

# Pioneers: If it weren't for the women...

By Sherry Stewart



"If it weren't for the women, the men would never have made it in this country," says Marie Monette. And she should know.

Born just over 70 years ago in a log cabin at Montana Hill, Marie is the descendent of two of our best-known Roe Lake pioneer families. Her dad was Ed Malm, a Finnish settler, and her mum was Velma Higgins, eldest daughter of Irene (Granny) and Ed (Grandpa) Higgins. Ed Malm and Velma married in 1930.

Malm and Higgins were leaders among the adventurous men who came to this country, cut the roads, picked a quarter section to prove up, cut the trees and built log homes, worked the land, built the schools, and encouraged other pioneer families to make the trek and settle what is now known as the Interlakes area. That makes for dramatic reading.

Their women did everything else. And that, while it isn't so dramatic, was the glue that kept the whole picture together.

According to Marie, "It was the women that were the ones that stayed

at home. They were the backbone of the pioneer society as far as I am concerned. Men did what they wanted to do, or what they had to do, what they were good at. Women did almost everything else. They looked after the kids, they did the housework, packed the water, split the wood, worried about how the kids got to school, where they were going to get clothes, and worried about what would happen if a child got sick.

Marie was the first daughter born to Ed and Velma Malm. Son Howard was their first child, and then came Marie, Irma, Nancy, and later Verna and Grace. Howard and Marie were the older ones, and therefore responsible for the younger children. Marie says, "I was 12 years old when Verna was born. Her birthday is September 3rd and my birthday is September 16th. I was born at home but Mum went to Kamloops to have Verna. She came home the day of my birthday, opened the door, handed me this baby and said, 'Happy Birthday!' And I literally took care of her from then on."



Marie (12) holding sister Verna and sporting her first perm.

I asked Marie to look back on her childhood, and tell me what the women and children had then, or did not have then, in comparison to now.

"Granny Higgins had inside water," she told me. "They had an inside pump, and you pumped water into the kitchen sink. I think eventually Noveta rigged



Ed, Howard, Velma, and Marie Malm in the early 1930s.



Marie was born in this cabin, which her father Ed Malm built, at Montana Hills.



up some kind of pump like that too. That would be around the early 40s. Granny Higgins was the only one that I knew that had a bathroom in those days, an actual bathroom with a toilet in it. The other women had to pack all their water into the house for cooking and washing and cleaning. And then pack it out again.

“Many folks had wells. We had a well too, but we also used lake water because the well water was very hard.

“Women did housework, but housework then was very different from housework now. Very few women had linoleum on the floor either, it was boards. And most of the women washed by hand. I washed by hand on a washboard for years after I was married. There wasn't anything else. So you had to pack the water in...and out again later. Wash day you had a big boiler on the stove to heat the wash water up, so you couldn't use the stove for anything else. Washing was a BIG job. Small things weren't bad, but you take flannelette sheets, not exactly easy.

“Women made most of their clothes themselves, and they did a lot of trading of clothes too. One maternity set did for six women.

“We went to the Bridge Lake store for most things, probably about once every two or three weeks. We bought the sugar, the flour, rolled oats, baking powder, baking soda, coal oil, molasses and Roger's Syrup, which mother watered down to about a quarter. If we ran out in between times we would go to Granny (Hilda) Larsen's store on Judson road just past Ole Ellingston's place.

“We had our own meat, eggs, milk and butter. We kept carrots, and turnips. Turnips kept fairly well. And cabbage. We tied that upside down. But later, towards spring, there wasn't much. I can remember coming home from school



Irma and Marie Malm in the back row, holding baby Connie Leavitt, Vivian Higgins and Nancy Malm in the front row.

early in the spring and saying to Mum, 'What are we going to have for supper tonight?' She'd say, 'Well now, there's potatoes and lambs-quarter greens.' We hated lambs-quarter greens, but that's what there was. Next night it was different, lambs-quarter greens and potatoes. Quite often there was no meat. When Dad had shot a moose or a deer then we had meat every day, because the only method of preserving it was canning it. And Mum did can a lot of meat, so we had canned meat too. Then, in the fall, you butchered a pig, but then you had to use that, because there was no way of preserving it.

“In those days you didn't worry about hunting season or anything. My dad was a crack shot and he knew every game trail, he just went out and shot whatever we needed. In the summertime we ate a lot of wild chickens, grouse. We didn't eat a lot of fish. Roe Lake didn't have any good fish, just coarse fish. But then every fall, adults would go up to Bear Lake and catch kokanee that were spawning. They had washtubs of them. They would bring them home and they were always smoked, and then canned. Some were canned fresh. So we ate a lot of fish for a short time.”

The boys and girls pitched in with all the chores, inside and out, and they worked hard, but Marie says that she didn't mind. “It was just what you had to do,” she says, “so we did it. We girls took turns. One week you did inside work, the next week you did outside work, feeding the chickens, getting the wood, packing the water. My dad and Howard always did the milking.”

[Next month...the kids had fun, too.]



This photo of young Howard Malm was taken by Marie and won her a first prize at the Fall Fair.