanaimo.

Contributed to District of Tofino by Tofino Homecoming Committee & Ken Gibson

Fishing and logging made up much of the work in his early career. To a young man who'd been hungry all his life, the MacMillan Bloedel camp in Ucluelet was a revelation. "I thought I'd gone to heaven. There was so much food! Steak, potatoes, the cook would even send me off to work with a whole pie in my lunch bucket. I couldn't believe it. I love pie."

For First Nations people, Tofino wasn't always a welcoming place, but Tom recalls a change in attitude beginning in the '60s. People began getting friendlier, "they began to open up."

Ah-Neets-Nas became his own boss when he purchased the Alannah-C, a 28-foot Tollycraft sports-fishing boat, with the assistance of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Economic Development Corporation. He took many visitors fishing, catching a 55-pound salmon near Radar Hill one year. He prides himself for being able to find the way in the fog in the days before the advent of GPS.

And he was famous for being the only person to know the whereabouts of what he called "The Big X," his standard response whenever he was asked where he was planning to fish.

For Ah-Neets-Nas

Having everything, suddenly nothing
I lay awake at night thinking
Why all the suffering?
No one to love no one to hold
All by myself out in the cold
Beaten for using my own language
Feeling confusion and anguish.

—Mackenzie Hale, USS



They lied

Residential school.
Keep quiet, no emotions
They lied.
Tell us how to live.
Stay at home.
They lied.
Work before breakfast.
Salmon juice and smoked fish.
They lied.
Apologies can't erase no actions.
Don't box us in.
They lied.

Mazie Ludwig, USS—

Ah-Neets-Nas told of climbing a steep stairway and seeing a woman dressed all in black, standing at the top. He had never seen a nun in a wimple before and he worried that she might be a demon of some sort. She spoke to him in words he didn't understand and when he replied he was strapped. Over and over he tried to communicate in the only language he knew, not understanding a word the nun said to him. Over and over he was beaten for speaking. Eventually he saw his brothers signalling him to be silent. So began the first day of school for this five-year-old boy.

For Ah-Neets-Nas

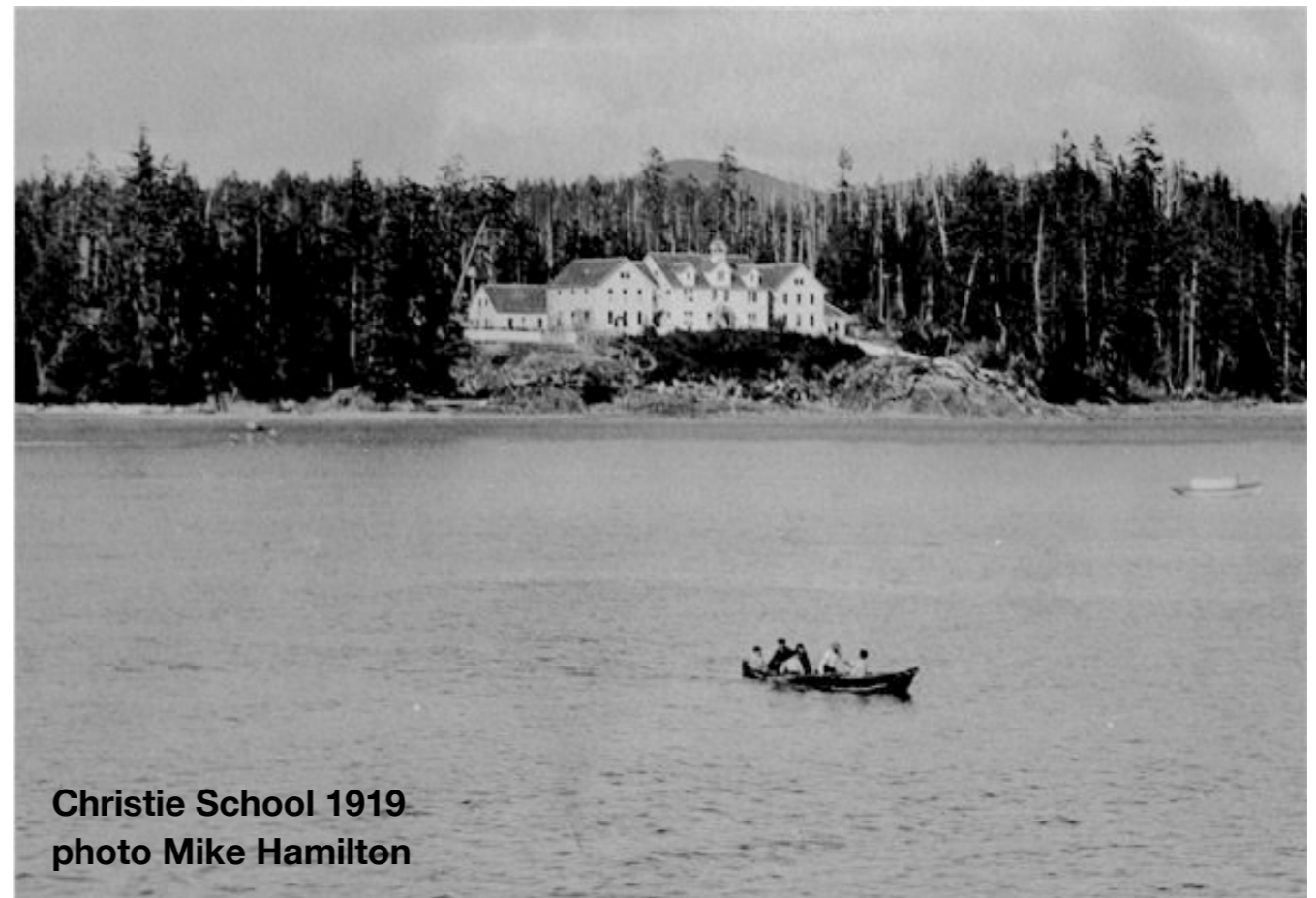
It's strange
How things disappear
As they move away from you.
Like the little boat

The water was cold on my chest
But it burned like the sight
Of my parents rowing away

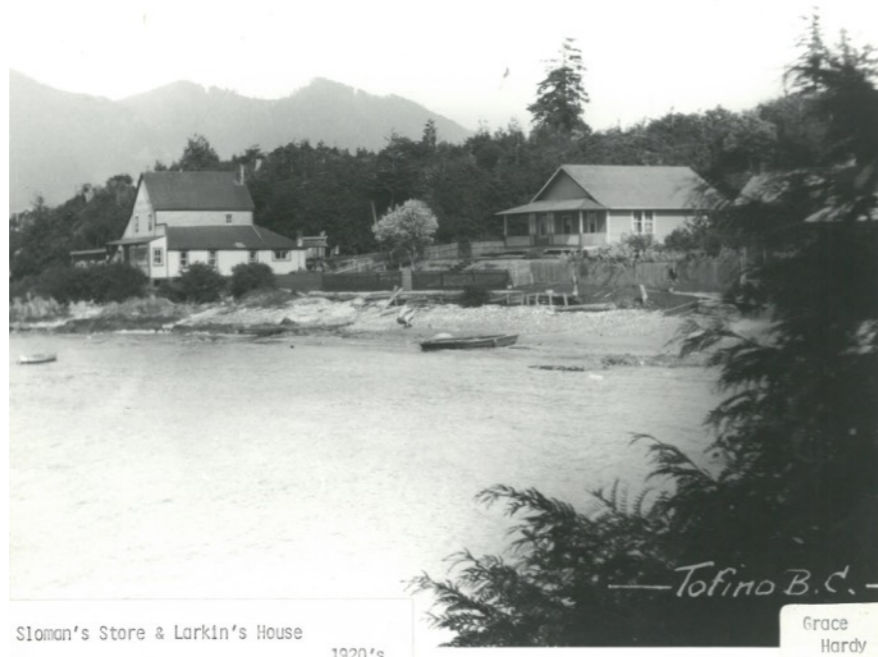
Hands on my shoulder,
My brothers
pulling me back

A man in a cloak,
Up on the hill
His laugh

—Cedar Forest, USS



To the Grade 9 class at Ucluelet Secondary School, Ah-Neets-Nas described the day his parents took him to Christie school to see his brothers. He was five years old. He described his happiness at playing with his brothers. He also told of turning to see his parents in their dugout canoe paddling away. Thinking he'd been accidentally forgotten he cried out, running down the beach, into the water up to his shoulders. While his brothers ran to him, a man dressed in black stood on the hill, laughing. His parents continued paddling, knowing they would be jailed if they didn't leave their children at the school.



Sloman's Store & Larkin's House

1920's

Grace
Hardy

Ah-Neets-Nas remembers not being allowed into Tofino when he was a child. He and his siblings had to play down on the beach, or wait on the bench outside the store. They were never allowed in.

Sloman's store and Larkin's House, 1920s

Photo by Grace Hardy

Courtesy the District of Tofino Archives

Of the Tofino hospital Ah-Neets-Nas has a memory of being taken there “in a little putt-putt” from residential school. He was so ill that he’d blacked out. He woke up once, to the sound of the boat motor roaring in his ears. The next time he woke to see a woman in an elaborate white headdress leaning over him. He thought it was a dream! Even though he was ill he enjoyed the hospital, as the staff treated him much better than the nuns did. And the food was good. “The oatmeal was actually cooked, not just water with chunks of raw oatmeal in it.” At that time the hospital was on First street, near the Co-op and the post office.



Dr Kaarsgard & staff, Tofino Hospital, early 1940s

Courtesy the District of Tofino Archives

I Don't Understand

I don't understand why I got taken to residential school
I don't understand why my parents were forced to put me in
residential school
I don't understand why the teacher was so cruel

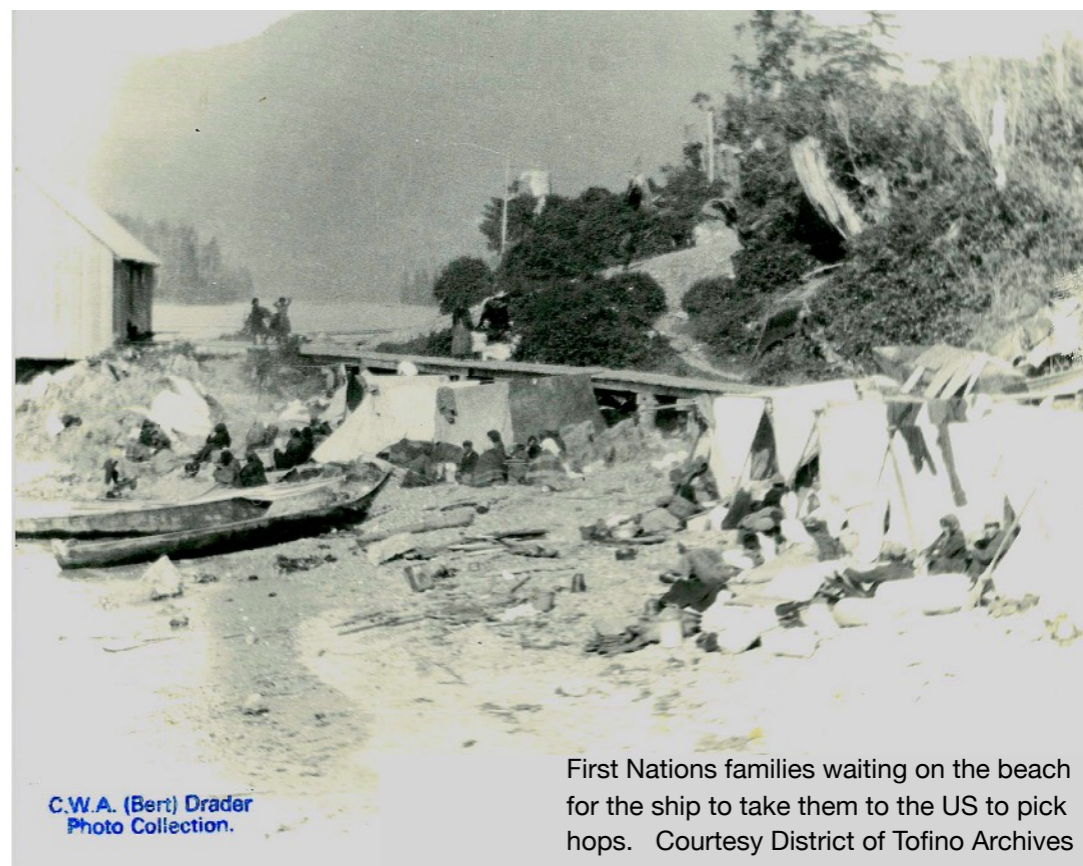
But most of all
Why people can be so inhumane?
Why people took my freedom?
Why people can take our land?

What I understand most is
Why I kept dreaming
Why I kept hoping
Why I kept trying
—Kyshu Lord, USS

born free and happy
nothing left, not even words
for us, hell on earth
—Koen Westwood, USS

Teachings of Ah-Neets-Nas

Life is hard sometimes
We all have differences
Pain is temporary
—Jack Kemp, USS



First Nations families waiting on the beach for the ship to take them to the US to pick hops. Courtesy District of Tofino Archives

*Photo by H.T. Fredericksen 1931 Long Beach
Dr. G.W. Bissett - Mrs Bissett + Son
Mrs H.T. Fredericksen + Son.
Came very close to losing car sinking in sand
while investigating Gull Island. Luckily a truck
came by on way to Heludet and pulled us out.*

Walk Away

Walk away
run, from my school to the bus
my binder on my head blocking the ever-falling rain

Walk away

My boat, a stone's throw away from the top of 52 steps

"A stone's throw"

My friends cower and brace for impact.

Wondering
as exhaust engulfs my lungs.
Will the bus ever be replaced?

Wondering

When will we be there?

As the west coast's only taxi shudders to a stop in the wet sand.

And again we start to push.

—Toby Theriault, USS



Ah-Neets-Nas told the story of his family taking a taxi to Kildonan. At that time, cars drove on the beach to reach Ucluelet and there was no road to Port Alberni. Even the road to Long Beach was so rutted and awful that it was sometimes quicker to walk. Tom's family paid the taxi to take them to Ucluelet, but the taxi got stuck so much that the family ended up pushing more than they rode. At that time two dollars was a lot of money.

Ellen Kimoto spoke of the Ittatsoo school boat arriving at 52 Steps in Ucluelet every day. And every day the Ittatsoo students were hailed with thrown stones.

Ellen Kimoto

Ellen Kimoto's life was directly impacted by Canada's internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. In March of 1942, not long after the attack on Pearl Harbour, her mother Chizuko boarded the Princess Maquinna with a suitcase in one hand and baby Ellen in the other. Ellen was three months old. Her father Robert had been ordered to drive to Vancouver in his fishing troller. Three days prior, the RCMP had knocked on the door of their home and given the order to leave. They were only allowed to take what they could carry. Of note, Chizuko chose to pack her sewing machine and her tea set.

The families were sent to Hastings Park under the Second Narrows Bridge in Vancouver. At first, they gathered in the forum, an arena where each family was allocated part of a bench to sit on. The men were then sent to shovel the excrement from the livestock stables before moving their families into the same stables, only separated from the others by hanging blankets. Twenty-two thousand Canadian citizens were interned in this manner, because of their Japanese heritage.

In Vancouver, the fleet of Japanese-Canadian boats grew into a vast sea. And even though the owners were supposed to get them back again after the war, they were soon sold off at bargain prices to Canadian fishers. Their houses, too, were similarly sold. When Japanese people first moved to the coast they were admired for their style of fishing (trolling) and their well-built boats. Several families on the coast made boats for a living, including the Shimizus in Port Albion.

Fishermen's Reserve rounding up Japanese-Canadian fishing vessels, Steveston, B.C., 10 Dec. 1941 Source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence



During internment, Ellen Kimoto's family was moved again to Seton Lake, near Whistler, to the site of an old hydro camp. They lived in tiny huts and endured several cold winters with very little heat until Tommy Douglas rose in parliament in 1947 to state that Japanese Canadians had endured enough. Families were then offered the choice of moving to the east coast, or returning to Japan. In a sadly ironic note, few families had sufficient ties with Japan to make returning an option. Many of them no longer even spoke the language, so Canadian were they. Everything they had endured had been endured simply for their outward appearance.

Ellen's family moved to Hamilton, Ontario, where her father became a steel worker with Stelco. In 1950 the family decided to move back to the coast. But no welcome awaited them in Tofino.

In 1947, Tofino's council had passed a resolution that would ban "all orientals" from "owning property or carrying on business" within the municipality. While the resolution did not officially become a bylaw, it encapsulated the climate of racism and bigotry and discouraged internees from returning. The Kimoto family returned instead to Ucluelet, where they made their home at Spring Cove.

Ellen attended school in Ucluelet before getting her teaching certificate from Victoria College, completing her degree and her masters degree in counselling and psychology at UBC.



Ellen Kimoto

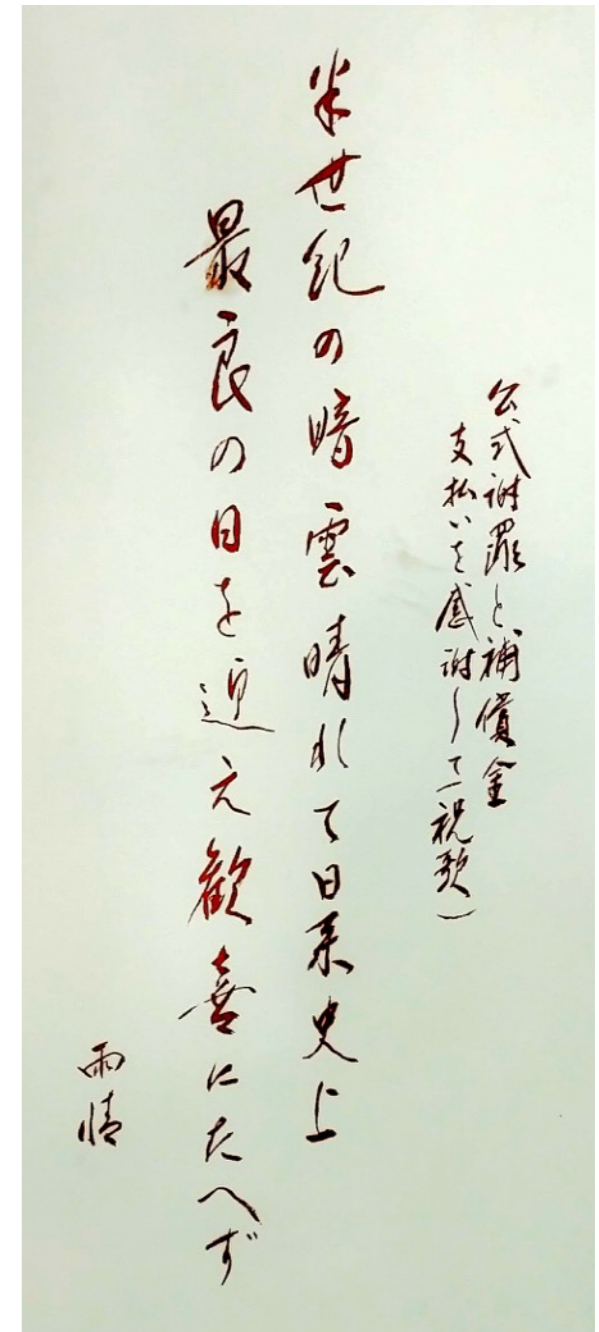
In 1988, a framed poem was given to all surviving internees by the government of Canada, along with an official apology by Brian Mulroney. In all, 22,000 Japanese Canadians had suffered from the cruel conditions of internment, as well as having had all their property confiscated and not returned.


The commemorative poem, a Japanese-form tanka, inspired Ellen to ask the students to compose poems for her story in the form of traditional three-line haikus.

Some of the Heartwood students opted to decorate their haikus for display in these pages.

Our dark cloud of half a century dissipated,
The fairest day
in Japanese Canadian history
Dawns.
Our joy is unsurpassable.

Takeo Ujo Nakano
translated by **Leatrice Nakano Wilson**





Apology made
for all lost and left behind
At last joy was laid

by Ocea Green

Ellen Kimoto was an infant at the time she and her family were forced to leave Tofino, so the students referred to this detailed memory to bring alive the colours and details of the day “when time stopped.”

Islay MacLeod is a much-missed Tofino local. Her reminiscence is reprinted from *The Sound Anthology*.

when time stopped

Reminiscence by Islay MacLeod

I remember that day as a damp, bone chilling day . . . the day on which my carefree young life changed forever. Now, all these years later, I sift through the sands of time and I still feel that same particular chill that comes from deep within one’s very soul. A chill that burned deeply into my young psyche, never to leave.

By a decree enacted by parliament in a far away place called Ottawa, which we children were taught was the Capital of Canada, my friends here in Tofino were ordered to pack a few possessions . . . just what they could carry . . . and to ready themselves for departure to a place where they would be detained “at His Majesty’s Pleasure”.

I had much trouble over Ottawa. Yes, it was indeed the capital city but so very remote from the events taking place in the Tofino of that day. London, England seemed more believable to me. Twice daily we heard news reports on the battery-operated radio via short wave from London. Why, our big clock was set precisely from the B.B.C. signal and there was the recorded chiming of “Big Ben”.

Time seemed to stop for me that day in Tofino. There were my friends, Emiko and her sister, Sachiko . . . and there was the Japanese boy who had won a place in my heart forever by helping me with my Arithmetic. And there were all the others milling about on the Government wharf . . . I had never seen so many Japanese adults and children together at one time. It seemed to my young eyes that half the population of Tofino was leaving. And there we were, the other half . . . watching, watching, watching . . . as our former friends gathered their pitifully few belongings together. These friends who almost over night became our enemy . . . there was no communication between “us” and our friends, who

suddenly and to me, miraculously, became “the mistrusted alien Japanese.”

The C.P.R. ship, “Princess Maquinna” arrived on that day looking drab and ominous in her wartime grey and soon my Japanese friends went up the gang-plank, clutching their suitcases or possessions wrapped in snowy white cloths. Not one of them looked back and not one of them waved good-bye. The ship sailed and somehow the innocence of my youth and part of my heart went with it.

It was in the schoolroom that I most missed the Japanese children. I never heard their departure discussed -- ever -- by children in my age group, or by the adults.

The Japanese did not return to live in Tofino and I never saw or heard from my friends again. There is, however, one saving grace. I still and shall always think of them as they were that day in 1942. In my memories they will always be young and it is our shared youthful laughter and joy from earlier days that is my legacy.

Years later whilst in London, England, I heard “Big Ben” chime the hour and instantly my thoughts took me back to that day on the dock. I found myself with tears on my cheeks, thinking of my young friends who had left the Tofino of my youth, never to return. I have missed them all of my life.



Islay MacLeod in 1997

(Nov. 30, 1990)



Ellen's Mother

Holding her baby
a tiny bundle of white
a lonely grey ship

—Nelita Greig
Heartwood, Grade 3

Ellen Kimoto shared her story of internment with the Grades 3-7 Heartwood students as well as the Grade 9 USS students. The students were noticeably affected by the details of her story: the sudden ending of a home; the fact that Ellen's mother could only take one suitcase with her; the things she chose to pack—like her tea set and her sewing machine, and the fact that she was being forced to do this with a babe in arms.

Ellen and Islay

Once there was a girl
Whose radiant smile
Shone
Like a spotlight
On our misery
A bright smile
Like all children should have
Not us
Our smiles are bruised and broken
After we were folded
Forced
Into boxes
We never fit

The girl fits
She fits all the boxes
Her hair, her skin, her smile
At times we wished we were just
like her
—happy
Her culture protected
But even her face was vacant of a
smile
The day we left
Sailing towards our boxes
They said the only ones
That we could fit in
But can never get out of.

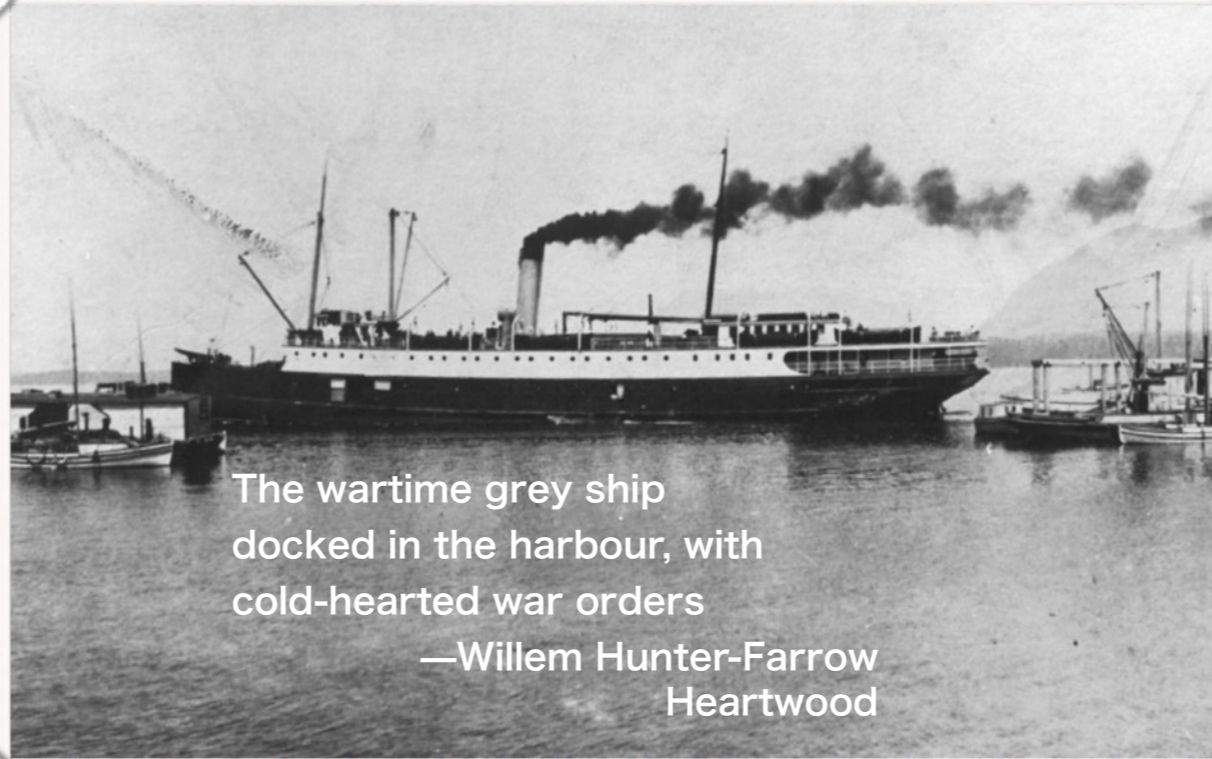
—Toby Theriault, USS

A knock on the door
“Pack your stuff!” Scared and very sad.
You have three days. Go!

—Ayla Roberts
Heartwood

Leaving what was home
Falling, crashing, surviving
Return, hope, succeed

—Mackenzie Hale USS



The wartime grey ship
docked in the harbour, with
cold-hearted war orders

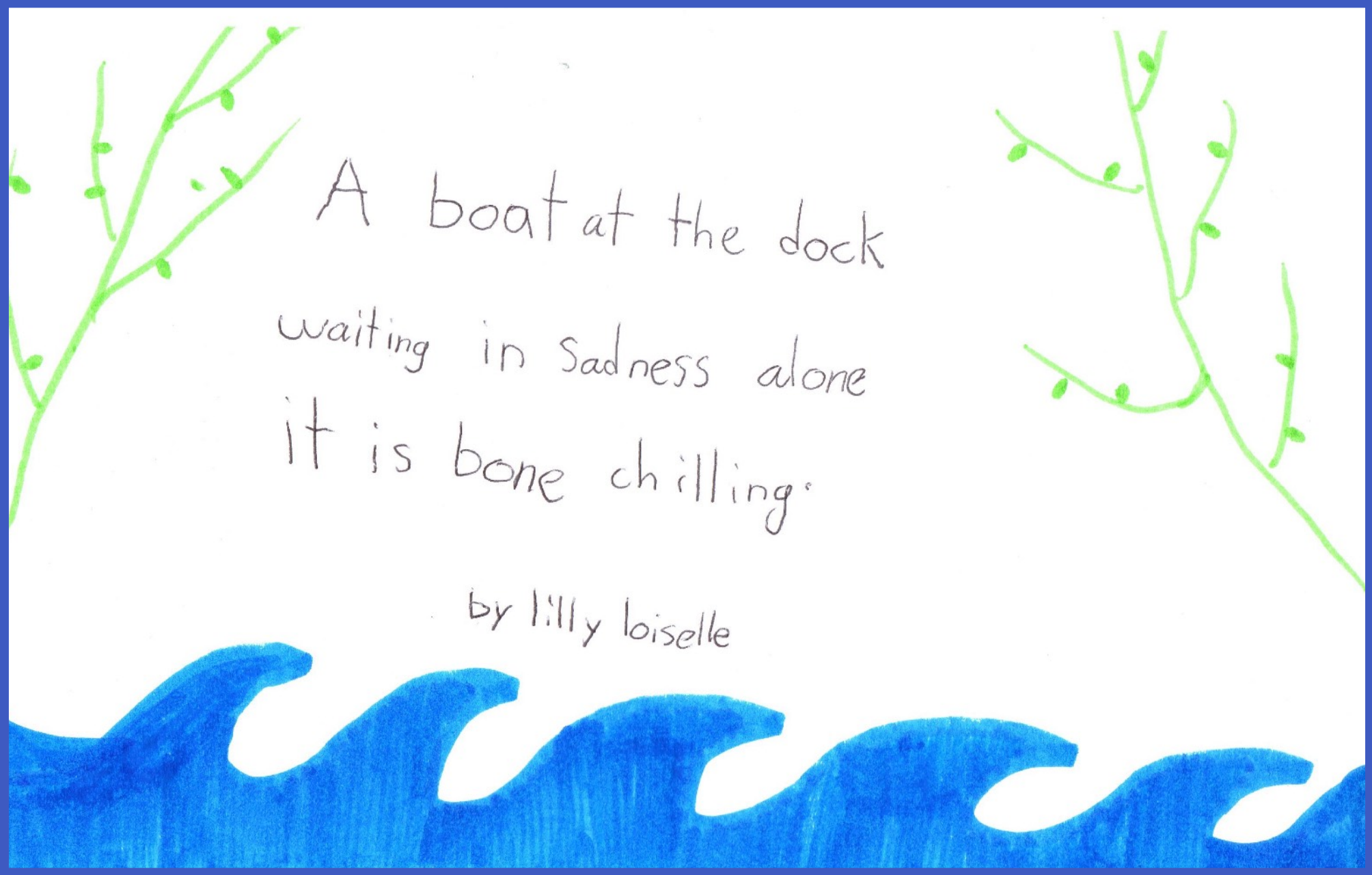
—Willem Hunter-Farrow
Heartwood

A knock on the door
go to the boat at the dock
leave friends, take courage

Phoenix Greig, Heartwood—

Great army of fire
Takes all, leaves very little
But then we regrow

—Orion LeFevre, USS



A boat at the dock
waiting in sadness alone
it is bone chilling.

by Lilly Loiselle

Ellen

Born in Tofino,
taken away,
1941.
Blood money.
Half a century gone.
Everything was lost,
replaced our memories with bills.

—Mazie Ludwig, USS




We used to catch crabs
By the ocean
Then we were told to leave

And then our house was empty
Like my heart

And then we returned
And the rocks stopped falling

—Cedar Forest, USS

Kiyoshi Shimizu, left, and his brother, Tsumotsu, whose family were boatbuilders in Ucluelet. They were sent for internment about ten years after this photo was taken, but not before their Caucasian teacher (who had no desire to call them by their Japanese names,) had arbitrarily given them English names. For most of their lives they were known as Dave and Ralph. Only in recent years has Kiyoshi reclaimed his real name.



Leave behind your home.
Baby wrapped in a bundle.
My heart is broken.

by Ayla R.

Helpless and confused
Leave my house I made by hand
I am humiliated

—Eva Wickham, Heartwood

A knocking on the door
Leave with all your belongings
Fear crept in the room

—Willem Hunter-Farrow
Heartwood



Above, the home that Kiyoshi Shimizu's father Kuroku built in Port Albion, Ucluelet, around 1917 or 1918. He and his siblings were born in this house. After the family were sent for internment they did not return.

At left, the Shimizu Brothers Boatworks where they built fishing vessels for local fishermen and themselves. The family also had a successful salmon fishing business. The boatshed and house are still there.

Some of the photos on these pages were taken by Kuroku Shimizu with his Leica camera. Given the harsh conditions of the family's internment, it is remarkable that the photos have survived.



A 1970 photo of the family home and boatworks in Port Albion, Ucluelet East. Now the boathouse is long gone and there are only rotting remnants of the pilings that supported it, and the launching ramp. When this photo was taken, it was only 28 years after the internment, so the boathouse was still there, but not being used for boat-building.

I first met Kiyoshi and his son Kenji five years ago in Tofino. When Kenji mentioned that his father had been born in Ucluelet, I asked if the family had been sent away for internment. So began a conversation which continues today.

I was able to give Kenji a copy of the late Islay MacLeod's reminiscence, (printed earlier) in which she writes of the loss of "my young friends who had left the Tofino of my youth, never to return," and finishes with: "I have missed them all of my life."

Seventy years after being sent away, this was the first time Kiyoshi (now 93) learned that some local people had mourned his departure, because as Islay pointed out: "I never heard their departure discussed — ever — by children in my age group, or by the adults."

Kenji's keen interest in his family's history prompted me to reach out five years after that first brief, but meaningful, meeting. He responded by sharing these wonderful photos and family history details.

Sent away, starved and mis-placed.
For so many, a childhood.

—Koen Westwood
USS

Ellen

I picture her mom
packing her sewing machine
her tea set, her grief

—Nelita Greig
Heartwood



Kiyoshi Shimizu's mother and brothers in the 1930s. At that point they could not have anticipated the grim future that lay ahead. If they had, this photograph might not have been so joyful.

Born young wild and free
Before they found I was here. . . .

But now living in peace

—Kyshu Lord, USS






Getting closer:
Siblings Kiyoshi and Tamotsu
Shimizu (L&R rear) with sister Emiko
and second cousin Gordon in 1937.
Within 4 years these children and
their parents would be labelled a
danger to Canada.
Photo: Kuroku Shimizu

A knocking on the door
Leave with all your belongings
Fear crept in the room

—Willem Hunter-Farrow
Heartwood

Worried and helpless
I am asked to bring one thing
I am scared and sad

—Eva Wickham, Heartwood



memories in mind

friends left behind at my home

holding my baby

by lilly loiselle

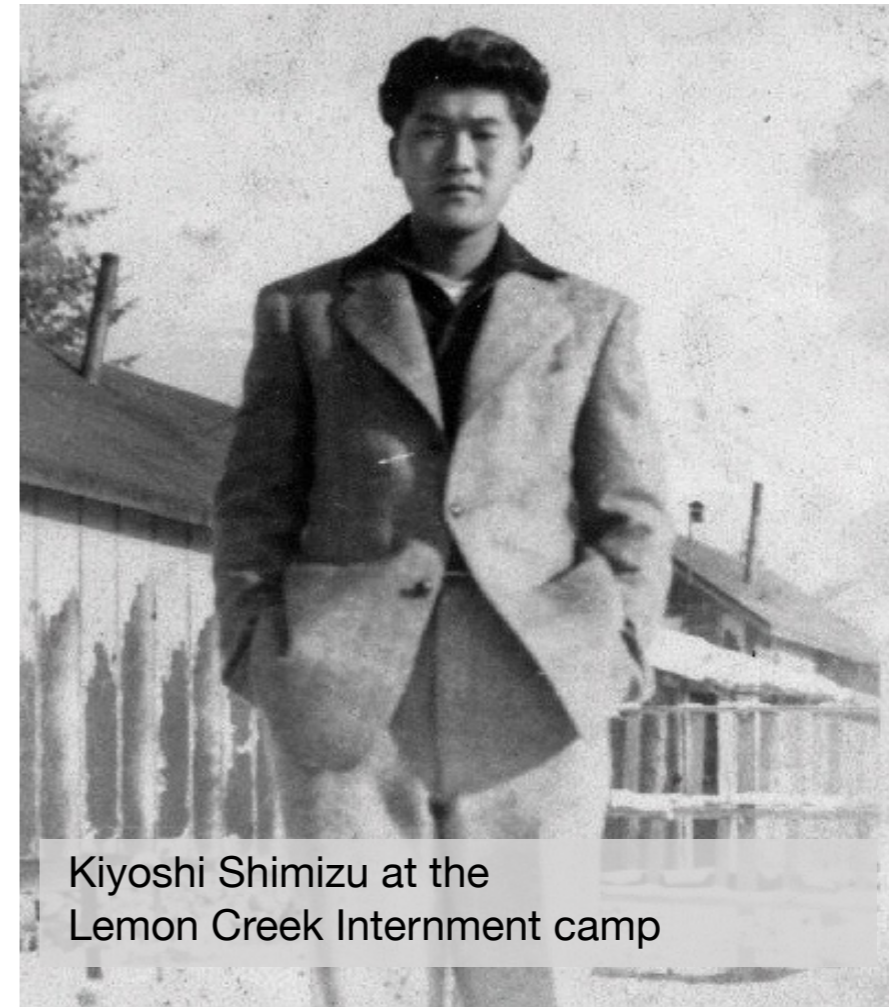
Kiyoshi Shimizu's son Kenji writes:

“My dad and his family, along with his uncle and second cousins, were forced out of their homes, ordered to take only what they could carry, and sent to the livestock buildings at Hastings Park in Vancouver, one family to a filthy horse stall with burlap sacks that they had to fill with hay for bedding. They had no privacy, with only blankets to hang between the stalls.”

“Six months later, they were sent to live in tar-paper shacks at Lemon Creek, a hastily-built internment camp close to Slocan City. Small pot-bellied wood-burning stoves were the only source of heat during cold, harsh winters. Still, they did the best they could, facing injustice and discrimination with dignity.”

“In October 1946, more than a year after WWII ended, they were released from the camp, but were ordered out of B.C. They were told to either move “east of the Rockies” or line up at the Japanese Consulate’s office for their Japanese citizenship papers and go to Japan.”

“My dad and his siblings, along with many others who had been uprooted and interned, were born in Canada. To my dad, my uncles, and my aunts, Japan was truly a foreign land, especially because much of it was still in ruins after Japan’s defeat.”



Kiyoshi Shimizu at the
Lemon Creek Internment camp

Taken away
Nowhere to play
In the camp
It is damp
Everything's been cut away

—Jack Kemps, USS

Wartime Climate

Neil Buckle grew up on the west coast and lived out at the Combers' Resort (now Comber's Beach) on Long Beach. When Pacific Rim National Park was established in 1970, Neil and his wife Marilyn moved to Vargas Island where they supplemented their sawmill business by taking in summer guests at the Vargas Island Inn. Many of Neil's childhood reminiscences were chronicled in *Salt in Our Blood; an anthology of west coast moments*. This excerpt gives a feel of the wartime environment and mentions the military base at the airport. He also refers to the supposed bombing of Estevan Point lighthouse by a Japanese submarine, which many suspect to have been a fake bombing, designed to instill an "appropriate" level of fear and suspicion of the Japanese in the west coast population. Neil writes:

"When we first moved to Combers' Resort there were certainly a lot of signs of the war. We used to go up to the airport and find all sorts of ammunition — grenades and everything. If the Japanese ever got to the airport there was a switch you could throw from where we were at the Combers 'and blow up all the runways and everything. There were tunnels under there, with dynamite in them.

"They had a pretty good arsenal. We were ploughing the field one time and we found a mortar bomb. There we were, tossing this thing back and forth.

"When the Japanese submarine was supposed to have fired on Estevan Light there was a black-out in Tofino. At that time

there was a party at the Wingen's. Somebody was passed out in one of the bedrooms with the light on. So there was this big bedroom light shining out over the harbour. The only light in the harbour. I guess everyone else got the news. "But I think the "bombing" was just a fake anyway. To frighten people. I heard that they callipered the size of the shell and it wasn't Japanese. It was US or Canadian."



Tofino Coast Guard, Bert Drader Collection. The wartime climate extended to the crew, as enlistment was less important to Norwegian settlers than to English.

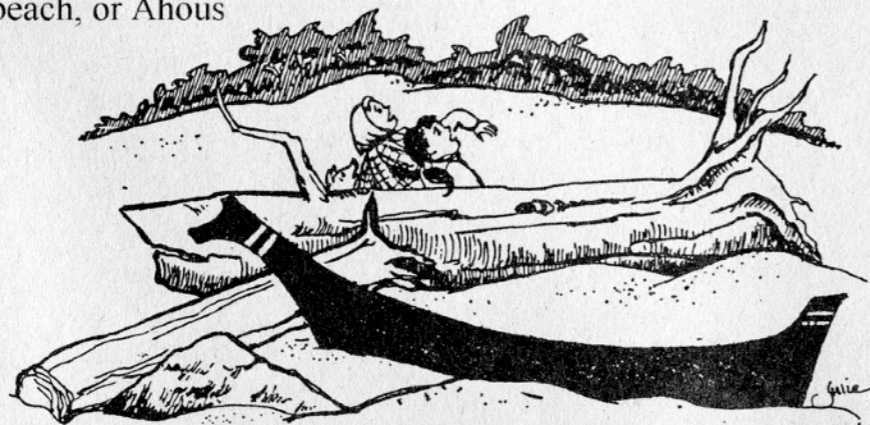
Photo courtesy District of Tofino Archives.

The War Comes To Vargas Island

Reminiscence by Ruth White

Our little adventure took place the day after Estevan Point was shelled, on June 20, 1942. Many can remember the shelling of Estevan Point by a Japanese submarine that day, especially the light-house keeper and his family. What with the blackouts and getting all airmen back to their station in the pitch dark, it was quite a scramble. The airmen were in the beer parlor on Stubbs Island, (Clayoquot) as in those days there were no beer parlors or liquor store in Tofino or Ucluelet.

My sister came for a visit about that time and my husband, Bill, was in Victoria on business. All seemed quiet to us the next day, June 21st, so my sister and I decided to canoe over to Vargas Island in a small Indian dugout about 8 feet long. We packed our lunch and took along my pup, Danny, and my 22 rifle. (Why I should take the 22 I don't know!) No life jackets in those days either. We took off early in the morning and paddled around the north end of Stubbs Island, then in a southwest direction around the outside of Vargas, through the reefs, quite close to the shore. My thought was to get to the outside or west end of Vargas to the lovely beach there -- locally known as "Sunset" beach, or Ahous



Bay. Needless to say, it was too far away to paddle in a small dugout in a few hours. Getting hungry and tired of paddling, we decided to pull into the next beach we came to.

We hauled our dugout right up the logs and secured it there. We had a bit of lunch, then proceeded to climb around the rocks; sometimes we had to go into the bush and felt sure we weren't far from our goal, but not knowing this area very well, we soon realized we were not making any headway. It was getting on in the afternoon, so we decided to turn back. Just as we were standing close to some logs an aeroplane zoomed low over the trees above us and started machine gunning! We dove for cover under a huge log, the pup landing on top of us. (We had been packing him for some time as he was tired out.)

We had no idea if we were spotted or not and couldn't tell where the plane was from -- it all took place in seconds -- then we heard it again, machine-gunning in the distance. From then on we stayed close to the bush, just in case the plane should come back, which thank goodness it didn't.

We arrived at the beach where we left the dugout to find the tide high and quite a sea running; not much fun here. After dragging the dugout to the edge of the sea, we waited and counted the waves, as there is usually a time when the waves flatten out a little -- it seemed to be about every seventh -- so we waded out to our knees, then with one leg in the dugout we pushed and paddled like mad. A wave caught us but we kept paddling, otherwise we would have turned over. With the sea and waves behind us we finally arrived home about sunset, weary but safe.

Reprinted from The Sound Anthology (Nov. 16, 1990)



Before the Road?

The intent of this album is to represent a period of time before the coast became more connected to the rest of Vancouver Island. To some, back in that time, a road was unthinkable. Yet one Tofino settler, Rowland Brinckman, was so sure a road would be built, he even wrote a poem about it.

What follows is an excerpt from *Tofino and Clayoquot Sound. A History* by Margaret Horsfield and Ian Kennedy.

“Kilkenny-born Rowland Brinckman arrived in Vancouver in 1914 and served in World War I for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. On his return to Canada, he spent several years in Ahousaht and came to Tofino in the late 1920s. A skilled artist and writer, he staged many light-hearted dramatic productions, writing the material himself and bringing the community together in a new manner.”

“Children loved him. On summer evenings they would wait till ‘Brincky’ went on his night watchman shift at the lifeboat station and they would visit him there, begging for stories.”

“When I first saw Tofino in the nineteen twenties
I felt the inaccessibility of my abode
But people said, “Don’t worry; all the money being spent is
A guarantee that soon we’ll have a Lovely Road.”

—Rowland Brinckman

The inauguration of “our Lovely Road” came about on August 22, 1959, when a convoy of seventy-four vehicles left the junction at six am arriving three hours later in Port Alberni. The road had taken five years to build.

The Long and Winding Road—reminiscence by Shirley Martin

Early settlers on this isolated coast were promised a road. In the early 1900s pre-emption promos told of a soon-to-be-built wagon road to the west coast. It was a long time coming.

After WWII the Ucluelet and Tofino Chambers of Commerce joined forces to advocate for the cause; in 1949 committee members hiked for three days through the mountainous terrain of forest, bush and bog, to Port Alberni to make their case. Finally, in 1955, there was some action. Two forestry companies took on the task. B.C. Forest Products agreed to build the most challenging, westerly section. This included major blasting and drilling at the Kennedy rock bluff. MacMillan Bloedel Ltd. put in the Sproat Lake section, joining up existing logging roads and building new ones. This included the switchbacks, a narrow section with hairpin turns, at its highest 580 metres with no barricades separating the road from the drop-off to the lake far below. The Department of Highways built the 12-mile middle segment, known as the “Government Stretch.”

Finally, in August of 1959 (drumroll please!) the road was opened for locals. I missed the grand opening. My dad had a key to the gates and didn't like crowds, so our family drove out the day before. “I don't plan to stick around and eat dust all the way out tomorrow!” he told my mom. By the next day we were well on our way to Alberta to go camping.

But many Ucluelet and Tofino residents headed out in a convoy on August 22nd. Seventy four vehicles, carrying 300 people, left the junction at six in the morning. It was a long and bumpy drive. George Gudbranson stood by with his tow truck to pull any struggling vehicles through one particularly massive mudhole. The group stuck together and made it to Port Alberni. Some celebrated there, while others carried on to Nanaimo for an official welcome and a group photo taken at Beban Park.

The road was formally opened on September 4th 1959, and swarms of people arrived on the coast, tearing up and down Long Beach in their cars. Civilization was no longer knocking at our door; they had now breached the divide. It brings to mind the phrase “be careful what you wish for.” Since the road went through development continues to gallop forward, with no end in sight.

When the road first opened it remained an active logging road, so gates at both ends were locked to non-logging vehicles during the day. In 1964 the gates were removed, and people were free to drive in daylight hours. But driving the road was not for Nervous Nellies. When you headed out of town it was pretty much a given you would lose a muffler, pierce an oil pan and/or shred some tires. It gave new meaning to the phrase “shake, rattle and roll.”

A local bus driver was so frustrated that one night he “borrowed” a Highways grader to smooth out a particularly irksome patch. Dr McDiarmid, a GP here for many years, recalled traumatized tourists requesting tranquilizers before heading back out of town.

Paving started in the late ‘60’s and was completed by 1972. That same year the switchbacks were taken out, so we lost both the thrilling view and the accompanying bouts of palpitations. The road alongside Sproat Lake is smoother and faster, but a tad less scenic.

And so the story continues. The road is no longer the dusty, washboard logging road of the past. But driving it is still a challenge. We get snow. We get washouts. Sections of the road sink. Potholes abound. Slow drivers don’t always use the pull-outs to let others by. People get impatient and pass in dangerous places. So let’s all “chill” and be grateful for any improvements. We’ve been discovered and traffic is on the upswing. It’s time to just sit back and try to enjoy the ride.

—**Shirley Martin**

First published in *The Westerly News*



Ron Matterson and Frank Bull at work on the Kennedy rock bluff section during the 1950s.

Photo courtesy of the Ucluelet and Area Historical Society.

Editor's note:

A project such as *Before The Road* is a challenge to confine. Where should it begin? Or end? The past is so rich and there are so many voices that could or should be heard, so many stories that need to be brought into the light of the present. But in the short span of my first tenure as poet laureate, the stories in this album are those that rose most quickly to the surface, and that alone suggests the urgency of their need to be heard. When I set out to introduce local students to the way life was Before The Road, I had a mental picture of the topics we might cover. I could not have imagined delving so deeply into the poignant life stories of the speakers and I am deeply grateful to them for their honesty. Their desire to make history meaningful and to showcase the injustices of the past (in spite of the pain brought about by the re-telling) has had a lasting impact on me. And I'm confident that I can speak for the students in saying they will remember these stories for the rest of their lives.

— Joanna Streetly, Tofino Poet Laureate 2018-2019

I owe debts of gratitude to:

Ah-Neets-Nas / Tom Curley

Ellen Kimoto

Kenji Shimizu

David McPherson and the students of the Ucluelet

Secondary School Grade 9 English class

Sarah Hunter, Lauren Howard Tripp

The "Buds" of Heartwood School

Ava Hansen of the Tofino Clayoquot Heritage Museum

Cindy Hutchison from the District of Tofino

Janice Lore and Kim Hoag, excellent bookmakers

Shirley Martin, Ucluelet

Margaret Horsfield

The members of the Poet Laureate Working Group

David Leverton, Victoria Maritime Museum

