

LOTUS RUCKLE

Typed By Debbie Hogg

Ruckle

Today is June 17, 1977 and we're on the Ruckle's property on the end of Beaver Point and I'm talking to Lotus Ruckle.

Interviewer: Lotus, were you born on the island?

Lotus: No, I was born in the Selkirk mountains, in a little mining town called Beaton, or Trout Lake City, I mean.

Interviewer: And when did you come to Saltspring?

Lotus: I came to Saltspring in the second of February 1921.

Interviewer: You remember the date just like that?

Lotus: Well it was on my birthday.

Interviewer: Oh, well you have good reason to remember, how old were you?

Lotus: I was ten years old.

Interviewer: And what brought your family to Saltspring?

Lotus: Well ah, my step father and my mother decided that they wanted to get out of the cold winters and mosquitos in the summer time and come down to the beautiful coast, so they came to find a place to live.

Interviewer: Did they come right to live on Saltspring?

Lotus: No, we lived for two months in Victoria while they were looking for property here.

Interviewer: And where did you settle when you came to Saltspring?

Lotus: The place that is now known as Solimar or the Bridgeman property, it's now a subdivision, it was all one big farm at that time, Solimar was the only piece taken out of it, it had belonged to the Bridgeman family.

Interviewer: And that would be then at the end of Bridgeman road which runs off of Beaver Point Road.

Lotus: And Regginald MOUNTAIN belonged to the property.

Interviewer: Is that right?

Lotus: In fact there were 640 acres of it when we bought it.

Interviewer: Oh, that was a big piece of property. What was your step father's name?

Lotus: Mr. Coriman Hennick, MenHennick Drive is now named for him, and there is one other road in the subdivision, it is Fraser Road, after my brother.

Interviewer: Was your brother's name Fraser then?

Lotus: Yes.

Interviewer: You name was Lotus Fraser then.

Lotus: Yes.

Interviewer: Then if you were ten years old, you must have gone to school on the island?

Lotus: Oh yes, I had about two and a half years in the little Beaver Point school house.

Interviewer: It's the same school house that's there today?

Lotus: Exactly the same school house.

Interviewer: Really, what year was it built? Do you know? Just approximately.

Lotus: 1880 something, around 1885.

Interviewer: Really, and it was in operation until?

Lotus: 1953.

Interviewer: And so even your children went to the school?

Lotus: Oh yes, Gwen went until the end of her grade eight year and Henry went until the end of his grade eight year, and then the bus started running to Beaver Point so Henry was able to go to highschool by bus.

Interviewer: And that would be in Ganges would it?

Lotus: Yes.

Interviewer: Well when you went to school, did they have a highschool on the island?

Lotus: No, everyone had to go to Vancouver or Victoria or Nanimo to go to high-school, and that is why I was out of school for three years, and then I went back and the highschool at Ganges was opened and I had worked two summers at the summer resort at the Policks were running at Solimar and I felt I had enough money to start highschool. Even then we were

Lotus: heading towards the depression of 1930 and money was getting very hard to procure.

Interviewer: About what year would the highschool have started in Ganges?

Lotus: Well I started in 1925, I think it started in 1924, I think it was in operation one year before I started.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of your teachers?

Lotus: Well, I had the same one for three years, A.P. Robertson, he taught three years of highschool, the first year I went he taught grades 8, 9, and 10. Then the next year he started with 9, 10, and 11. I was talking to a girl the other day who had just seen him and she said he still remembers his years at Ganges. He lives in Qualicum. I look back now and wonder how he handled that many subjects in one day.

Interviewer: Well how many students would he have?

Lotus: I suppose there would be around 30 or 40 not such awfully big classes but, even so he had all those subjects in each year.

Interviewer: That was quite a handful wasn't it?

Lotus: Yes, it certainly was.

Interviewer: Would many students go on from highschool to university?

Lotus: Well some of them did, again it was a question of money, whether their parents had money enough to send them or not, quite a few went onto normal school and became teachers.

Interviewer: And that would be in Victoria would it?

Lotus: Yes, but some went to Columbia College in New Westminister, and some went to UBC.

Interviewer: And I guess some girls would leave the island and go into nursing?

Lotus: Oh yes.

Interviewer: What did you do after highschool?

Lotus: I got married, I was home for a year after I maticulated and because I wasn't very well I though I was going to go onto my normal school but,

Lotus: we still didn't have money enough for finance it so I was offered a job as a companion housekeeper to Mrs. Bridgeman who was a very very lonely lady, and I was on the point of taking, when Gordon said that I could do that for him. And I have been doing it ever since.

Interviewer: Well now that brings us into the Ruckle side of the family then, you were married in what year?

Lotus: I was married on the 30 of July 1930, In Victoria.

Interviewer: And your husband's name was Henry Gordon, he was born on the island?

Lotus: Oh yes, he was born on the farm.

Interviewer: And the farm means where you are living today?

Lotus: Not this house, but yes, the farm where we are living today but, he was born in his father's house on the hill.

Interviewer: And that was the original Ruckle home was it?

Lotus: No, the original Ruckle home is where his father was born.

Interviewer: Is that right, the Ruckle family really dates back don't they?

Lotus: Oh yes, it's practically 100 years now since they came to Saltspring, nobody is sure of the date but is around 100 years.

Interviewer: And they settled in Beaver Point?

Lotus: Yes, they bought from the crown at a dollar an acre.

Interviewer: How many acres would they have?

Lotus: It eventually became 1200, but they didn't buy it all at once, Grandpa Ruckle would buy a bit, and then he worked in Sannich off and on while Grandma Ruckle managed the farm so that he could buy more land. He left Ontario to go to California because there was a gold rush in California around 1858 and the goldrush petered out by the time he got there, he worked his way up the coast, through Oregon and then some of them bought a sailing boat and they sailed up the coast to Victoria and decided that they were going to look for land in this part of the world. So he evidently sailed to Beaver Point, probably landed just a little

Lotus: way below us here and he liked what he saw and he evidently started negotiations to buy some.

Interviewer: He wasn't married at that time?

Lotus: No, he wasn't married at that time, there are a few discrepancies there it's now sure if he met Grandma Ruckle here or in Tacoma where she was housekeeper for a doctor and his family or whether she had left Tacoma and come to the Sannich Penninsula, some say on thing some say another, but anyway he met her and persuaded her to marry him and come to Beaver Point and live. So that's the way the family arrived on the island.

Interviewer: Oh that's really an exciting life, it must have been so different back then too, they would have to do all their shopping in Victoria.

Lotus: I would imagine so, I imagine they rode to Sidney and they were very friendly with the Bretter family in Sidney because they were palitines too see, the Ruckle family originally started out from what is known as the Palitine area in Germany and evidently the Bretter family had done the same and so they became friendly on the Sannich Penninsula too and he would stay over night and come home again with the groceries after staying the night at the Bretter's. Grandma used to tell how frightened she used to get because the Indians used to come and look in the window. She was very frightened of Indians and she never really accepted them, she always felt that they meant to do her harm.

Interviewer: Well now the Indians at that time wouldn't be in the area all the time would they?

Lotus: No, it was mostly if the Haida's came visiting evidently, I don't think she was so frightened of the Cowichan Indians and so on but evidently she was very frightened of them.

Interviewer: It would be a strange life for a woman all by herself wouldn't it? What family did the Ruckle's have?

Lotus: There were four, there was Alfred, Ella, Agnes, and Henry, Alfred was

Lotus: the man that built this house, he was the oldest, and then Ella, Agnes and Henry. Agnes is the one that did all these lovely paintings in this room.

Interviewer: Did they all stay on the island?

Lotus: No, Agnus was a teacher, she was drown^d at Christina Lake when she was only twenty-two, she didn't live very long.

Interviewer: She was quite young when she did these paintings?

Lotus: All the instructions she had was a correspondence course.

Interviewer: Really, your daughter Gwen comes by her talent naturally then doesn't she?

Lotus: On both sides as far as that goes, my Grandfather was J.A. Fraser and he was one of the best known artists in Canada at his time.

Interviewer: Well now, he was in theatrics too wasn't he?

Lotus: No that was my father, he was the actor. Grandfather Fraser just stuck to his painting all his life, he left Canada because he didn't think he was making enough money and in New York artists were recognized a little bit more than in Canada so he spent the rest of his life in New York. It wasn't a very long life because he died at sixty. Unfortunately we don't have any of his work, they do have originals in the National Gallery in Ottawa. It's rather interesting at the present time they are doing research to write a book about his work.

Interviewer: Really.

Lotus: My brother was in Ottawa last summer and just happened to get in touch with the man that was doing it through a fluke.

Interviewer: Well, isn't that exciting.

Lotus: So he was quite interested to discover a relative and he got in touch with us and we sent what notes mother had kept, it will be interesting if the book is finished.

Interviewer: Yes indeed. Now that is one Ruckle sister, did the other sister remain

Interviewer: on the island?

Lotus: Yes, Ella married a man on Morsby Island, Stanley Harris, they lived there and made a very lovely farm of it, had two children, Tom and Agnes, but then Ella had cancer and didn't live very long and after she died he moved to Florida. Tom died when he was 21 but, Agnes still lives in Seattle.

Interviewer: Those are their children are they?

Lotus: Yes.

Interviewer: The two Ruckle brothers remained on the farm?

Lotus: Yes they remained on the farm and owned the farm between them, from the time Grandpa died in 1913, until around 1950 or so, and then Uncle Alfred retired and Gordon's father Henry, and Gordon and his brother Norman took the farm over, and farmed it until Norman died, which was rather tragic.

Interviewer: Now the house that is across the road, is that Norman's?

Lotus: That was Norman's house yes.

Interviewer: And Norman died as a young man did he?

Lotus: Yes, he had Hodgekins disease and in those days there was very little they could do for that kind of thing and he died in his early forties.

Interviewer: And the house has never been lived in?

Lotus: Well, they are using it for Park headquarters now and there have been some of the Park familiers have been up and stayed over night, that's all so far but, it's all finished now except they haven't put the water in yet.

Interviewer: And this house is just beautiful, so Henry Ruckle built this house then?

Lotus: Alfred Ruckle.

Interviewer: Alfred Ruckle built this house. Now when Grandfather Ruckle first came to the island what type of farming was he doing?

Lotus: Oh they had cattle right from the beginning, Grandma Ruckle liked cattle,

Lotus: she liked making butter and of course there was a very good sale for butter in Victoria at that time, and they had chickens and they took their eggs to Victoria too.

Interviewer: Rowing their boat over?

Lotus: Yes, rowing their boat over and they always had some sheep, they didn't have a great number because Grandma Ruckle had been born in Norway, her father was a farmer and they had sheep and she always said that they ate everything that there was and that there was nothing for anything else to eat. So then they planted fruit trees, they had alot of fruit trees and there was a splendid sale for fruit in those days, the Okanagan fruit had not come onto the market and as time went on they got more sheep because they found that lamb was a very marketable product, and they even used to row the lambs to the New Westminister market.

Interviewer: Really.

Lotus: So they tell me, I feel sorry for the lambs, this is what they tell me, then gradually, as Henry and Alfred got older they started butchering lambs and taking carcasses to Victoria and Vancouver, and they really have carried on just the same, always pigs to provide bacon and ham and so on, and eventually they put in a bar~~red~~ pear orchard and it had very very good pears for along time and the Sidney cannery used to take all the crop, then eventually the Okanagan fruit put the local fruit out of the picture, but we have always carried on much the same.

Interviewer: Well now, I know that on the island the Ruckles potatos are quite famous.

Lotus: They grew the potatos absolutely from the beginning too, I know that when we came to the island fifty years ago everybody said if you want potatos buy them from the Ruckles. After the last war we went into seed growing of potatos in quite a big way, I think the biggest crop

Lotus: we ever took out was seventy - five tons. That was alot of work. A lot of hand work, handsorting and resorting and so eventually we dropped that and now we have just gone back to commercial potatoos.

Interviewer: You have quite a few sheep now don't you?

Lotus: Yes, we usually keep the same amount, around 140 - 150 and I think this year we have 155, but we haven't many cattle now, we have just two milk cows, we got rid of the Angus herd because we thought they didn't go with the park very well. People seem to be a bit nervous about big black cows. I don't know why.

Interviewer: Now, the pattern of the farm has changed now that it is a Provincial Park?

Lotus: Not very much really, because the 200 acres that is in the Agricultural reserve will never be developed into the Park, it will always be used in an Agricultural way, and we farm it complerely at our pleasure, there is no interference what so ever, so that actually we don't notice very much difference other than the fact that we got rid of the beef herd because we thought they were rather hard to contain on 200 acres, we felt they needed a little more pastues^{res} and that. As far as the sheep go, it seems to be going very well, I used to be very petrified of dogs but people seem to ~~be~~ be very good in the Park as far as the dogs are concerned and we have only had two instances, which is rather amazing to me.

Interviewer: Well now with your sheep I know you do alot of spinning yourself and did you use your sheep just for the wool or do you butcher the sheep as well?

Lotus: Well we do some butchering, and the bulk actually go alive to the Richmond packing Plant at the present time but we do butcher for the butcher shops in Ganges and actually the largest income comes from the lambs but, the wool does provide a very good income because what we don't

Lotus: use ourselves the Cowichan Indians take and some of the local spinners and weavers and so on. I have been very fortunate I have been able to sell it all the last four or five years.

Interviewer: And you have both dark fleece and white?

Lotus: Yes, after we started making our sweaters, I found it very difficult to buy any very good black wool, so I started raising black wool just for myself and of course I kept all the yew lambs and the flock grew and it grew and it grew and now I have about fifty black sheep.

Interviewer: When did you start spinning Lotus?

Lotus: Oh I guess it was about 20 years ago I guess, between 20 and 25 years ago Gwen decided to learn how to spin and I decided to try it too. My mother had an attachment ~~th~~ fitted on a singer sewing machine and you used the belt of a singer to turn the spindal, that's what we both learned on, then I picked up a little spinning wheel for ten dollars that I liked quite well, now I have progressed to an Indian spinner, so when Gwen's idea was that if she could sell some children's sweaters it could help her buy oil paint, she was getting very anxious to paint, and we were finding that oil paint was rather expensive, so the first winter she made nine little sweaters and sold them all.

Interviewer: You were spinning the wool and she was doing the knitting?

Lotus: No, she was doing more spinning than I was at that time, actually I think the first nine she spun the wool and knitted them herself, and I was interested in trying to make socks and a sleeveless pullover for my husband so I decided that I must learn to spin too and gradually I took over the spinning completely and Gwen does all the knitting and we sell sweaters every year and at the present time I think there is 62 or 63 on order.

Interviewer: Really?

Lotus: We only do about twenty - five sweaters at the most in a year and that

Lotus: means we are almost three years behind.

Interviewer: Twenty-five is quite a number to do in a year?

Lotus: Well it takes Gwen about ten days to two weeks to knit one and that is just about the rate at which I spin I can just about keep up to her now. So that means two sweaters a month.

Interviewer: That is quite a bit of knitting?

Lotus: Yes, it is alot of knitting, I don't know how she does the knitting and watches television at the same time.

Interviewer: And still have time to paint?

Lotus: Well she only knits at night, she made that a rule, the knitting is only done at night because she must have her days for painting and photography and so on.

Interviewer: Now you have a son as well as Gwen don't you?

Lotus: Yes, Henry has been teaching now for about twenty years in Victoria, he was not a farmer I'm afraid, right from the time he was a young boy he had no opinion of this business, raising animals and killing animals, and he decided he was going to be a school teacher when he first started high school and we didn't try to dissuade him at all because the main thing in life is to be doing what they want to do, I think he has been quite a successful teacher, he is the traveller for the family, everyone stays home and he travels whenever he can get the time off or get the money to do it, he is very interested in other countries and what, the way other people make their living and so on and he isn't married and so he really has no reason to stay home.

Interviewer: Now what other Ruckles are there? There is Gwen and Gordon, and Henry and you...

Lotus: And Nan.

Interviewer: And Nan.

Lotus: She lives here.

Interviewer: Nan is your husband's sister?

Lotus: And Helen.

Interviewer: And Helen.

Lotus: Helen is Gordon's sister, she also teaches in Victoria, she teaches highschool.

Interviewer: Nan lives down across the road from you, on the Beaver Point property. Now, when I came in the other day you were making butter, and you mentioned that you have made butter for years.

Lotus: Well off and on I made butter at home before I was married, and for along time we bought our butter from the Saltspring creamery, when our cream went to the creamery, we got our butter back every week which was a marvelous arrangement, as far as I'm concerned, but then we off and on had milk cows and made butter, at the present time we have two and I'm churning everyday but I progressed to an electric churn which is an improvement but it still has to be work, someone told me the other day that my butter was just as good as Mr. Drakes butter and I think that is quite a compliment because when he was manager of the Saltspring creamery, Saltspring butter had a marvelous name.

Interviewer: This would be about when?

Lotus: I don't know when they started it and I'm not sure when they finished it. I imagine it was closed around, after the war, it was sort of cooperative, the different dairy ment had shares in it. It was between the two wars, it was in operation in all of World War 2 and it was just after that that it was purchased privately and after that it was closed.

Interviewer: There is one more question I would like to ask you about before I leave you this afternoon and that is about the Bean supper at Beaver Point. I can remember hearing that the Ruckle's recipe was used for beans.

Lotus: Well, we attempted to have it used but I don't know if one could say

Lotus: that it was used, when we first started the Bean suppers Gordon's father Henry Ruckle used to grow the beans, every year he donated a particular type of large white bean, the seed came from Florida, I think and it is a very mild bean, I guess that we have lost Grandfather's touch because we can't seem to grow them anymore, every year so cold and wet that we can't get them started early enough and they don't rippen properly so, the community association has to buy their beans, but after all this year they cooked a hundred pounds of beans. I think the first year we started, we cooked twenty pounds.

Interviewer: When would that be?

Lotus: Well Gwen says that the next one will be the twenty-fifth anniversary, she said she noticed in the Driftwood not too long ago that it was the fifteen and the next will be the twenty-fifth. So it has grown from twenty to a hundred, although then, we used more beans than we needed, but we did attempt to work out a recipe that was rather bland I guess, but we thought that way we would suit all tastes, but it didn't meet with success.

Interviewer: Some people did a little adlibbing eh? Has the menu at the bean supper always been the same?

Lotus: Yes, it has always been beans, and buns, coleslaw and pie. We still keep our pies up and I think we are one of the few organizations that still serve pie.

Interviewer: Oh what a wonderful assortment.

Lotus: Well this year I don't think I have seen a more attractive pie table, I must say, it did look very nice when we started, Nan and I always make from a dozen to fourteen each.

Interviewer: Pie?

Lotus: Pie.

Interviewer: Really.

Lotus: So we have just been doing it right from the beginning and so that is our contribution, neither of us cooked beans this year, I have been cooking one lot until this year, but we just made pies this year.

Interviewer: Now one lot would be about a pound?

Lotus: No five pounds, five pounds will just fill a good size roaster.

Interviewer: Well thanks ever so much Lotus this has been really interesting.