Little Red Schoolhouse on the Hill

Part Two

Davyd McMinn

"Good morning class". Donald Braithwaite slapped a hand over his mouth in an effort to suppress a giggle. His friend Harold kicked the back of the desk. "Good morning Miss Burkinshaw". Rigid with anticipation, Donald watched the teacher reach forward, open the bottom drawer of her desk and remove two new pieces of chalk. Stepping over to the blackboard Miss Burkinshaw picked up the eraser and began methodically to erase a hand drawn map of Europe. France disappeared, then Belgium , Holland, Denmark, Norway..... almost like Hitler's armies marching across the continent.

As the last of Norway disappeared Miss Burkinshaw picked up a new piece of chalk and began to jot down figures on the board. Donald started to worry that she wasn't going to take attendance and then his little prank would go to waste.

As if the teacher had suddenly read his mind the chalk was abruptly placed back on the tray underneath the board. Miss Burkinshaw walked back over to her desk and reached over to open the top right hand drawer where the attendance record was kept. Donald closed his eyes and waited with giddy anticipation. .....AAhhhh'.....!

Opening his eyes a moment later Donald was just in time to see the mouse scuttling around the corner and into the entrance hall. Miss Burkinshaw, pressed up against the black board, recovered her composure and pointing to a smirking Harold, demanded that he capture the creature and remove it to the outdoors. Harold disappeared around the corner and there followed a short scrabbling noise, the sound of running feet, and then the front door was opened and quickly banged shut. Miss Burkinshaw hurried into the hall, no doubt to ensure that Harold had in fact removed the little beast. Moments later there was a second scream. . . .

Some years before, when the school was temporarily vacant, someone had fired a bullet through the front door. The resulting hole remained unrepaired and was systematically enlarged by the restless penknives of little boys. As Donald learned later, when Harold heard Miss Burkinshaw walk into the hall, he crept back up the steps and waited until the teacher reached the door. As she stooped to observe him through the bullet hole Harold stuffed the still wriggling mouse through and beat a hasty retreat.

Miss Burkinshaw was only nineteen or twenty and quite small, but all the boys knew how handy she was with the strap. Harold was for it this time, for sure.

Pranksters Donald Braithwaite and his friend Harold were probably quite unaware that within a few months of the mouse incident Miss Braithwaite would depart for another school. At the end of the 1941 term the school would close for good and the students disperse to Langford or Colwood schools.

Opened in 1893, Highland School was in operation for a mere 27 of the 48 years ending in 1941. Plagued by low enrollment, the parents and Highland District School Board struggled to maintain a level of attendance required by successive superintendents of education. It was also exceedingly difficult to attract teachers who were willing to stay beyond one or two terms. This was probably due in part to the poor salary offered and to the rugged and remote location of the District. During the first seven years of operation, students at the school were taught by no fewer than six different teachers.

As described in Part One of this article, Highland School closed in 1901 after just seven and a half years of operation "owing to the failure to maintain the average attendance required by the School Act."

Following vigourous lobbying by parents and a still active board the school re-opened in 1909 with thirteen students. Alice Cory, who taught for four short months in 1910 was typical of the eight different teachers who passed through the school between 1909 and 1914. Most were unmarried young women who, like Miss Cory, were recent Normal School graduates with Second or Third Class teaching certificates.

The school board considered itself most fortunate to have attracted someone such as James Likeman who arrived to take up the teaching post in September 1914. Mr. Likeman, a teacher with over twenty years experience, followed the unfortunate Mrs. Alderson, whose questionable competence compelled board secretary Frank Gregory to urgently request a replacement several times during the previous year.

James Likeman not only had suitable credentials, but he was contented enough with his position to remain for six and a half years. This was by far the longest tenure of any teacher during the entire period of the school's operation.

Enrollment during this period fluctuated between 8 and 19 students. A precipitous drop in attendance during 1919 can probably be explained by a serious outbreak of ringworm. Some parents

were apparently reluctant to remove afflicted children from school, prompting a rebuke from school board member, Cuthbert Holmes. A seasonal resident of the old Pike homestead and a principal in the Pemberton Holmes real estate company, Holmes informed his fellow board members that "the law states that a child found with ringworm should be sent home immediately. "This outbreak was deemed sufficiently serious to warrant a special ratepayers' meeting at which additional school taxes were directed toward the employment of the district nurse as school nurse, at nine dollars a month. Unfortunately, the vote was determined to be invalid as non-ratepayers were found to have cast ballots.

A school inspection report of the same year suggests that enrollment was also imperiled by the "closing of a road which had hitherto been open for forty years." The Provincial Works Engineer was unmoved. In a letter to the School Board he refused their request, stating that, "You are asking for the re-opening of an abandoned byway". Which "byway" the engineer was referring to is not clear, but it may have been an early road built by Caleb Pike between Pike Lake in the eastern Highlands and a junction with Millstream Road near Teanook Lake.

In 1914, when James Likeman arrived to teach at the Highland School, he lived for a time in a small building on the property of Frank Gregory. The Gregory farm at Fizzle Lake on the Munn Rd. was several miles from the school . Perhaps the fact that Mr. Likeman remained at the school, convinced the trustees two years later to undertake the construction of a teacherage in the summer of 1916. Photographs of the now collapsed structure suggest a building barely large enough to accommodate the cot, table, chair, tiny stove and washstand provided for the teacher.

By the time James Likeman left the school at Christmas in 1920, enrollment had slipped to eight pupils. Over the next two years, Mr. Likeman's successors, Miss Dorothy Head and Miss Margaret Head never managed to attract more than nine students at any one time. A letter from board secretary Frank Gregory to Mrs. Emma Dixon in early 1923 suggests that improved roads and transportation methods were taking a toll on enrollment at the school. Gregory requests Mrs. Dixon's assistance in helping reach a level of enrollment that would satisfy the Ministry of Education. Mrs. Dixon replies that "Dorothy and Fred are now driven to Langford School by Fred". One can speculate that the decision to send children to Langford when schooling was still available in the Highlands may have reflected a concern for a quality of education that the smaller school may not have been able to deliver.

Frank Gregory's attempt to recruit new students was an obvious failure as the school report of November 1923 states, in rather dry fashion, that "School closed November 5th, 1923 due to low attendance". Enrollment that month had fallen to just 6 pupils.

The school remained closed for the next 13 years, but in 1937 the District gathered together the required ten pupils and petitioned the government for re-opening. With new paint and after considerable repairs, the Highland School re-opened its doors in September of 1937 under the tutelage of Mr. Eric Lewis. Mr. Lewis and James Likeman were the only male teachers in the entire history of the school. Mrs. Gladys Welsh, who followed Eric Lewis after only one year clearly enjoyed her time at the school. In an interview with a local newspaper reporter in 1966, Mrs Welsh said that she never felt lonely, surrounded by the many colourful characters in the District. Her pupils were "most rewarding children to teach; independent and alert". With fewer outside interests, the community made full use for entertainment of the school picnics and concerts. It was "a casual, delightful way of teaching and the children learned fast, although we seldom saw the school inspector. Every young teacher should have this experience before being swept into a big school".

In 1941, when the Highland School closed for the last time World War II was in full swing. Families were leaving the District and the era of the one room schoolhouse was drawing to a close. Perhaps there were those in the District who recalled previous closures and reopenings and imagined that some day children would once again troop up the hill to the little red schoolhouse. But it was not to be.

For a time, during the war, the school building was pressed into use for billeting soldiers, but by 1944, legislation had been passed to permit the sale of the property. In 1951 the school buildings and property passed into private hands and in 1952 the Highland School District was folded into the larger Sooke School District. Sixty years after a determined little group of Highland pioneers had successfully petitioned the provincial government for a school, the Highland School and School District were reduced to an historical footnote.

The school property has remained in private hands for forty-five years, and during most of this time the building has been vacant. Although derelict, it remains standing nearly 104 years after it was built , — a testament not only to good construction but to the fact that the building sits firmly astride solid Highland rock. Long ago students found the stony ground surrounding the school a challenging site for baseball and soccer games, but the rocky, well drained perch has certainly saved the building from earlier collapse.

Many Highlanders have been saddened by the gradual deterioration of the schoolhouse. The building, it can be argued, is an important, tangible link to the early history and the pioneering settlers of this District. Constructed by community hands, the school served not only as a place of learning, but also as a church, concert hall and meeting place.

The preservation and restoration of the Highland School would not only maintain a living link with

the vision of the early settlers, but also in very concrete way, provide a resource for the community as we move towards the next century. To this end, the Highland Heritage Park Society has successfully pursued an agreement with the owner of the school property which allows for the transfer of the school building to the Society. In the near future the Heritage Park Society hopes to raise sufficient funds to catalogue and dismantle the school, move it temporarily into storage and eventually, as further funds become available, erect the building adjacent to the Caleb Pike Homestead.

.....Strolling up the old school driveway on a winter afternoon one's imagination drifts back down the years to a simpler time. Could that be the sound of chattering children converging around the fallen front steps? Somewhere close by a door slams and for a moment it seems possible that a figure will emerge from the shadows surrounding the collapsed teacherage, starched collar and books in hand. A rising breeze rustles the boughs of an encroaching Douglas Fir as it presses against the walls of the old building. Faintly, the rhythmic ringing of a school bell draws the visitor inside. Emerging from the cloakroom one finds oneself in a large empty room. Fallen brick and plaster litter the twisted floor. Rain drips through gaps in the roof. With eyes closed, it is possible for a fleeting moment to catch the play of light on the scrollwork of a cast iron desk seat; possible to make out the tap,tap,tap of chalk on the blackboard; possible to watch the top of the big cast iron stove at the back of the room redden as another pitchy log takes flame. Grade One and Two in the first row on the right, Three and Four in the second, Five and Six in the third and Grade Seven on the far left. Heads bent in concentration; teacher moving quietly from row to row. A large map on the back wall. Little flags on pins tracing the ragged line of the western front across Belgium. Outside, the sound of an impatient tethered pony, stamping his feet; and then; the eight day clock strikes one, two, three.....❀

Davyd McMinn grew up in the Highlands, not long after the last of the pioneers had departed. Boyhood exploration of the remains of some of the early homesteads led to his interest in the history of the District .

Courtesy of Olga Robertson

The old Highland schoolhouse as it was in 1951 when it passed into private hands, a few years after the school bell no longer rang and the door closed for the last time.

EXCERPT FROM HENDERSON'S B.C. DIRECTORY, 1901

MILLSTREAM

A post settlement in Highland, Esquimalt riding, 2 miles from Langford station, 10 miles from Victoria.

Postmaster—Alfred Maltravers.

Annett, J.S., cooper.
Bennett, J., farmer.
Bentley, J., miner.
Cave, E., farmer.
Dockins, William, farmer.
Dixon, J.M.
Dixon, W.M., miner.
Duggan, John, farmer.
Eldridge, J.R., painter.
Lambert, F.
Lindsay, P.K., farmer.
McGregor, D., miner.
Maltravers, Alfred, postmaster.
Millington, W., farmer.
Neil, W., farmer.
Palmer, John, farmer.
Pike, Charles, farmer.
Pike, Henry, farmer.
Porter, J., farmer.
Poulton, Geo., farmer.
Ratcliffe, J., farmer.
Savage, Albert, farmer.
Scarfe, J.A., farmer.
Scarge, W., laundry.
Simpson, Edward, farmer.
Stevens, George, farmer.
Stewart, John, farmer.
Stribbing, Henry, rancher.
Vellacott,, J.J., miner
Webb, G., farmer
Wriglesworth, J., postmaster

If you have information concerning any of these early Highlanders, please let us know so that we can share it in these pages. Ed.

THE NATURAL WORLD

Birds of the Highlands

Part Two

Michael Carson

This column covers land-based birds that can be found in the Highlands in the period February through June. It uses the same format as in the October 1996 issue. Overwintering bird species discussed in that article are not considered in any detail here.

In many ways this period is the most exciting of the year for the birder: the northerly migration of birds spans this entire period, and birds have donned a new set of feathers in order to impress prospective mates. This fresh "nuptial" plumage, in the male especially, is a refreshing change, for many species, from the drab appearance of winter birds.

Spring is a time when the Highlands, as elsewhere, lose some bird species which migrate north to breed, but gain others which come to the Pacific Northwest to raise young.

Our first summer visitor is usually the Violet-green Swallow which can be found as early as mid-February in milder locations such as Blenkinsop Lake in Saanich, but probably won't be seen in most years in the Highlands until March. The Barn Swallow, more commonly seen above open fields than woodland glades, doesn't arrive until late April.

Our last summer visitor, the Common Nighthawk, doesn't arrive until mid-June after its long haul from South America, but since its nest is nothing more than a scrape on the ground, it perhaps doesn't have the urgency to move back that other species do.

The peak of the spring migration, which includes species passing through to breed north of here as well as arrivals that nest locally, is the last two weeks of April and the first two weeks of May. After that, most of the birds that we encounter are likely to be breeding locally. Those species that do breed

Job Kuijt

In conversation with the editor (Part one)

Highlander: You were born in Holland. Tell me a little about your background. And how was it that you later became a botanist? What was it in your early life that gave you such a love for plants?

Job Kuijt: Yes, I was born in Holland, the third son of what eventually became a family of six kids. I was born in 1930 at the beginning of the depression, and my parents, with a growing family, did not have an easy time. But in Holland the depression was not quite as severe as in other places, and that is probably because the social network has always been strongly developed there. So while there certainly weren't any extras, my family survived. And then, of course when I was nine or ten, the Second World War started and that was a shocking event, naturally.

I remember very clearly the Germans coming in. What I as a ten year old was of course not aware of, was the frenzy of the Jewish people at that time. They had at the very least an inkling of what was coming, though I'm not sure that my parents or the non-Jewish Dutch population had any idea. We were all in the bliss of ignorance. I remember, for example, that one of my parents' colleagues got a row boat, of all things, and he rowed out onto the open sea in desperation, trying to get away! Five years later we found out that he had been picked up by a British boat. There was a spy, somewhere near the harbour of our town, apparently, because I remember that several times a fairly large ship, loaded with mostly Jewish people trying to escape, was bombed into the sea, and that is one thing that I remember very, very clearly. We were playing—it was calm; the war action was nowhere near our town—we were playing on the street, my brothers and I, and then we suddenly heard the noise of a plane, which of course we didn't know very well, because there were no low commercial planes ever coming over, and we were scared, and I remember running back with my brothers, and seeing this big plane, a German bomber, coming over low. I stopped for a moment looking towards the harbour where it had disappeared and then I saw two little black dots falling out of it, and then I heard the bomb explode. Oh did I run! Even now my heart beats, I was so scared. So those were some of my strongest early memories. I was ten at that time.

The first couple of years of occupation were not particularly unusual for the ordinary person in Holland. The Germans tried very hard to be civilized to the Dutch, because they were convinced apparently, that the Dutch would eventually see the light and would be on their side. Only it wasn't quite as simple as that. The Dutch stayed aloof and on the whole didn't move in that direction. Of course there were exceptions. Then, when the Germans became aware that it wasn't going to go that way, they began tightening the screws. And it was then that the first Jews were being taken away. I remember very clearly going to Amsterdam and seeing these high barbed wire fences going right through the town to cut off the mostly Jewish corner of Amsterdam, the Jordaan as it's called. And again we, as kids were really not aware of what was going on. It wasn't until after the war that the full awfulness really became apparent to me as a fifteen or sixteen year old boy. And the sense of human catastrophe has never really left me. I carry that with me even though I was a boy at the time. I'm reminded of my piano teacher who at one point was deported and never came back. I am reminded of his sister who was also a music teacher, who in the last year or so lived, hidden in a haystack somewhere. You know, it's that sort of thing.

The winter of '44-'45 was a terrible winter. It is what the people who went through it still call "the starvation winter". Before that the country had been stripped of cattle and many other foodstuffs Then in September 1944 the Dutch railroads called a general strike in co-operation with the Dutch underground. The strike continued until the end and the whole country ground to a halt, and that made getting food from A to B more difficult. So we from the big cities went on very long treks with the heavy carts that were in circulation then, literally begging the farmers from door to door for potatoes, wheat, or whatever. It was a time when the Allies had stopped in their advance, in effect. They had very nearly cut off the western part of Holland where I was, from the German occupied area and from Germany itself, so we were isolated, and the awful thing was that by then as I said, the Germans had had four years of stripping the country—of cattle, of food, of metals. I remember all the railroads being ripped up, the copper overhead wires being taken down, the tracks being taken up and shipped off to Germany, to have the metals that they needed for the war effort. So on the railroad embankments there was nothing left except gravel. It was terrible. The country was devastated. It was stripped of everything. I remember when there were still railroad flatcars going by,—we lived next to the railroad—you would see farmers' wagons, anything that was on wheels, being conscripted and sent off to Germany. It was an incredible thing. By then I was fourteen or fifteen and you know by then you are more aware of things And the resentment to anything German is something I will never get rid of even though I have tried desperately to get rid of it because it seems so totally unfair at this point, especially when you meet Germans who have been

born since 1945. And yet the feeling is there and it's difficult to get rid of.

Highlander: What was the town where you lived?

Job Kuijt: Yes. We lived in Ijmuiden, a town which is not a historical town. It was at the mouth of the North Sea canal that leads from Amsterdam to the North Sea—as it were the first harbour of Amsterdam. A major fishing port. The Germans surrounded the town—this must have been at the beginning of '43 or '44—they surrounded the town by anti-tank ditches and antitank walls and minefields. They made the whole town into one giant fortification. Only the strategically important people were allowed to live in the town, and one third of the town was flattened because, being a flat country, the houses interfered with the line of action between the big sea guns on the coast in the dunes, and the railroad bridge, and the Germans needed to have a clear vision so that they could destroy the bridge if necessary. My father worked in the local steel mill and therefore he was strategically important. We stayed until the very end. Except that during the "starvation winter" my parents were wise enough to farm some of us out to relatives in the country who had some food. I was very lucky to be sent into the country way up north of Amsterdam where I had an uncle who had no children and he and his wife looked after me. So we escaped all action. That was one stroke of luck. So that is how we got through the winter. For the people in the cities, especially the big cities, it was a terrible thing and I don't know how many died of starvation, but a lot of them did. And there was no wood for the coffins. And the weather was very harsh that winter. So that was a memorable thing and it has put a stamp on me in my whole view of food on the plate. You know it sounds silly, but I meticulously clean my plate when I eat—it is so deeply ingrained in me. Whether I like it or not it is food and I eat it. You do not throw away food—no waste, no waste in my kitchen!

How did I get interested in plants? Well, I don't really know, except that my whole family was interested in plants and animals. And the love of plants is a very strong thing in Holland, in Dutch history. It is an essential thing in the lives of many Dutch people. You know, the bulb industry for one thing. There are nurseries all over the place. And my parents, especially my father, encouraged that sort of thing. In this tiny little front garden that we had, when I was thirteen or fourteen, I was allowed to plant anything that I liked, and I planted native things from the dunes, and I started to play around with crossing different kinds of poppies in a terribly uncontrolled, unscientific way. But I had lots of fun. Right next door were the beautifully manicured little rose gardens of the neighbours, but in our garden it was an unholy mess because I wanted to let things go to seed. However my father loved it and he encouraged it and that's one of the reasons that I became a botanist.

Highlander: How was it that you came to Canada?

Job Kuijt: Yes. As I said, I was one of four boys by then, and one girl. And for a family of that many boys in '45 or '46, it did not look pretty. Western Europe was a disaster. We were beginning to hear of people immigrating, neighbours and so forth who were immigrating. So the idea was sort of born in our minds, you know, would it be a possibility? We would have to find a sponsor and start out on a farm. That was the regulation. None of us had any farming background. My father was an engineer. He didn't know anything about cows or soil or anything. I had an uncle who was an early radio operator for KLM, the Dutch airline, and he flew to North America, to Canada and so forth. And my brother Ernie and I decided to see whether we could emigrate, and through my uncle's help we placed a little advertisement in what was then called the Star Weekly. Most people nowadays don't have any idea of what the Star Weekly was; it was the basic newspaper all through the prairies, the weekly newspaper. We had a number of replies, people that were interested. We wanted to immigrate and therefore we needed a sponsor, a Canadian sponsor to get us a start on a farm somewhere. The one answer that we got that caught our imagination was from a sixty-five year old man, a Mr. S. from Condor, Alberta. Most people have never heard of Condor. It is a tiny little hamlet, even today. In fact it has hardly changed—between Red Deer and Rocky Mountain. Mr. S. said that he had a quarter section, and that it was good deep soil, black soil, and he had a couple of horses and some equipment, a little bit of it was cleared. There was running water in it that he thought might actually be turned into hydro-electric power.

Now we were totally naive of course. We had no idea what he was talking about. I was seventeen at the time. Ernie was eighteen. We were still going to school. The whole idea caught fire in the family and as I look back on it now it was a deeply romantic thing. The Canadian West, so close to the Rocky Mountains. You have no idea what the Rocky Mountains is to someone from Western Europe. It is utterly romantic. And the Prairies, for heavens sake! So, to make a long story short we started to write to the man, and we eventually decided that the whole family was going to emigrate. By then I had another sister, and my oldest brother had a fiancée, so that when we actually moved in April of '48, there were nine of us, six children, two parents, and Linda. I have memories of going across this vast country by train, from Halifax to Red Deer. It took us three and a half days. That was unimaginable! And it's interesting that we still were going in the really old immigrant trains.

Highlander: I remember them, with their hard wooden seats.

Job Kuijt: Yes. And those bulging things that came down at night—they were upper bunks. You know, about six years ago I saw a historical book of

Ukrainian immigrants who must have been coming in the twenties. And there were those same trains, the *same* trains!. And the space, the *incredible* space. So, we arrived finally in Red Deer. We got off. We had to wait for a little while and then Mr. S. came—he had got somebody's truck. So we had arrived in Condor, and would you believe, here was a quarter section which was *muskeg*. It was muskeg of the kind that where you walk on it the tamarack moved—the tops of the tamarack moved towards you as you sank into the muskeg. It bounced. I remember that three of us boys found a watery hole and we got ourselves a long pole and we threw that pole into it and it never came back. And that was going to be our farm! The so-called creek which was then at its height was no more than four or five inches deep—there was hardly any water. There was *nothing* cleared; there were two old horses and one rusty old plough. The accommodation that Mr. S. provided was incredibly small, a hovel of a house. To make a long story short, the man was senile. It took us a little time to find out because our language was very deficient, very poor, but the man *was* senile, and here we had burnt all our bridges behind us.

Well, the eldest boys quickly went out and got little jobs here and there. I remember cleaning an incredible pig-sty for a couple of weeks. But we were fed. Any number of eggs we could eat and there were lots of them. So, it was still all very exciting. Even though we could see that there was a real disaster around the corner, it was still very, very exciting. Then the next disaster happened. We had worked on Mr.S.'s land for awhile, but we needed to have some money to keep us alive and he refused to pay us, because by then it was quite obvious that we were not going to take over his farm as he had planned. And before we knew it, Mr.S. had started a legal suit against us, because he felt that we were under contract to work the farm and eventually buy it from him, so within two months of coming to Canada we stood before the judge in Red Deer. We never got our wages, but at the same time we were not held to that contract because the judge said that it was not a contract in a legal sense. In any case that was not a good start.

photo courtesy Job Kuijt

The Kuijt family with relatives in front of their tiny house in Condor, Alberta, shortly after emigrating from Holland. Job is on the far left.

Highlander: It must have been frightening, I should think. What was your parents response to all of this?

Job Kuijt: It was depressing, and yet I don't really have a memory of depressed meetings or depressed talk. It was all so very exciting. It was all so new. And we could see that it was easy for the boys to find work and we were sending some money home, so we survived, and then slowly we began to sink in our roots. I worked on a turkey ranch outside Red Deer. My oldest brother got married. He had work. Ernie had work. My father became a carpenter in Condor for a time. So, you know, we got settled and some money began to flow in to keep the family alive. From then on it became easier. I worked on the turkey ranch for about a year, until the summer of '49. Then, again this was so naive, but I wanted to see the Pacific Ocean. I had heard about the possibility of hitch-hiking and I hitch-hiked all the way to Vancouver, and I put my feet in the water in English Bay and I wrote home that *I* had put my feet in the *Pacific Ocean*!

Highlander: You and Alexander Mackenzie!

Job Kuijt: Yes. But you know, these early impressions become so deeply ingrained in you. I'll give you one instance that is with me all the time. Hitch-hiking through the Rockies from Banff, I was standing on the road west of Field. In those days there was very little traffic so I stood for quite awhile. It was beautiful weather and then I heard the sound of the CPR train whistle reverberating down the valley, and that is a sound that is so utterly romantic that it is still with me. Every time I hear a train, I see the mountains at that time with a blue sky overhead. It was very exciting So, I hitch-hiked to the coast and from then on I had made up my mind that I was not going to live in Alberta. I wanted the mountains. Little did I know! So, once I got back to Red Deer and stayed with my parents for a week, I said, "I'm going to B.C." I had heard there was work in Kimberley where there was a lot of housing construction for the CM & S (Cominco) Company, a big mining company. So I worked there wheeling concrete for awhile, and then the winter was coming on and I heard that there was more permanent work in Trail. So I started to work in the smelter and that was not pleasant work, of course. But soon after that I met a young biology high school teacher who told me that in Canada you could go to university by just working in the summer time. Well, I had never thought of going to university, but I suddenly saw this mirage, that I could study botany at university if I just had the money and if I had grade 12, because you see we had left Holland one month short of the final examination, so I didn't have

Grade 12. I didn't know what to do because I didn't have a penny, and I didn't have Grade 12. Well, I thought of a solution—doing both at the same time. That is, I worked night shift and I went to school in the daytime. It was from eleven to seven in the morning that I worked—in the smelter, in the foundry most of the time. Then I went home to my

Job Kuijt

Large witches broom on Douglas fir. The deformed branching is caused by parasitic dwarf mistletoe.

boarding house and my landlady gave me breakfast and I went off to school. School lasted till about three in the afternoon and I rushed home, jumped into bed, slept until about ten o'clock, my landlady woke me up, fed me dinner and off I went to work.

Highlander: You were determined, weren't you?

Job Kuijt: I was going to do it. And I did, because at the end of that nine months I had enough money for my first year university, and I had my Grade 12. And from then it really was easy, because in those days there was no difficulty in getting summer work at all. My first summer I spent sitting on top of Mt.Hooker in the Nanaimo District as a forest fire lookout. It was one of the nicest summers I've ever had—totally alone in the forest. It paid well enough to finance my second year. The second summer I worked for the Forest Pathology lab, here in Victoria. In my third summer I worked for the Forest Pathology lab in Calgary. I worked for Vidor Nordin, who was very, very supportive. Imagine, he had this undergraduate assistant and he said, "Here is a truck. Go and map mistletoes. So that was the beginning of my mistletoe career. I travelled all through Alberta and B.C., and I mapped mistletoes, and I began to make observations—inevitably you make observations—which eventually were part of my PhD work.

Highlander: How in the world did you find such small, obscure plants as mistletoes?

Job Kuijt: Well, you develop an eye for it—just ask my kids—they're terrified to drive with me because I have my eyes in the trees. Dwarf mistletoes, the only mistletoes in Canada, are parasites on conifers. They produce certain malformations on the trees, and after awhile you learn to see these malformations from a great distance, and if you recognize that a certain malformed tree is a Douglas fir, then you know that its a Douglas fir mistletoe because no other mistletoe grows on Douglas fir.

Highlander: Is there a particular part of the tree where you are more likely to find it?

Job Kuijt: You can find infections on any part of the tree but on the lowest part of the tree you tend to have the oldest infections, and they then induce on the tree massive witches brooms—clumps of irregular and deformed branches which give the crown of the tree a very messy appearance. And that is what makes the infection stand out. You can spot them miles away. With field glasses you could look across a valley three or four miles and identify this mistletoe plant which really is only about an inch in size. I worked by way of an ordinary map, going up logging roads and side roads. I began to recognize when a stand was healthy and when it was not. I took a lot of photographs, and also I would make a lot of herbarium specimens, documented so that we could really see what the distribution of these mistletoes were.

So that was the beginning of my mistletoe interest. Now what also crystallized it in an academic sense was that when I was at UBC I took an honours course in botany and in order to qualify for an honours degree, you had to write an honours thesis, and since I had some facility with the major scientific languages, like German and a bit of French, my professor, Tommy Taylor, suggested that I survey the published literature on dwarf mistletoes. I did, and it was accepted and in fact it was published. That was my first publication, which is very unusual for a bachelors' thesis. But more importantly, when I got to my graduate work in California, I had my literature review not only done, but published, so that put me a huge step ahead.

After finishing my undergraduate degree at UBC I went to Berkeley for my masters and then my PhD. I got my PhD in '58 and went overseas to the University of Utrecht for a post-doctoral year. After that I came back to UBC and began life as a faculty member. ❀