

NOTES FROM JENNIE MARILYN WIGARD

Notes received from Gunnar Roy Wigard, February 12, 2007.
Arranged in chronological order.

1800's

My grandparents moved to Edmonton in later 1800 and raised their family. They were very well known as there were not many people. As time went on they named a park after them. The McGhan Park. Susanne, my daughter, was trying to find more material about them but she passed away unexpectedly a couple of years ago so we were not able to go further. She and her husband's family had moved to Edmonton. But she did find out about the park. I was hoping to see if I could find it, but at my age they wouldn't likely let me on the plane!

My parents were born in Ontario before 1900.

1912

My mother and father eloped when they were sixteen and bought a farm in Kinley, a small town in Saskatchewan.¹ They started a family right away. In those days, most people started a family right away.

My mother and father bought a large farm. I remember a lot of cattle. They had a large family of seven children. Five girls and two boys: Spencer, Roy, Minnie, Lucy, Georgiana, Jennie and Ruby. Biggar was our closest shopping town.

I was born on January 24, 1912 in Kinley, Saskatchewan. I was the seventh child and was the delicate one. No one expected me to live as I was very frail. So they didn't register me or give me a name. Just plain "Jennie." I had that name till I was 21 and I got my mother to change my name to just plain J. Marilyn. So it was all legally down. I may be registered either in Kinley Saskatchewan or Vancouver or Victoria.

Kinley must still be there as I've seen the name in the *Vancouver Sun* just once in all these years. I probably wouldn't be able to find it if I went looking for it, as I understand it was a small town.

1914-1918

Everything was going well until the war started and in 1918 when the Asian flu epidemic hit Canada, it took a lot of strong, healthy people. In November 1918 my 'Papa' as we called our dads in those days, and my brother, Roy, passed away, the same as a lot of others. I think Roy was 16.

My mother (we called her "Mumma" in those days) was from the city and not knowing much about farming, had to give it up. She was just over 30 years old at this time and she tried to keep

¹In other papers she writes that they bought the farm in Prince Albert Sask, however in the next line she refers to Biggar Sask as their main shopping centre. Biggar is close to Kinley, but not to Prince Albert.

the farm and raise the rest of the family, but it became too much for her. In a few years she took ill, so she moved us all to Saskatoon, but still it was too much.²

1921

So in 1921 my aunt—a sister of my dad's—and uncle from Chilliwack came to visit us. She saw how hard it was for my mother to cope with everything and begged my mother to let them adopt my sister Ruby and I.

No one told me Spencer was coming to get me, and I was on my way before I knew it.³

Two other couples wanted me, but Auntie wanted both of us. I did like the Johnson's in Wilson Lake. I'm sure they would have given me a nice home. I still have a good memory of back in Wilson Lake and Edmonton as I was always sent to my grandma in Edmonton when any of the family were sick.

1922

Signed papers of adoption, January 1922.

My uncle was retired, but had 10 ½ acres about ten blocks from the centre of Chilliwack. He had a Model-T Ford for every day and a new Nash car for Sundays and special events.

At that time my aunt and uncle's family were at home. The two oldest ones (Clara and Clifford) were out of school and were working, but lived at home. It was one big family, Ruby and I plus auntie's family, Clara, Clifford and Norman Skelton.

Ruby and I were about the same age and size as their daughter and we were taken for triplets. She'd dress us up about the same.

Auntie was very fair in her disciplining of us. She never made us change our name which I was glad of. Skelton seemed like a cold, scary name.

I was very sickly with colds and pneumonia so I couldn't do well at school. When I was 12 years old I developed _____. My hair all fell out and that year I lost a lot of schooling.

In those days we had clothes just for Sunday. Every Sunday we attended the 11 o'clock service and Sunday school at 2 o'clock. Each family had their own pew. We had to sit with the family and then when we reached 12 years old we could join the choir. It was the largest girl's choir in the valley and people came from all over at Easter and Christmas to hear our special music. We

²Mother married a second time to an American. Nice man. They both passed away before 1950

³In another writing she states: "Left for Chilliwack by myself then ten years."

had one of the best lady instructors. This was the Chilliwack United Church. There were about 50 teenage girls all dressed the same in white choir gowns. Most people attended church in those days.

I did have a good healthy home. All home-grown fruit and vegetables, all home-made cooked meals. It was a nice place, but we sure had to work for it. Their youngest was the same age as my sister (8 years old) and I was ten.

We never knew there was a depression. When we went to live with my aunt and uncle they had 4 or 5 cows and some pigs and chickens, but soon a horse was added and then a nanny and three kids and a billy goat. He was a mean one and had to be tied good. It was a good thing we could run fast in those days as sometimes we would get too close and then he would be after us.

At Christmas time at school the kids chose names and were only allowed to spend up to 25 cents on a present for another schoolmate.

Aunt Susan sold all the butter she could make. She taught us everything and at 13 and 14 we could make butter as well as she could. When I was about 14 or 15 she got me to put my butter in the Vancouver Exhibition and the New Westminster fairs and I won First Prize at the 1923 and 1927 exhibitions or fairs. Auntie won a lot of exhibitions at many places: Mission, New Westminster, Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Vancouver. And more in her flowers, vegetables, cooking and preserves. She was very clever and never stopped working. She was a wonderful person.

Aunt Susan wanted me to be a nurse. She kept me in school till I was 16 or 17 and I got to grade 9. I took up hair dressing, but didn't like it.

We stayed with them till we came of age. By this time my aunt was a widow, so the family wanted me to stay with her in the big house in Chilliwack, which I did until I was 24.⁴ By this time I had four married sisters in Vancouver, so I was never alone.

I enjoyed Chilliwack and still like it. When I went there in 1920 it was about like Sechelt was when I came here. There was lots of space for the horse and buggy and the odd Model-T Ford.

1925

Broach: Uncle Norman gave Mom about 1925. Norman Skelton—Mom's cousins and adopted brother (at age 10).

Cup and Saucer: Given to Mom by Nora Cathcart in Chilliwack about 1925.

1936-1945

⁴In another writing she says she was 22 when she "left for the bright lights of Vancouver."

In January, 1936 I went to Vancouver for a visit to see my four sisters and stayed and did housework for \$15 a month. We worked all day and babysat at night.

After a couple of years I married a young man from Finland—Gunnar Wigard.⁵ He was a high rigger and superior foreman of a large American logging camp.

Gunnar was of Swedish descent but was born in Hopsala, Kronoby, Finland on April 17, 1907. After graduation he spent 1 ½ years in the infantry in Kronoby, winning a diploma and silver medallion. He was an adventurer and in 1928, at the age of 21, came to Vancouver with other friends. It didn't take long to find work and soon learn the job of high rigging. (He could climb a 200-foot tree like a squirrel.) In his middle 30s he married and settled at Jordan River and later he became foreman for the Canadian Puget Sound Company (CPS).

When we were married Gunnar was working as a high rigger for Puget Sound Logging at Jordan River on Vancouver Island. After a few years the supervisor was getting older and wanted to retire, so he asked my husband if he would take his place. It was a fairly large camp and a big responsibility. We both liked Jordan River and stayed there until the war ended. There he was also in the militia. As Jordan River supplied Victoria with electricity at that time, we were well protected by the airforce and army. We all had a lot of excitement and good social times.

When the war ended in 1945 Gunnar and his friend Charlie McDermid decided they would like their own camp.⁶ Gunnar was a high rigger before he was offered the super's job, and Charlie was a good mechanic, so they worked well together. It didn't take long to find what they wanted, and we all moved to Doriston just this side of the rapids in Sechelt Inlet (bought November 1945). That was in January 1946.

We had three children then and it took us four hours on the Union Boat from Vancouver and another two hours from Porpoise Bay on the old *Maude*.

It was quite an experience with no electricity and outside plumbing, the bunk houses, the lamps outside the privy, pioneer stuff. Saturday night baths was something to remember with the four children. We had a lot of snow that year and going to our little outhouse was not for pleasure. Our house was up on the hill overlooking Sechelt Inlet, and a beautiful spot just about five minutes from the Skookumchuck. There was a school, as it was a good place before the war. At that time there were Japanese families there and by all reports their gardens were the best. After the war they never came back to Doriston.

My son Roy was born on July 1, 1946. I went down to Vancouver to have him. We had the big earthquake on Sunday morning at 10 a.m. and I knew my time was out. People were out in the streets. Lucy came out without too much on. "Get out! Get out!" she said.

I wasn't nervous. I wanted half a dozen children. I came from six. We had a whale of a time,

⁵There is no baby by that name in Canada, but I have six grandsons and I'm sure they'll spread the name.

⁶Still known as M & W Logging

so I was thinking there was nothing to it. My husband was a Swede born in Finland and they say Swedish babies have square heads. I didn't realize it was so tough! With Roy, it was a beautiful day, but I was having a heck of a time getting through it. This woman next to me was screaming and swearing and the nurse turned to me. "Oh, she's just having a baby," she said. That nurse gave her the dickens. "Look at Mrs. Wigard, here," the nurse said to this woman, "she's had three babies already." The woman said, "I don't give so-and-so what Mrs. Wigard had!"

1947

The school at Doriston, just a few blocks away, had closed when they moved the Japanese people away at the beginning of the war. It was a nice little 1-room school, but we never had enough children to warrant a school. So when our two oldest boys had to start school we decided to move closer to Sechelt.

Our taxi driver at that time, Harry Sawyer, owned the only taxi. He began to show us around. In those days no one would rent to us with four children and there were no real estate people here. We started looking at Grantham's Landing and worked our way to Gibsons. All I can remember is that all the places he knew of were so hilly, it seemed like we would always be climbing. So we forgot Gibsons and concentrated on Sechelt.

We found two places for sale—one was too small for the six of us and the other was a large older house. They said it was built in 1912. Gunnar could see it could serve the purpose with a bit of remodeling and painting.

In August 1947 we found a place in Selma Park known as Captain Vints. It was a large, older house on $\frac{1}{2}$ acre⁷ of land in the middle of Selma Park on the beach side. It had to be almost rebuilt, but we had a good carpenter in the family. Gunnar remodeled and made it larger and it was made very comfortable. Lots of space and beautiful and peaceful. There were lots of children for ours to play with. A lot of children were on the beaches and they were a happy bunch. Now there is no one using the beaches very much. This is where we lived for 20 years, from 1947 to 1967.

In those days all the local parents enjoyed the beach with their children. Many nice events were started by the late Doctor McCall and his wife Molly.

We had a lot of fun in our early days in Sechelt. When there was a charity dance, such as a Red Cross Dance, we would hire a bus to take the Selma Park people to the Roberts Creek Hall. Our little Selma Park Hall is still standing, but not used.

There was a camp cook living in Selma Park and he would put on a big dinner and dance just for Selma Park people. One New Years it was cold and the plumbing etc. all froze at the hall. They had prepared food and everything for a big party. When they got to the hall and found it wasn't usable, they decided to come to our place as we did have a large front room. There must have

⁷In another writing she says it was 1-acre of land.

been 45 - 50 people. Everyone said that was the best New Year's party they ever had.

In those days we had a pretty record player with old-time music such as the Beer Barrel Polka, and we had a collection of Swedish polkas and waltzes.

Everyone said it was the best time they'd had in a long time. When the few of us that are still here get together, we remember our good parties we had when we were young.

We had good neighbours all around us and on special occasions we would all get together. We all didn't have cars so we hired a bus to hold about 40 to take us to some special dance in Roberts Creek or Gibsons. Now we just don't seem to get together like we used to and enjoy it the same.

My daughter and son-in-law bought and live on the property that we bought in 1947.

1949

Joined the Eastern Star in July 1949. I should have been a charter member, but I was very sick the night they got their charter.

1954

In 1954 there were few stores in Sechelt and one could not always find what they needed so it was a trip to Vancouver on the slow Union Steamship. After a few of these trips it was decided that Sechelt needed a shoe store. I was tired of taking the children to Vancouver for a year's supply of shoes! The children were all in school and it seemed I had time on my hands, so I asked my husband if I could start as shoe store.

I went to buy the shoes from a Bata Shoe Store on Hastings Street in Vancouver. The boss couldn't even speak English. I was scared out of my skin. This was November and it was dark and the store was near the Lotus Hotel and the Sun Building. By the time I got there, the store had closed. I got into Chinatown and I could hardly get out, I was so scared.

The next day was Remembrance Day, November 11th, and all of the stores were closed. I called the John Mussenden Wholesale Store. The owner agreed to meet me there at 9 o'clock before the parade.

We opened on December 4, 1954 and Sechelt had its first real shoe store known as Wigard's Shoe Store. When I started, I couldn't even read the inside of a shoe! I could just remember where every shoe was.

In the beginning the store was a 16 x 20-foot room with two chairs and one wall of shoes. The first Christmas we had the floor covered with shoes because there were not enough shelves. I was stepping in places between the shoes. (Vern and Angel Richter later added on the store two additional sections, but we soon outgrew that.)

At this time Gunnar was still working in the logging camp at Doriston. Susanne was eleven, the others were in their teens.

Gunnar and I did enjoy serving the people of the Sunshine Coast. People from Pender Harbour came down to our store—the native people, the Duncans, and Camerons, the Dubois with their five girls and son, and the Griffiths. The children of Pender, Egmont and Madeira Park wore out a lot of shoes. If our shoes were a dollar less, they'd come down here to buy them. Saddle oxfords were popular.

People would put cardboard in the bottom of their shoes when they got worn out.

The children did appreciate a new pair of shoes and used them with respect, and it made me happy to serve them. We fitted every shoe that went out of our store to make sure there was room for their feet to grow. If the child liked a shoe and we were out of the larger size, just to get the style they liked they'd try and squeeze their foot into a smaller size. We would soon find another style of shoe that they liked.

The parents would always come with their children, especially on Saturday. They never wore the shoes out of the store. We would always suggest that they try the shoes on the rug to make sure they were satisfied, and if not they could change them. All the children appreciated it when they got something new.

Most celebrations and Christmas the nuns would bring the little girls from the Sechelt Residential School for shoes. They were so good and happy when we fitted them with their new slippers. Often the grandmas would bring the little girls in for shoes and they would sit there like little princesses and be so interested in having their shoes fitted on. Sometimes I would have to try 4 or 5 pairs of different styles before I was satisfied with what suited them. You didn't have to tell me the ones they liked—you knew by their smile or expression on their faces.

In those days, most of us wore "hand-me-downs." Sometimes we didn't like it, but we never complained.

A couple of girls worked at the Village Café and their dad would collect their wages. There wasn't a lot of money around.

There weren't many people here then and we took time to hear what they had to tell us and we enjoyed what we had to work with. I have people stopping me on the street now saying how they enjoyed our little visits.

Being in business we got to know the people and what they needed, and we all enjoyed what we could afford. Gas wasn't so expensive then and people from one end of the peninsula to the other would come to Sechelt to shop. Our native people were very patriotic and we enjoyed their faithful attitude toward our relationship.

People don't seem so interested in their businesses any more and everyone wants to sell.

We all enjoyed what we were doing and we didn't expect to make or get rich overnight. Talk about the good old days when taxes were low and the rent wasn't so high. People that were here in the olden days, still speak of the 'good old days.'

We are all too busy today to enjoy what we have here.

1956

I was 44 ½ years old when I went into the Vancouver General Hospital for six weeks with four broken bones in hip and ankle, and road and gravel burns. Recovery good.

1962

After nine years of renting from Annelisa Richter, my husband built the Wigard Block in 1962⁸ and we sold our house in Selma Park and moved into the apartment above the stores. The couple that bought our house lived in it for another 30 years. Her husband passed away and it was too much work for her to keep up as she used to, so against her wishes, she had to sell and move to a smaller place.

We paid \$5,300.00 for that house. When she had it appraised it was valued at \$400,000.

1963

On October 19, 1963 we opened our new store on Cowrie across from the cenotaph. We stayed there until we sold in 1967.

1967-1969

In those days credit was very popular and after 13 years there was so much hard work to do that I decided it was time for a change. We had not had a break or holiday for twelve years. So we sold the first shoe store on March 3, 1967 to Betty and Micky McKay. They moved to Trail Bay Mall on February 28, 1967. They finally went broke and closed shop.

After a couple of years of retirement, Gunnar and I missed working with people so much we decided to start the first sewing and fabric store. On April 15, 1967⁹ we opened up the first fabric store and sold Singer sewing machines. The native people still had the school in their village and they had a dressmaker teaching the girls sewing, so we had a lot of dealings with them then.

But not knowing materials, it was a worry about buying the right kind of fabrics. I was getting older and styles changed. I couldn't change so fast, so I gave up. I decided to sell on July 3,

⁸Also listed as being built in 1963.

⁹In another writing she puts the date of this opening as 1968.

1969¹⁰ to Bob and May St. Jean from Hatzic, BC for \$9,000.00. It was then known as May's Sewing Centre.

1972-1976

On May 1, 1972 we opened up the shoe store again, but decided to give it up on May 1, 1976¹¹ as I was getting tired. We sold the second shoe store to David and Emma Campbell.

1979

We sold the Wigard Block in 1979 to Vic Walters. Richard and Adele started the furniture store in the first store, and Carlyne and Georgina Newman started Simpson Sears mail order store in the second store. Till August 1988.

1984

Photograph: Dad, Beril and I. The house we bought at Porpoise Bay Wharf and East Porpoise Bay (Peterson's) in 1984. Larie, Beril's nephew took picture.

1986

Gunnar died. He was a great sportsman and a charter member of the Sechelt Rod & Gun Club. He taught the boys.

General Notes, undated:

Pioneers of Sechelt:

Bergliot and Minnie Solberg
 Billy Steele
 Mr. & Mrs. Dawe
 Whitakers
 Doris Crowsten
 Caroline Kelly & Louise Higginson
 Lee & Jack Redman
 Gunnar and Marilyn Wigard
 Louise and Ben Lang
 Sam and Pearl McKenzie, Selma Park

Old Timers: Business People 1954 to 1992:

Eva & Frank Lyons - 92 - Dress Shop

¹⁰ Also listed as being sold in '1970'.

¹¹ Also listed as being sold on August 18, 1975.

Florrie Edric Clayton - 87 - Trail Bay Mall

Chrissie & Gus Crucil - Dry Goods Store

Annelisa & Vern Rechter - 57 - Radio and TV Repairs

Phyllis & Jim Parker - Hardware Store

Louise and Ben Lang - Drug Store

Lee and Jack Redman - Grocery Store

Marilyn and Gunnar Wigard - Dec 4, 1954 - Footwear and Sewing Centre

Ena and Art Armstrong - Halfmoon Bay - Restaurant & gas station.

Memberships in Organizations:

1. I have a life membership in the Rod & Gun Club. Gunnar was a great sportsman and a charter member of the Sechelt Rod and Gun Club.
2. Eastern Star member from 1949.
3. Hospital Legion.
4. Seniors.

Life Observations:

1. When my daughter and her husband, Ken, were visiting friends in Edmonton, their friends were all getting the *Saskatchewan Seniors* paper, so she bought me a subscription for a year and I've been getting it ever since. It has really interesting stories of what people had to do and what they had to work with. Life is so different now. People helped each other then. Not any more. Everyone wants so much now.
1. We had a lot of summer people that would come here and some would return each year and eventually buy property. As they arrived they would say it was so interesting with the big telephone poles and large trees, and they just liked the way the clerks accepted them in the stores. How do the new citizens think Sechelt got to where it is today if it weren't for people of the earlier days. We appreciated our customers and greeted them warmly and they would come back to see us whenever they could.

In the 30s and 40s and maybe 50s, the Vancouver department stores had their picnics and

the big boats would bring all the staff to have lunch at Sechelt Inn. Over 200 or more at a time. It was marvelous to see.

People that enjoyed Sechelt still talk about the good trips and hospitality of the Sechelt people and band.

1. I think I'm the oldest living business person that started the stores in Sechelt from 1950. We've watched and helped Sechelt each celebration and we have had some good celebrations. But it is getting really bad. Most of the businesses had floats or something in the parade. Everyone liked to come to Sechelt for our parades. It was a fun day for all the family.

1. All of our children started and ended school in Sechelt. Three of them have their own homes here¹², and their children have all graduated from Chatelech School. Pretty soon some of my twelve great-grandchildren may be going to the same school.

We didn't have much to offer our children. Singing and dancing lessons and a few ball games. No TV. For a while we had a roller rink and shows in the old Union building. There was no crime and we never locked our homes in those days.

1. I would not want a business anymore as it is so hard to buy the merchandise you like and in a lot of cases you take what you can get. The buyer doesn't have the same choice.
1. This record tells how we happened to be here in this beautiful place. So please don't spoil it by letting an industrial business like CAL start exporting gravel from the waterfront property. It will ruin the Indian waterfront. When they run out of space there, they will just walk away and leave an eyesore which we will look at for the rest of our days. Sechelt will just become a little old ghost town like a lot of other small towns throughout the country.

We have all watched Sechelt develop into a nice town until they messed around with it by changing our roads.

It would be better if Sechelt would only start paying off the old mortgages before they start more projects such as recreational swimming pools.

The council members all want to be boss. I do like your attitude of "different projects" so keep it up!

1. We did enjoy our experience with the people of the Sunshine Coast, from Pender Harbour and Egmont, all the way to Langdale.

¹²In another writing when she was 88 ½ she gives the following quote: "Now the half-year makes a difference. I came here when I was 34, can you imagine that?" Her husband Gunnar died in 1986. Two of her children live in Sechelt with their families. She has twelve grandchildren and twelve great grandchildren.

1. When I reminisce now about the years we spent with our native people and white people, it has been a rewarding experience. To this day I have gifts from the native people that I cherish, including a totem pole made by Chief Dan Paull, baskets from Mary Jackson, and a tray made by ___ Paull, and others.

We all enjoyed working together and on May Day when we had the parade the natives would have a beautiful float with the children dressed in buckskin outfits. It was something to remember. Oh for the good old days!

1. It was a sorry day for me when the shoe store got too big for me to handle. I did like working with our native people and whites alike. All these little ones have grown up and they still know me and speak when I meet them. Even with all my wrinkles and white hair!

Raising our four children and working with the people was the highlight of my living on the Sunshine Coast.