

The Shertenlib family: The Kings [conclusion]

By Ian MacInnes

This is the second and final installment of Ian's reminiscences of a 1940 summer holiday with his mother Goldi's (née Shertenlib) family at Bridge Lake. Ian's relatives mentioned in this story include his aunt and uncle Gordon and Alice King, his cousins Rita King and Russell Ross, and his father Alan MacInnes. Ian now lives in Duncan with his wife Adele.

Uncle Gordon was a trapper. Although he owned a ranch, his ranching was done in the same modest way that many country folk ranch, principally to serve the needs of his own family. Unlike his nephew Russell Ross, he never pursued ranching on a scale that would provide him a living. At times he guided selectively in hunting season, or had a party of fishermen staying in one of the cabins, but his chief occupation in 1940 was trapping.

How difficult it was for him to work a trap line, I could not, at eight years of age, have imagined. He was then fifty-four years old, had a prosthetic leg, yet managed somehow to make his rounds on snowshoes in the worst of winter weather. During the time he spent alone in the bush, miles from any other human being, he doubtless also had close encounters with wild animals, some that perhaps even threatened his life.

Of the several cabins Uncle Gordon

had at intervals along his trap line, one was located at Wavey Lake. Aware that it was an excellent fishing spot, he one day decided that we would go there so Dad could try his luck. The horses were duly rounded up, including Dad's old Shorty—his friend, confidant, and means of transportation when he taught school at Roe Lake.

The following morning we rode doubled-up to Wavey Lake, Russ behind Uncle Gordon and me behind Dad. Upon arriving there, Dad exhibited his enthusiasm for fishing by confidently declaring that he would provide the lunch. Better him than me, I thought. You see, I have never had much success as a fisherman, though perhaps my failure has resulted from not pursuing the sport with enough enthusiasm. Fortunately, my dad did not share my lack of fishing success, and we all enjoyed a lunch of fresh-caught, butter-fried rainbow trout.

Although my memory of that day is now vague, I still recall something that occurred on the ride home. For some reason, Russ and I had switched horses, and when we got to a fork in the road, Uncle Gordon asked



Goldi (Shertenlib) MacInnes, 1943

seriously which way we should go. If he's asking me, I thought, we must be in an awful fix. But after letting me wonder for a minute, he dryly suggested that we let the horse decide. Not sure that this was a good idea, but lacking an alternative, I reluctantly agreed. Of course it turned out that the horse was a far better guide than I imagined and took us home directly. "Now that," offered my dad, "was an example of 'horse sense,' the quality that also prevents horses from betting on people!"

The holiday spent with my cousins at Bridge Lake all those years ago passed pleasantly but all too quickly. Most memories of it are now badly faded, and yet one or two still remain. I still remember the playhouse that Rita's dad had built for her down by the lake. It was child-sized, about six feet by ten, with a door at one end and a window overlooking the lake at the other. Its size virtually excluded



Alice and Gordon King's home at Bridge Lake

adults, but three or four of us children could huddle in there and talk about all sorts of secret things. We would all crowd in, Rita, Russ, and I, and talk, tell stories, and sing songs. Arthur Barnes Jr., blinded by dynamite, would sometimes arrive and keep us in stitches with his ready wit. The playhouse was where we shared our thoughts, our likes and dislikes, our doubts and aspirations.

I think most children are attracted to water in its natural surroundings, and we were no different from the rest. The lake was a source of delight to us then, but at only eight or nine we were hardly able to take full advantage of it. On hot days, we would wade in the shallows and splash about, but it was not until we were older that we did any real swimming. After learning, though, we were allowed to go out in a boat and row back and forth within sight of the house, or over to the island where we could jig for squawfish. We spent hours doing that one summer, bent over the gunwales, squinting into the depths, watching the fish ignore our bait.

One day we decided to make some ice cream, and since the wild strawberries were ripe, to make wild strawberry ice cream. So we picked the berries, got a chunk of ice from the ice house and set to work. Without electric power, ice cream was made then in a hand-cranked ice cream freezer. Ingredients were placed



Ian and his cousin Russell Ross, 1940

in the freezer's canister, which was rotated in turn by hand crank in the crushed ice and rock salt held around it by a wooden bucket. We three took turns cranking and topping up the bucket with ice and rock salt, a chore that seemed to go on forever. Just when we had decided that our mixture would never freeze, cranking became noticeably more difficult, and Aunt Alice declared the ice cream ready. All agreed at supper that night that the ice cream was superb, but that the frozen wild strawberries were like eating bee-bees.

Aunt Alice was a great cook and spoiled us rotten with the meals she served during our stay. With relatives visiting, breakfast was a casual affair that saw people eat whenever they got up. There was always a variety to choose from: bacon and eggs with hash brown potatoes, pancakes and syrup, or toast made with fresh-baked bread, browned on top of the wood stove and smothered in butter. Even lowly oatmeal was topped with thick cream and brown sugar. A breakfast I particularly remember was one of fried eggs, medallions of venison, and hash brown potatoes. I had never had a

breakfast like that before, and I am certain that I never shall again. At the day's other meals, we all sat down together, with Uncle Gordon in his rightful place at the head of the table. The food and the company were excellent there at my aunt and uncle's, the mealtime conversations, lively and interesting.

Toward the end of our holidays, however, mealtime conversations became more reserved as we each began to contemplate a return to the responsibilities and restraints of everyday life. We all knew that the time for play was nearly over, and that my parents and I would soon have to leave for home.

The day came as inexorably as we knew it would, and saw the scene of our arrival played out once again. They all came out and milled around the car, kissing and hugging and promising to write. It was hard to say goodbye and harder still to leave, but our time there was up. As the farewell began to lose momentum, Dad slipped the Austin into gear and we crept away. Mom and I kept waving till the first bend in the road and then settled back in our seats to begin the long journey home. We had been royally treated there at my aunt and uncle's and knew that our Bridge Lake holiday would be long remembered... and we would return again, at the first opportunity.



Ian and his wife Adele live in Duncan



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