

Clearing the Forest

The Mill Bay property was completely covered with trees, and one could see nothing but forest from one end of the property to the other. When I took my Barbara on a tour of the property, she rebelled. She was not going to move up to this God forsaken piece of land under any circumstances.

I, on the other hand, considered the land to be a terrific challenge, and I sweet talked my dear Barbara, using every trick that I had learned in the past thirty years of marriage, to win her over to this latest bit of madness.

My plan was to clear the land and build an antique village of sorts, using as many old things as I could lay my hands on. The first challenge however, was to clear the property of as many of the trees as necessary.

Never having cut trees or cleared property before might well have been an obstacle for a sane person. But once again I charged into the project with a minimum of thought or preparation, hired a man with a D6 Bulldozer to start clearing the land, bought chain-saws, axes, and a whole lot of logging implements that I figured I would need to finish the job, and moved into the woods, intent on clearing the land within a week or two.

The twenty-eight acre property sloped downward in an easterly direction toward the ocean half a mile away. This, of course, was conjecture on my part as at that point I couldn't see anything but the damn trees, most of which stood over seventy feet high, all of which were surrounded by thick salal and other native plants and bushes. Undaunted by this dense vegetation, the D6 and I started our journey toward the sea.

Shortly before we started our land-clearing venture, a man phoned me to see if I would be interested in some old furniture that he wanted to dispose of. The furniture was on his farm out on East Saanich Road, not too far from my antique shop. I drove to the location right away, only to find that the furniture was not suitable for me. The man suggested that I might be interested in other things he had around the farm and continued to show me the odd items that he wished to unload, none of which interested me.

One of the items he showed me was a #930 Bob Cat, the largest Bob Cat made, and it included a backhoe attachment. He had used it in his swimming pool business, excavating for the pools and grading the land around them once they were completed. The replacement cost of such a piece of heavy equipment, would have been in the range of \$120,000. He offered it to me for \$20,000, including an impressive assortment of attachments.

Initially I said that I was not interested in the machine, but after a short period of reflection, I told him that I would pay him \$18,000 for it, if he included the heavy-duty trailer. He readily agreed to my offer and even delivered it to my property in Mill Bay the next day.

Within a few months we began clearing the land. I spent two days a week on the site and employed a young man to help me. This young fellow knew how to operate heavy machinery including the Bob Cat, and proved to be a Godsend. He could make that Cat do anything, including standing itself on end,



Cliff hauling logs with Babe on Pine Lodge Farm 1986

which proved to be a decided advantage when we needed to carry out repairs or change a flat tire. Unfortunately the young buck inflicted more damage to the machine than I considered reasonable, and so I took the reins again, and learned to operate it myself. Within a very short period I could do everything the young man could do with it, with considerably less damage to the machine. Over the years that it took to prepare the land for development that wonderful Cat paid for itself over and over again.

Like everything that I have tackled in my life, clearing the twenty-eight acres took a whole lot more time than I could ever have imagined. In the first place, falling trees is only the beginning of the process. The timber has to be limbed and cut into specific lengths, particularly if you wish to have it milled into lumber, which I chose to do with much of it. In this case I employed a young fellow with a portable sawmill to cut the trees into lumber for some out buildings. The rest I cut into firewood, which I stacked all over the property, eventually constructing a large shed and filling it with all the cut wood. Ultimately I created a wood lot similar in size and volume to those I enjoyed visiting many years earlier on Market Street in Victoria.

Many of the cedar trees were small and not suitable for lumber. These were cut into posts and used to construct a fence around my twenty-eight acres. I spent a tremendous amount of time drilling holes in the rocky ground, and building a five foot high fence around the property, as well as cross fencing much of the pasture which had been wrested from the forest. The multi-railed fence would have been substantial enough to contain a herd of elephants, rather

than the herd of Black Angus or, later on, the Hereford cattle that I ran on my farm.

For several years, my workweek included two days in the forest, and five days in the store. Much of the time that I spent in the forest entailed back breaking labour. I won every square foot of pasture only by sweat, tears, and endless patience.

One never to be forgotten hot July day, during my second year on the job, I was sitting on a stump looking at the tangle of trees which the D6 had pushed over the previous day, wondering why on God's earth I had ever started this project. After two years I still couldn't see anything but trees and bush. Although there were many cleared areas, some already planted with grass, I still had no view and I was beginning to despair, believing that all I would ever accomplish would be the creation of a picturesque farm surrounded by dense forest.

The burning desire and hope that kept me going was that somewhere beyond those trees was an open expanse of sea and sky, a dream which was becoming dimmer as each day passed. But finally, a short time after I sat on the tree stump wondering if I would have to spend the rest of my life searching for that elusive view, I saw the outline of Mount Tuam, on Salt Spring Island.

Normally, a glimpse of a large mountain would not be an exciting event, but when I caught sight of Mt. Tuam that wonderful summer day I rejoiced and thanked God for such a wondrous gift. From that moment on I knew that there was indeed something special awaiting me just beyond those trees, and I worked as never before to reveal God's plan for me.

Within a very short time, after falling many, many trees, a small opening appeared, and glory, glory, there before my very eyes was the sight that I had been dreaming of for so long, the sparkling blue ocean.

To say that it was the happiest day of my life would not be an exaggeration, for I had been working for over two years toward this day, and now it had arrived. I knew that my efforts and dreams would be rewarded even beyond my wildest imagination.

Once the Mountain and the ocean were in view, we spent much more time cleaning up the site, taking down many more trees and improving the pastures and clearing trails throughout the property. Eventually the whole twenty-eight acres were crisscrossed with trails suitable for vehicle traffic and included over a mile of 'elephant fences', with huge gates at the main entrance.

These gates were hung on a framework of logs that might have equaled the fortified entry to Fort Victoria in the early days of the colony.

My two-day workweek continued for quite some time, while I built outbuildings and a small, rustic 20' X 20' cabin, which I used as a place to sleep, whenever I felt the urge to 'rough it'.

One day, while visiting the site of the Bamberton cement works on the Malahat, I was taken with an old school house. Evidently it was slated for demolition along with most of the original Bamberton Village. The manager

was delighted to hear of my interest and allowed me to arrange for the removal of the school house from the property, and also gave me permission to remove as many doors and windows as I wished from the old houses, before they were demolished.

A house moving company arranged to transport the schoolhouse from Bamberton within the following two weeks. Meanwhile I contacted the telephone company and the hydro authorities to inform them of the move. The plan was to move the building, which was forty five feet long and thirty six feet wide, along the highway to Kilmalu, north on Telegraph to Meredith and lastly up Mutter to its final resting place.

As I drove the proposed route the following day, I noted that there seemed to be enough width on the main roads to accommodate the school; however, a section of Meredith Road seemed a little too narrow because several hydro poles were very close to the road. When I measured the space between the large trees on the south side, and the hydro poles on the north side, I discovered that the width was less than the required thirty-six feet so I contacted the Hydro company and explained my dilemma, and asked what my next step was.

The Hydro boss was a very nice fellow, and suggested that their poles would probably be better located away from the road itself, and agreed to do the work immediately, if I would share the cost. The actual cost to me was a thousand dollars, which I felt was very reasonable as I had acquired the school for nothing and the moving company was only charging me four thousand



our first cabin 1980



1982 Bamberton School House, before and after..

dollars to move it and lower it onto its foundation, once in place.

Moving the monstrous structure took place at two a.m. one morning. The early hour was planned to avoid any unnecessary traffic, and things moved along very well, that is, until we reached the intersection of Kilmalu and the Island Highway. At that point we discovered that the maze of overhead electrical wires, were far too low to allow passage of the building. We then decided that the only other possibility would be Hutchinson Road, further north. Fortunately there was no problem passing along Hutchinson as there was plenty of room on either side. For the most part there was also sufficient room along Telegraph as well, until it reached the point where several telephone poles blocked its passage. The three telephone poles were very close to the road itself, and would have touched the roof of the school as it passed by, with the danger of tearing the lines down. So the school was parked in a field until a solution was found. The problem was quickly overcome when a crew from the Cobble Hill Telephone department arrived and leaned the poles over, just far enough to allow safe passage for the school. Best of all they did it with no charge. Finally, the school was in place, the foundation constructed, and the building gently lowered onto the footings. The moving equipment removed from under the structure, and the building was finished and ready for whatever I was going to use it for.

During the previous five years I had accumulated many historical artifacts, including stained glass windows, doors, light fixtures, and a beautiful wooden balcony that had been a very prominent feature in the Capital Theatre in Victoria. This particular balcony was the very one where I stood with my feet between the spindles, looking down upon the movie-goers in the foyer, those many years ago. It was destined to become the central feature in my home.

Those were very busy years for me, as I was not only collecting pieces to build into the house, I was also collecting antique furniture to furnish it. Somehow, the more I collected, the more I became inspired with grand ideas, eventually drawing up plans for a lodge which included nine bedrooms, eleven bathrooms, kitchen, dining room, den and a large baronial hall or living room.



Front entrance to Pine Lodge Farm

Naming Pine Lodge

Once I realized what I was about to do, and the cost of it all, I suggested to Barb that perhaps we should consider doing bed and breakfast to help cover expenses. Barb, bless her heart, once again went along with another of my wild adventures, and together we laid the foundation for what would become the Pine Lodge Farm B&B. Barb suggested the name Pine Lodge because I had ordered sixty thousand feet of white pine from a small mill on Sylvester road. The pine trees had come from a stand of timber near Youbou, in Cowichan Lake, and seemed perfect for the project. When the pine lumber was delivered, all sixty thousand feet of it, we proceeded to stack it in piles around the field just below where the house now stands. For six months the lumber lay about while we prepared everything to begin construction.

At long last everything was ready to go. My dear brother Frank took charge of the project and, with the help of two other young men, began the six-month building project. For the next few months the rain fell continually, making a difficult job even more difficult. The lodge was designed to replicate an early style of architecture, using as many antiques or near antique artifacts as possible. The wood flooring had been milled from trees on the property and when finally installed was absolutely perfect. Every light fixture, stained glass window, and wooden door was refinished and carefully restored to its original lustre. The restoration of furniture and building items had taken several years to accomplish and, though adding tremendous challenges along the way, had all come together to make this home one in a million.

While brother Frank laboured on the Pine Lodge, I spent my time

preparing all the artifacts for installation. This was a time consuming job as every window, door and light fixture was a different size or thickness, necessitating a unique framework for each piece.

Many of the artifacts were stored in the Bamberton Schoolhouse which by that time was filled to capacity making it very difficult to find the room to manufacture the framework or, for that matter, even make the decision where each article should be installed. Often the item in question would have the hinges or locking devise on the wrong side or edge, making it impossible to use in a particular room or closet. Often I would have to reset hinges or door locks to make the item usable in the place I had intended them.

All my light fixtures had all been rewired and approved for use by my good friends at Water Glass Studios in Victoria, a shop that specialized in light fixture restoration and Art Glass Replication, an art which they had perfected, and applied to my own collection with care and attention. The balconies that became the centerpiece of the grand hall and upper staircase required several months to refinish, as there were many coats of paint covering each section. The paint removal took weeks of painstaking labour followed by countless hours sanding, repairing broken spindles, and restructuring each section in order to fit them into their designated spaces. Happily, the thirty foot section covering the full length of the upper balcony fit perfectly when finally placed in position as did each section used on the staircase and at both ends of the balcony. Gradually the lodge took shape, the roof framing was completed, the cedar shakes hand-cut by my good friend Eric Roberts were fastened into place, the rooms and trim were freshly painted by my dear brother Harold, and the pine boards and battens left in their natural state. Finally every nail was set, the hemlock and fir flooring sanded and lacquered, windows, doors, and lighting installed, drapes hung, antique furniture in place, and a large house for Lady, my Dalmation-Black Lab cross dog placed on the outdoor porch.



Capital Theatre railings in front room of the lodge

Lady Adopts our Family

Lady was the smartest animal that I ever encountered. Considering that my mother was a devout animal lover her entire life, we always had stray dogs and cats dropping by for a meal or two, plus the many forms of rodents that I harboured over the years; and considering Prince, that very special Border Collie that used to accompany me on my paper route each morning (until he decided that running several miles every morning was not what it was cracked up to be, and finally reached the point that no amount of persuasion or cussing for that matter could get him out of my bed in the early morning). That gives you an idea of just what I mean when I say, “Lady was the smartest darn dog that I ever owned.”

About the time I began clearing my land in Mill Bay, Lady made her appearance in my life. Early one morning, while we were still living on Doyle Road in Saanich, I discovered a snarling, teeth bared, skinny black dog on our lawn. I told it, in no uncertain terms, to remove itself from my lawn. The vicious black object flatly refused to budge, so I threw a missile of some size at her. Still she refused to leave, so I went into the house and told Barb and daughter Marlene not to go near it, as it was probably rabid.

That night, despite my request to phone the city pound and have it removed, the black dog was still lying on our lawn in exactly the same spot as it had been before I left for work that morning. Marlene had poured a bowl of water for it to drink, and said that the poor thing was starving and we should feed it.

I laid down the law saying, “No way, if we feed it, we will never get rid of it”.

After Marlene fed the dog, she looked at us, licked her chops once or twice and then grinned at us.

The next morning the dog was still in the same spot but, just as I was about to leave for work, the pound keeper drove into the driveway, stepped out of his truck, walked over to my vehicle, looked toward our canine visitor, and said, “Is that the dog?”

My answer was affirmative, but the keeper made no move toward the animal, he merely stood quietly looking at it. For some mysterious reason, I also stood gazing at the beast, without making an effort to hasten her departure, in fact I found myself looking directly into her deep brown eyes, thinking that she didn't look too vicious, and observing that she appeared quite content just where she was.

After quietly studying the animal for a few minutes, the pound man turned to me and said, “What do you think?”

I was about to say, “Go get em”, but the object of interest looked directly into my eyes, and, I swear on my mothers grave, spoke to me with as much clarity and passion as in any communication that I had ever experienced with a dog, and said, “Don't send me away, I'll make it up to you.”

Well, what could I do? The message was clear; if I didn't keep her I

would pay for it for the rest of my life. To save face, and to avoid looking like a sap, I told the pound man that I would keep her for a couple of days, decide what to do with her, and call him once I made my decision. Before the man disappeared from view, the black beast got up and walked over to me and nuzzled my leg. Marlene was ecstatic, Barb was wonderful, and I was caught, hook, line and sinker.

Each day Lady, as she was now known, did everything within her power to ingratiate herself into our family, and succeeded, probably beyond her wildest dreams. Guided by some mysterious instinct, she focused her undivided attention on me, quickly overcoming any resistance I might have entertained.

Within several weeks she presented us with a magnificent gift of ten gorgeous puppies. Five spotted black Labs, and five Rottweiler pups. It would appear that sometime before finding her way to our home she had tarried with a handsome, ne'er-do-well Rottweiler and perhaps even a handsome black Lab. When we first discovered her new family, she looked directly at me, grinned from ear to ear, and distinctly said, "I told you I would make it up to you."

From that time on, Lady and I spent as much time together as possible. She always accompanied me when I worked on the farm in Mill Bay, and we enjoyed many interesting conversations during our countless trips up to the property. While I never was able to teach her to speak English, she certainly understood everything that I discussed with her, often making truly intelligent observations of her own.

When requiring her presence, all I would have to do is whistle once, and she would come running no matter what she was engaged in at the moment, which was very unusual, as most dogs I ever owned usually ignored my calls unless it was to their advantage to come when called.

One night, soon after Lady made her appearance, I had a butcher over to cut and wrap a steer that had been hanging for twenty one days. I had picked up the carcass that day, and it was still resting in my truck awaiting the hand of the butcher.

Lady stood watching as the two sides of beef were cut and wrapped, occasionally enjoying scraps of meat that came her way. We were very busy and weren't watching her too closely, other than when we threw her scraps from the cutting table, and so we never noticed that she periodically disappeared for short periods of time.

When all the beef was cut and wrapped, I went to the truck to retrieve the liver, the tongue and the heart but, unbeknownst to us, Lady had already made frequent trips to the truck, and had completely devoured everything in sight. This, considering the fact that we had been quite generous feeding her scraps, was unbelievable. Lady offered no apologies or explanations for her amazing feat, rather she looked as pleased as punch, no doubt reasoning that she had ten extra mouths to feed, and what the heck, we shouldn't expect her to starve herself.

One of Lady's greatest pleasures was running. She would race around

fields whenever possible, stretched out like a racehorse, her tongue hanging out a mile, and grinning from ear to ear. The farm presented the best opportunity for running, because the lower field was longer than a racetrack, and obviously presented a challenge to this faster-than-a-speeding bullet canine. She would take off from the house site, and would run full speed to the very end of the field, run a circle or two, and return at an even faster pace, and then quietly sit down at her favorite spot and serenely gaze over her domain.

Whenever I prepared to cut down a tree, I would tell her just where I thought the thing would fall and just where she should stand. Once I approached a large tree, much larger than I would normally tackle, and pointed out to her that even though it was on a downward slope, I was going to defy gravity and fall it uphill.

My experience with tree falling was not fully developed, and I did not know that it would take a very skilled logger to manage such a fete. So I positioned her in a spot downhill, then set my chainsaw in motion and cut a large wedge from the upper side of the tree, figuring that once I cut through the tree on the lower side it would miraculously fall upward.

As soon as I had cut half way through, on the down side of the tree, it gently leaned backward binding the saw in such a way as to make it almost impossible to remove. Undaunted, I fetched my other saw and proceeded to cut a thin wedge from the tree just above where the first saw was pinched in what proved to be, a death grip.

Lady eyed my handiwork, and immediately moved to a different spot, well away from the tree itself. Completely unaware of the danger I was in, I continued with the saw-cut. Within a few short moments the tree suddenly lurched downward, snapping off the remaining bit of wood still attached to the stump, and came crashing down, ending up on the ground, precisely where I had been standing moments before. Fortunately my reflexes propelled me away from the tree with the velocity a man shot out of a cannon, and the only thing, belonging to me that ended up under the tree was my cotton hat.

After a short discussion with Lady concerning that particular incident, I decided to leave the larger trees to those who knew more about them than I did. From that time on I engaged professionals to drop the big ones, while I concentrated on the smaller sized ones that I felt comfortable with and, as there were hundreds more to come down I never ran short of work to do, and also Lady didn't have to continually worry about my welfare.

My dog continued her long runs, usually resting afterwards on her favorite spot on the lawn near the backdoor of the lodge.

One very cold day, shortly after we moved into the house, while awaiting my return from my antique store, Lady went on one of her runs around the lower racetrack and returned to her favorite place on the lawn for a rest. Barb happened to be looking out the window at that moment and noticed that when Lady sat down she suddenly became aware that the ground was frozen, and it obviously was more than her tushie could stand. She raised up onto her

haunches, but her nether regions still refused to remain so close to the ground, So she went over to the porch and retrieved a pillow from a chair that was still outside, returned to her spot on the lawn, and laid the pillow over the offending area, then assumed her normal position, completely satisfied that she had done the right thing. Barb knew that no one would ever believe it, and took a picture as proof.

Gradually my dear Barb was becoming accustomed to the Pine Lodge Farm and all the chores that went with it. Actually life was better than it had ever been.

Convincing Barb to sell our house on Doyle Road had been extremely difficult, because she did not want to move away from the city and into the wilderness, but I finally smooth talked her into selling the house and putting the money that we would receive into the Pine Lodge.

For six months, while the For Sale sign was up on our front lawn, Barb was quietly praying that it wouldn't sell, and that I would come to my senses before it was too late, and before our house with its beautiful view overlooking Elk Lake and the distant ocean was gone forever.

There is no doubt that I had asked myself the same question many, many times, "Why would one want to move from an absolute paradise, to the far reaches of Mill Bay?" But my stubborn nature wouldn't allow me to admit defeat and so I pressed on. I did promise Barb that if the house did not sell by the time the listing expired I would give the whole thing a second look.

Once again fate dealt us a hand that appeared to be a winner. On the last day of the listing, a young couple from Prince George made us a cash offer with no strings attached. They had just won over a million dollars on the 6/49, and had fallen in love with our place and were prepared to buy it at once. When I look back to that moment I wonder if our life would have ended up differently if we had not moved.

Driving back and forth from Mill Bay to my shop in Royal Oak was beginning to wear on me. I began to begrudge the time away from Barb and the



farm, and decided to sell the Red Barn Antique store. I reasoned that I could continue on with the antique business from my home or, better yet, build a bigger and better store in Mill Bay. That was not to be, however.

Lady sitting on pillow

Building a Museum

After selling the property in Victoria I held a going out of business sale, hoping to off-load the contents of the store. Many items sold, but I was left with the major portion of my antiques and collectibles which I moved up to the farm, storing them in every available space. The main space used for the collection was my beautiful barn that my son-in-law Bernie and I had just finished building, which also housed my three horses in a lean-to attached to the back of the main structure. By storing all the remnants of my antique store plus my own personal collection in that building, I created a very fine museum type showroom. The collection included several horse drawn wagons, every conceivable kitchen gadget ever invented, blacksmith tools, carpenters implements, show harness, sleds, a collection of stoneware jugs including some original ginger beer bottles identical to the ones I used to collect when I was six, plus a large assortments of ginger beers from every corner of B.C.

When Rose's Jewelry in Victoria closed down I purchased six enormous glass display cases, all of which had been constructed just after the turn of the century, and had been installed in the jewelry store by the builder himself. They were moved directly to my 'Museum', and promptly filled with a vast assortment of ancient memorabilia, including the ginger beers, and every other type of collectible imaginable.



While all this activity was going on Barb and I began our bed and breakfast business at the Pine Lodge. Considering the fact that we were far off the beaten track and completely unknown, things began to happen very quickly. A new acquaintance suggested that I write to as many B&B guidebook publications as possible, which I did. He just happened to be involved in the travel industry himself, and was able to help us in many ways. He even arranged for the American publication 'Country Living' to visit the farm for an interview and a write-up.

One fine day a helicopter landed in the field closest to the lodge and dropped off a couple from the magazine. The couple included the magazine's publisher herself, and her photographer, an award winning professional. They stayed overnight in our Lodge, and enjoyed the experience and graciously included us in a Vancouver Island cover story. The story included several pictures and featured the ginger beer collection as well as other items of interest on the farm. When the article appeared in their magazine we had a number of inquiries for lodging, and also requests for more information on the various collections. This led to yet another interesting opportunity for us: the possibility of renting antiques to movie-makers.

We placed an ad in the magazine, 'Hollywood North', and soon developed a modest rental business, catering to both movie companies and theatrical productions. While we never made a fortune, we did meet some very interesting movie people including the cast of the highly successful "Little Women", which was being shot on location in Cobble Hill.

Several of the cast were housed here during the filming, including Kirsten Dunst and Claire Danes, both delightful and well-mannered young ladies. Their mothers and their personal tutor accompanied the two starlets, and during their stay we shared many pleasant moments, including a wonderful farewell party on their last night.

During their stay here at the Pine Lodge, Claire Danes invited us over to the movie set and introduced us to Winona Ryder, the show's star. For some reason I had no idea who Winona Ryder was, and when she was introduced, all I could say was, "What did you say your name is"? Claire quickly set me straight, "This is the star of Little Woman." Winona smiled graciously at me, and said that it was a pleasure to meet me. Much later I kicked myself. Heck, if I had played my cards right, she might have given me a role in the movie.

There were several movies that used our antiques in their productions and usually we were invited to the sets to see how things were done. Quite often we would get to meet the actors, which was always a thrill, of sorts.

Joining the Chamber of Commerce

Once Barb and I had things under control on the farm, I began to look for other things to get involved in. For some insane reason I thought that it would be fun to get involved in the local Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber was not large, that is, it had very few members but the people involved were just great.

Before long I was elected vice-president, which wasn't necessarily because of my abilities or talent, but rather that there was no one else to take the position, and I didn't know how to say no.

When the president refused to run again, much against my protestations I was unanimously elected to fill his place. I'm not even sure there was a quorum in attendance that night, but it didn't seem to make any difference. They passed the resolution anyway, and from that moment on, I didn't look back; of course there wasn't much to look back on in any case.

From the moment that I was catapulted into the president's seat, I did as much as possible to make the rest of group sorry for their foolishness. Certainly I knew as little about Roberts Rules as I did about anything else I ever tackled, but it didn't seem to matter to the others, as long as I turned up to all the meetings.

When I first began attending the meetings there were only four or five members who showed up regularly, but gradually a few more folk became interested and before long our ranks swelled and included seven dedicated followers, who were subsequently referred to as the 'Group of Seven'. They were local businessmen who believed most of what I told them. Their names were Grant Garnett, Klaus Seibring, Wayne Allen, Jim Dakin, Morris Simard, Fred Little, and myself. What was most remarkable about the group was their willingness to go along with my crackpot ideas.

At that time Mill Bay was still regarded a Sleepy Hollow by most travelers. The highway was still two lanes at the widest point with only one traffic signal to slow the light traffic down. The village did boast two gas stations, two restaurants and a coffee shop. It definitely had the feel of a place of peace and tranquility for the weary travelers.

The Birth of Mill Bay Jack

The 'Group of Seven', however, had other ideas about how the village should be viewed, and set about getting Mill Bay put on the map, figuratively speaking, and so, began a crusade to make it a destination point. One of the first brilliant ideas I put forward was that the place needed a central figure that would spark interest in the area. I, of course, had a plan. We would invent an imaginary figure to represent Mill Bay.

A very close friend of mine, Guy Randall, affectionately known as 'The Old Timer', spent his entire life glorifying the lives of the explorers who opened

up Canada. He and his wife Nora would dress in clothes reminiscent of our early day trappers, and travel all over the province, visiting schools and relating tales of the 'Old Days', to the fortunate students lucky enough to be able to sit in on their lectures.

Guy was six foot four and as strong as an ox, and a very impressive figure dressed in his buckskins, sporting a long rifle with a powder horn slung about his chest while Nora, equally impressive in her own deerskin leathers, would regale the kids with their stories of early day pioneers.

History was of great importance to me, and I thoroughly enjoyed hearing my friend spin tales of early Canada, while Nora would delight the audience with poems written by well-known authors. Sitting around with the group of Seven one day, I threw out the idea that we could create our own mythical character patterned after Guy Randall to represent our town. This character would be called Mill Bay Jack. I further proposed that we carve a twelve-foot figure of Jack and display him in the town square, or wherever he would attract the most pigeons. Mill Bay Jack would be depicted as a logger rather than a buckskin clad frontiersman; in this way we could build on the rich logging history of the area.



Mill Bay Jack in Pioneer Square, Mill Bay 1985

In the 1800's, well before the Island Highway, there was a mill just where Shawnigan Creek entered the bay. Logs cut from lands above the bay were skidded down a specially constructed flume to the mill and then cut into lumber. To this day there are old pilings and mill slabs at the former site. According to some sources, the pilings supporting the Empress Hotel were logged from the same land and barged down to the inner harbour.

One of the group of Seven, Maurice Simard, a former logger himself, felled a large cedar tree and supplied the twelve foot section for the statue of Mill Bay Jack. The chamber employed a

young carver, Julien Oullet. He set about the task admirably, first carving a small figure which would become the replica of the finished statue using pictures we had taken of Guy Randall as an example. I was so taken by this carving that I purchased it for my own collection, and still have it to this day.

Carving a twelve-foot statue from a twelve-inch model was certainly a challenge to the young carver, but he did very well. The project took quite some time and after some minor problems, he completed it and then applied the many coats of paint that were necessary to cover the highly porous cedar.

At long last Mill Bay Jack was ready to be placed on the concrete pad we had prepared at the front of the Pioneer Square shopping mall. This building was built on property owned by Grant Garnett, a founding member of our group, and designed and built by another member our select group of seven, Wayne Allen.

Once positioned in the square, it attracted a lot of attention from tourists, passing travelers, flocks of pigeons, and the somewhat bewildered resident folk of the area, who were often heard to ask the question, "What the hell is it for?"

Meanwhile, I was busy writing 'The Legend of Mill Bay Jack', a mythological story of a man of gigantic stature, born in the wilds of Shownigan many, many years ago to a happily married Sasquatch couple. Jack became the first Sasquatch logger in the area and, to the best of my knowledge, probably the last. However improbable this tale seemed, it was my story and I was sticking to it.

The character, Mill Bay Jack, grew up in the hills around Shownigan, and being a restless youngster he took to knocking trees down just for the fun of it. His handiwork was noticed by an old logger who took him under his wing and taught him the trade, beginning with concept of sawing a tree, and falling it rather than merely knocking it down.

Jack, though a slow learner, eventually mastered the craft and made quite a name for himself in the district, displaying his unique talents harvesting logs from the forest. He was famed for ability to fall a tree, and then drag it through the woods to the mill without any mechanized equipment.

While dwelling in the fantasy world of this mythical being, I told the incredible story at every opportunity. Many times I brought an audience to their feet, though sometimes they remained seated and stayed for the whole tale, which certainly pleased me a whole lot.