

The Shertenlib family [Part 2]: the Kings

By Ian MacInnes



Ian MacInnes, a writer who currently lives on Vancouver Island, is the son of Goldi Shertenlib MacInnes. He has written extensively of his experiences as a young boy visiting his aunt and uncle, Alice and Gordon King. —Sherry Stewart

One of my most pleasant childhood memories is that of a trip I went on with my parents to the Cariboo region of British Columbia in the summer of 1940. I was only eight years old then but can still recall the thrill of seeing for the very first time places about which I had heard so much.

The two cousins I met at Bridge Lake that summer turned out to be simply great. Aunt Alice and Uncle Gordon King's daughter Rita was about my age, delightfully witty, intelligent, demure, and just about the prettiest thing I had ever seen. Aunt Viola and Uncle Norman Ross's son, Russell, was every bit the older brother every young boy wished for. Also delightfully witty and intelligent, Russ was good-natured, kind, gentle, and even at ten years of age seemed to have innate common sense to an extent far beyond his years. Rita, Russ and I hit it off right from the start, and the days we spent together as children were filled with fun and laughter.

The location at Bridge Lake chosen by Uncle Gordon for his homestead is arguably the finest on the north shore. It looks out on a bay sheltered by a small island, and all around the land slopes

gently to the water's edge. There on that south-facing, sunny slope in 1918, the couple built their first little house. By 1932, however, they had two children, a son, Jack, and a daughter, Rita, and needed more room. So a second house was built, which still stands today (1998), and the family moved into it in 1936. Built of logs and with a steep-pitched shake roof, it was larger than the original and a little further from the lake. Nearly half its floor area was devoted to kitchen and pantry and the remainder divided into a living room and two bedrooms.

Aunt Alice's kitchen was dominated by an old-fashioned wood-burning range, complete with warming oven and hot water reservoir. A good-sized, substantially built table, surrounded by chairs, stood before the windows, and a buffet rested against the wall nearby. Because the house lacked a bathroom, a washstand and mirror were conveniently



Alice and Gordon King, 1956

placed near the door, where those coming in from work could wash up before eating. Years later, a cream separator, securely bolted to the floor, left no one in doubt where the kitchen ended and the pantry began.

A doorway beside the kitchen range led into the room that was in every sense a "living" room. Besides the commonplace soft furniture, it contained a wood burning heater, an upright piano, and my uncle's favourite chair. On a tall chair-side table sat the family's only year-round contact with the outside world, a battery-powered radio. This apparatus was reverently regarded, providing as it did the daily news and

weather report. But to spare its complement of batteries it otherwise remained silent. The living room walls were adorned with the mounted horns of deer, moose, and mountain goat, the larger of them used as racks for guns and other hunting gear. A banjo resting in its well-worn case nearby evidenced another of my uncle's interests. He loved his music, and when my dad was there the two played often, Uncle



Gordon King, Ian on Shorty and Ian's dad, Alan MacInnes

Gordon picking away on the banjo and Dad strumming accompaniment on guitar. Later, when Russ had also taken up the guitar, the three played together, both there in that cosy living room at King's and at the Saturday night dances held at the Double T Guest Ranch.

Although he appeared to have little use for a car, my uncle had a boat that he used to go across the lake in. There was a landing on the far shore where he could leave it and walk comfortably to the store, or a little farther to the Double T Guest Ranch. Sitting in the stern, his hand resting gently on the tiller, the visor of his crumpled cap pulled down to shade his eyes, Uncle Gordon talked, and as he talked we listened. He pointed out landmarks like the island, gull rock, and the shallows, and explained why each was interesting.

Being typical of similar establishments across rural North America, Ernie King's Bridge Lake General Store was the sort many older people would think of immediately when hearing the term "general store." It was packed from floor to ceiling with everything imaginable, and if customers had the time to search for what they wanted, they would likely find it there. Outsiders, to whom the store was a curiosity, often entered with no intention of buying but then ended up buying something anyway. That store was probably then the busiest place for miles around, made so by people coming to buy groceries, to use the post office, or to gas their cars up at its lone gas pump.

Partway between my aunt and uncle's and the general store was a place where the road ran along a hillside, overlooking the lake. It was in this setting that some ingenious soul placed the life-sized silhouette of a moose, cleverly made of wood and perfectly resembling the animal as it would appear when coming up from the water. Aiding the illusion was a shimmering background of sunlight, reflecting from the lake and



The Gordon King Band at the Double T Guest Ranch Hall

making it difficult to see. Viewed in this way, the moose presented such a convincing target that a few hunters shot at the magnificent wooden beast before realizing the deception. Of course this was a great joke among local folk, who relished confiding that only a city dude would be dim-witted enough to be taken in by a wooden moose.

In the course of writing this story, I have several times mentioned the Double T Guest Ranch and have also mentioned its Saturday night dances. Those popular dances were held in the ranch's recreation hall and arranged by the management for the entertainment of guests. Everyone was welcome there, however, and most who attended were not guests of the Double T. At the time, parents often took their children to these, and my parents took me to one there at the age of ten. They were very much a family affair and lots of fun. In contrast to the dances I attended elsewhere when in my twenties, I never heard coarse language at any at the Double T, never saw anyone more than mildly intoxicated, and never saw a fight, although others have told me that fights did occur on occasion. Of course at my age and being shy I did very little dancing. Mostly, I just sat admiring the girls who sat whispering and fidgeting on the benches opposite. Mind you, there was no need to dance to be

entertained, for the antics of those on the dance floor were entertaining enough for anyone. I can tell you from my own observation that the sight of mature and normally sedate people rapt in the throes of the Horse Lake Mazurka was one not soon forgotten. With dignity abandoned in the frenzy of the dance, their foot stomping and wild gyrations made an alarming spectacle, and one I could not recommend to the faint of heart.

Those tripping the light fantastic were inspired to these heights of revelry by my uncle and his small band of musicians, a few friends who got together to play because of their common love of music. The ones I recall were Mrs. Law on piano; my uncle Gordon King on banjo; the Faessler brothers, Charlie on violin and Ernie on saxophone; and when visiting, my dad Alan MacInnes on guitar. Later, they were joined by my cousin Russ, also on guitar. Their tunes remained the same for as long as they played together: waltzes, polkas, fox trots, one-steps, two-steps, and schottisches—old fashioned today but lively and enthusiastically enjoyed back then. At some point in the evening, partners were picked for a square dance, and confusion reigned when the city dudes, clad in spanking-new jeans, also joined in the fun.

[To be continued]