

THE HIGHLANDER

Memorial Issue



Nancy Joan McMinn

May 26, 1927 - October 6, 2000

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EDITORIAL

The editors of this special commemorative issue of *The Highlander* were very pleased by the variety and scope of the response to our request for remembrances of Nancy McMinn. We have included all the contributions we received and thank those who shared their memories and anecdotes. We have edited with a light hand to honour Nancy's philosophy of letting each contributor speak in their own voice.

Along with friends, family members have contributed their sense of Nancy, from Bob's biographical narrative to thoughts by Davyd, Diana, John and Libby expressed at the Pike House Memorial, October 13, 2000. We also include some material in which Nancy speaks for herself – a short story she wrote while taking a creative writing course at U.Vic., in the 1970's, a nature column that appeared in *The Goldstream Gazette* during the 1980's and an editorial she wrote for the *Gowlland Foundation Journal* in 1992.

Taken together, we hope the contents of this issue provide some sense of Nancy's multifaceted nature and of her impact on this community.

–Elliott Gose

Cover Photo – Nancy, 1991: *Gowlland Foundation Director*

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Nancy with Davyd, Libby, John and Diana at home at First Lake, 1960's

THE HIGHLANDER

Voice of the Highland Community

Volume 15, Special Memorial Issue

Fall 2001

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Tribute to Nancy McMinn

Eric Bonham

Thoughts expressed at Nancy's Memorial held at the Pike House, October 13, 2000.

Gandhi once observed:
"You must be the change
You wish to see in the world."

This quotation I believe, is a fitting tribute to Nancy McMinn. Like Gandhi, Nancy walked her talk, even though there were considerable challenges at times in her doing so. She was indeed a remarkably influential, yet totally unassuming leader who lived in our midst, and, throughout, she was true to herself, to her values, to her belief system and most important of all, to her family.

Her sincere interest in people, her integrity and compassion, her deep love for the outdoors, nature and music, along with an enquiring mind that consistently thought outside of the box, made her a delightfully interesting friend and companion. Furthermore, she was an incredible teacher in the art of living life to the full, with a keen insight that could see the humour in everyday life situations.

Nancy was both a pragmatist and a visionary; these traits, combined with her dedication and commitment to doing her very best at all times to the highest of self imposed standards caused her to be very successful in whatever she turned her hand to. We have only to think of the many initiatives that have occurred in our community over the years that bear her stamp.

For example, her interest and vision with husband Bob and others in the founding of the Highlands Community Association, forerunner to the formation of the District of Highlands. Her active participation in the many events held in the Caleb Pike Homestead, such as craft fairs, Halloween nights, folk nights, Heritage Fairs and picnics, market days, Easter egg hunts, roads clean up. The list is truly endless.

Nancy would be the last person, however, to claim credit or fame for such initiatives, for these successful events were, and are, a result of creative community participation that exists to this very day. She would, nevertheless, contribute to each event in her own inimitable style, adding her homespun touch that never missed detail, whether it was the creation of a tasteful flower arrangement, colourful Christmas decorations, unusual tablecloths, the supply of delicious goodies or yet another thoughtful editorial in *The Highlander*. Like the true artist that she was, she wove a heart-warming welcome into every community event, and at the same time, quietly inspired others to follow suit. In essence, she led by example, while giving her undivided attention to everyone she met. To Nancy, everyone and everything mattered.



The McMinn family hamming it up at the Highland Heritage Fair, 1996

Her love for nature was a legend unto itself. It was my privilege to work with Nancy and friends in the Gowlland Foundation for the conservation and preservation of the Gowlland Range, which was eventually to become known as the Gowlland-Tod Commonwealth Nature Legacy Park. Nancy's involvement was nothing short of inspirational. There were times when the creation of a provincial park seemed an unlikely outcome, but her deep trust in the Universe to provide the skills and the right people in the right place at the right time, was consistent, and indeed proved to be correct.

Although all those involved in the Gowlland Foundation had their peaks and valleys, we performed as a team working consistently towards a Vision that was greater than the sum of its parts. It was truly a lesson in trust, cooperation, compassion, respect and teamwork, and Nancy was central to it all.

She was also a problem solver extraordinaire. Her approach to say the least, was unorthodox to the conventional mind, but therein lay her secret as well as her wisdom and strength. She believed that problems or conflict could not be solved with the head alone, but rather through a combination of head and heart. Conflict resolution in her opinion, began with a deep respect for those who may hold a different viewpoint and, in that regard, she demonstrated a clear ability to separate the issue from the person.

While Nancy experienced, like all of us, times of doubt, fear and resistance to change, they were but fleeting moments, and never lasted long, for the spiritual side of her nature was so balanced and steadfast that it carried her forward to the next set of challenges with renewed strength.

There is an old saying that there are three values in life that are important: The first is to be kind, the second is to be kind and the third is to be kind. I think we would all agree that Nancy McMinn lived her life by such a creed, sharing her seemingly inexhaustible range of talents and wisdom in a most selfless manner. Kindness was indeed her hallmark.

Bob and Nancy, along with family members, Davyd, Diana, Libby and John further demonstrated such kindness to the Highlands community on many an occasion through the sharing of their home for various events. Kindwood Farm, appropriately named, is a testament to the values that Nancy held so close to her heart.

I close with the observation that the on-going spirit of

Nancy McMinn is as natural and belonging to our community as are the trees, rocky bluffs, hills and lakes of the Highlands that she so dearly loved. Perhaps this sentiment is best captured in the words of the Scottish bard, Robert Burns, who like Nancy, also had a great love for people and nature. With a little poetic license these words reflect the love that Highlands Nancy held for her community:

"My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is right here
My heart's in the Highlands, along with the deer
Along with the wild deer, and following the roe
My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go."

Your spirit lives on Nancy and your star still shines brightly in the Highlands' night sky.

Thinking about Nancy

Kathy Gose

The death of Nancy, an important person in my life for over thirty years, was the loss of a dearly loved friend and an age-mate. I certainly love and value my younger friends, but there is something uniquely special about a friend with whom I shared so much personal history. A hole opened up in my life when Nancy left. How am I to do justice to the memory of this remarkable and complex friend, and to express what she in her complexity means to me?

When we met in 1967, Nancy and I were in our early 40's, both of us vigorous women involved in very different lives, she here in the Highlands, I in Vancouver. For years our family spent each summer and many Christmas and spring holidays at our cabin on Third Lake. On excursions together, Nancy opened up the treasures of the Gowlland Range and other special places in the Highlands to us. As we got to know each other, we recognized that, along with the simple enjoyment of each other's company, a strong connection was growing out of our shared interests, values and experiences. Over the years our two families shared many Christmas and New Year's celebrations at First Lake. We also shared personal milestones and family rites of passage, as well as difficult challenges that occurred now and then in our lives. I could depend on Nancy for understanding and sensitive support in times of trouble in my life, and I offered the same to her. In short, we had a loving, trusting relationship that deepened and broadened over time.

Here are some of the things I loved about her: Her spiritual connection with the natural world, a connection that more and more informed who she was and how she lived. Her aliveness and openness to life - her excitement over her new discoveries and how they made her light up. I loved being around as she explored new ideas, though I was sometimes uncomfortably stretched when she would turn to me and ask, "What do you think about

this fascinating notion?" Often I hardly knew what I thought. Her passion for clarity stemmed from her high intelligence and intellectual curiosity.

I also loved the ways in which she expressed her creative ability. She seemed to have enthusiasm and endless energy to tackle all kinds of challenges. Long ago I watched her lay tiles on her kitchen floor and later on, I was inspired to do the same myself. Recently, she taught herself to construct fencing and a gate from the tough stems of ocean spray. When she died, she was in the middle of planning a native plant garden at the Municipal Office, a project that will now go on without her. Among many other creative talents, she was a skilled sewer, a dedicated gardener, an excellent cook. Without missing a beat, she could prepare delicious food while carrying on an involved and animated conversation. Joining her in some of her many and varied creative projects usually was fun, often filled with good humour and gentle teasing, especially when things were going well. I loved her wicked and sometimes zany sense of humour and her wit, which lightened the challenges we were facing as we worked together.

Here, from our joint history, are several small scenes, which I remember fondly. (1) In 1977 the four of us (Nancy, Bob, Elliott and I) hiked the West Coast Trail. I remember all of us snuggling down in our sleeping bags, protected from the falling rain and the night around us by a plastic shelter, and cozily drifting towards sleep as Nancy read aloud to us by flashlight. (2) In that same year, the four of us took a trip to Cuba at a time when the Castro regime was just beginning to reestablish tourism. I remember pedaling barefoot on rented bicycles through warm Cuban rain and catching the delight on Nancy's face when she splashed herself and me as we cycled through a puddle. (3) Most recently, I remember a companionable morning spent in what turned out to be



On the West Coast trail. Nancy, Kathy and Elliott, 1977

her last spring, as she and I transplanted a glorious patch of yellow violets growing along Ross-Durrance Rd. We did this to save them from extermination by the road improvement soon to take place. I had been fussing about the violets for some time when she offered to help me rescue them. We enjoyed this simple but meaningful little relocation project. This spring as I saw our transplants thriving, I was grateful again for our salvage operation and for our time together while we accomplished it.

Nancy offered support, guidance and encouragement to many people. It took me some time to recognize that she periodically suffered from self doubts. How could she with her generosity of spirit, her high intelligence, her high creativity and wisdom possibly have doubts about herself? Especially with her ability to be there for so many people, her success in reaching out to all kinds of people, her ability to come up with different ways of looking at and solving vexing problems that the rest of us were ready to throw up our hands over. How could low self esteem sometimes be a problem for her, loved and looked up to by so many people? Yet it was, and she would speak about it from time to time.

As well as being a caring, inclusive, outgoing person, Nancy was in some matters a very private one, stoutly defending a part of herself from intrusion by others. On a few occasions I blundered into this private core, usually when I was, in hindsight, assuming that I was doing so "for her own good." Her BACK OFF response was unequivocal.

In November, 1996, Nancy became ill with congestive heart failure, a condition that came on very suddenly. After spending a short time in hospital she returned home to begin a long recuperation. Nancy had changed from the person we all perceived to be abundantly well and strong to one who had been brushed by death. It was a shocking and upsetting time. Influenced by her contact with Christian Science when she was young and the spiritual beliefs she had been developing over the years, she resisted pleas to get medical attention. She remarked

later that she gave in and went to hospital because of our fears for her, not her own. After this event she realized that she needed to be more selective about how she used her energy, since she no longer could count on the strengths she once had. She tried to let go of certain "shoulds," and, as she said, "follow her heart." I believe that during this time she concentrated more than ever on her spiritual life. She rarely discussed her physical problems at any length with me, always turning the conversation to inquire about how I was getting on. I saw somewhat less of her because we were doing fewer things together, but periodically we had long phone conversations in which we spoke frankly about many things, including what it's like to grow older and how you deal with this stage of life.

On the surface, there did not seem to be a huge change in Nancy's life. She most certainly had not retired from the world. She was still involved in a number of projects. Yet she was having to select with more care what she could do and wanted to do. However, her last major project was certainly not one of her choosing.

Nancy's sudden death occurred at a crucial time in the appeal process involving the First National suit against Bob and the District of Highlands. She was going through a painful examination of the accusations made by First National's lawyer concerning the process by which the Gowlland Tod park had been acquired. She saw these accusations as twisted and unfair, and with her sharp analytical mind, was helping Bob to prepare a clear, convincing factum for his lawyer to present to the Appeal Court. She felt that the case against Bob and the municipality unjustly attacked altruistic efforts that had been made by many people to save the Gowlland Range from development. The Range was a sacred place to her, one she loved deeply. She was under great stress as she tried to counteract the developer's clever legal scenario. She, who usually tried to find common ground between opposing sides in a dispute, was angered and offended to be caught up in the deliberately confrontational process of the law. She was equally upset about the inequality of the case in which a large development firm from Vancouver used its ample resources to litigate against a small community. Unfortunately, it was months after her death that the Appeal Court exonerated Bob, Bruce Woodbury and the first Highlands council of any wrong doing and upheld the right of a council to determine local land use deemed to be in the public interest.

In stating the decision of the three Appeal Court Judges, Madame Justice Newberry wrote "...I would allow the appeal and dismiss the actions as against all the appellants." When those of us close to Bob and his family heard this good news we gathered in the Kindwood Farm kitchen to laugh and cry with relief and joy. In our celebration of justice finally done, the only note of sadness was the absence of Nancy who had steadfastly helped to bring it about.

Nancy once wrote in *Connecting with Nature*, the journal of the Gowlland Foundation, "There is something in the nature of certain places which attracts us, some energy which resonates with our very being. As when we place a key in a lock, we find in these special places a way of opening to the natural world and making a profound

connection with nature. We are touched by feelings of harmony, of peace, of being at home." This was an expression of what the Gowlland Range meant to her and of the love she felt for the Highlands, her home for so many years. I feel that this statement sums up an important part of her legacy to the rest of us.

Into the Flow of the Universe

Michael Bocking

Nancy loved the Highlands. She was as much at home in nature as she was in her kitchen. She was inspired by the beauty, diversity and preciousness of this landscape, and knew that wilderness is vital for our spiritual well-being.

Among my memories is working together with Nancy to create a brochure for the Gowlland Foundation. We struggled to find the words and images to convey the sense of a more harmonious relationship with the natural world, and supplemented our own thoughts with quotations such as this one by Dolores La Chappelle, which Nancy selected;

"We learn from the interrelationships of sky, rock, water, trees, a way of looking which allows us to step back into the flow of the universe."

The wind blows over the hilltops
A raven soars high overhead

Looking down it sees adults and children
Enjoying a hike in the range

They pause to take in all the beauty
Of spring flower meadows in bloom
The views of the inlet and islands
In a frame of arbutus and fir
In the distance a deer gently grazes
At ease in its home in the hills
Here nature is free and enduring
Here people can come to find peace

Long before Gowlland park was created
A young woman roamed in these hills
She was drawn by its magic and wonder
She delighted in all the land's moods

Her dream was to see it protected
She inspired that dream in her friends
Her love for the land kept her going
The land found in Nancy a friend.

Highland Wild Flowers

Daphne Allen

Nancy to me was the Highland Flowers of Spring. Fifteen years ago a group of us Highland ladies met in Nancy's kitchen to start a project that resulted in the HIGHLAND WILDFLOWER QUILT. We pored over the large variety of books from Nancy's library, picking out our choice of wildflower to put in the quilt. We then spent many happy hours in her living room sewing our squares together and finally quilting them.

When Mayor Bob asked if I would be interested in making the Mayor's Chain of Office using those Highland wildflowers from the quilt I was delighted. It was easy to take each pattern and reduce it to the right size to fit on the linen band but what about colour? Nancy said to come over and we could check it out in her garden. So, one evening, armed with my pallet of embroidery cottons I went down to the McMinn garden. Nancy and I sat in the grass and matched thread colour with flower petals. I was amazed. She had almost all of the 16 quilt flowers growing in her garden. It was a truly magical moment for me, and I cannot see an Easter Lily or a Shooting Star without thoughts of Nancy and her flower garden.



Nancy and Jane McMinn, members of the Highland craft group, selling raffle tickets for the Highlands Wildflower quilt at the Luxton Fair, 1978.

Strawberries in September

Carol Lester

One of the things I remember most about Nancy is how she always found such joy in the simple pleasures of life, like our Highlands folk music coffee house, or a potluck meal with good companions. Being able to share with others seemed to come naturally, and she always delighted in the happiness of other folks around her.

Our last communication was in September, and it sticks in my mind as a perfect example of what I mean. Rick and I had done some work for The Highlander, and put it onto a computer disc for Nancy, as editor, to work with. We left it on our porch for her to pick up at her convenience when she was in the neighbourhood, but several days went by and the disc remained. We began to wonder if she'd forgotten. Then one afternoon we returned home to find a small basket of perfect, tiny, red ripe strawberries sitting on the porch chair. There was no note, no fanfare, no indication from where they might have come. Certainly such a delicacy is not to be taken for granted in the fall of the year!

It wasn't long, though, before we noticed the computer

disc was now missing from its spot, and put two and two together. Sherlock Holmes had nothing on us! The berries were delicious. Naturally, we sent Nancy a little note of thanks, via e-mail. Then we left on a three-week holiday abroad.

Nancy passed away while we were gone, and we only heard the sad news on our return. But the kicker to the story occurred when we finally sat down and read through our month-long backlog of e-mail. There it was, a letter from a ghost! I can't express my feelings as I "opened" that last note from Nancy. It read, simply, as follows: "Glad you enjoyed the strawberries. My programmed mind can't get used to strawberries in September, so I get special delight from them."

That delight, together with both the strength and the gentleness that were so much a part of her, is how we will always remember this special and unique lady. These are just a few of my memories of Nancy that still make me smile.

"Love Comes in Many Forms"

Lynne Shields

One rainy winter morning when I arrived for a walk with Nancy she suggested, for reasons I cannot remember, that instead of a walk we go for a row on the lake. Although I have always been nervous on the water, I felt safe with Nancy since I knew she was such an experienced boater. She told me to get in first and she would push off. But as she got into the boat she somehow tipped it over and we both fell into the lake. The look of utter astonishment on her face as she hit the water made me laugh and forget about being afraid of drowning in two feet of lake water. She was so concerned about me because she knew of my insecurity in water, and was shocked that she had been the one to tip the boat. It was rather awkward for us to disentangle ourselves from the boat and lake since we had on gumboots, rain pants and jackets. We squished our way up the slope to the house, stripped, put on dry clothing, and were drinking brandy in front of the fire by 10:30 that morning.

Then there was the time when Nancy and I were hiking in an area of the Gowlland Range that was new to me - a place where there were no marked trails. On our way home Nancy slipped and fell. I solicitously asked her if she was O.K. She said, no, she was sure she'd broken her leg. I was very upset and tried to figure out how I could get her home or bring help in to her. She was a great actor, completely convincing me that she was in pain, until finally she admitted that she was just teasing me - she wasn't hurt at all!

One wonderful sunny winter morning I brought my son, Eric and his friend, Shawn out to skate on the lake. While we were getting on our skates Nancy went up to the house, opened the living room windows, placed speakers on the window sills and soon an old recording of the skater's waltz was pouring music out over the lake.

And for my birthday one year Nancy and Bob filled 12 garbage bags with composted manure and tied a heart-shaped card to each bag. One word was written on each card to form the message: "Do you know that love comes in many forms? Happy Birthday Lynne".

Early every February I began to look for the first satin flowers to emerge on Gonzales Hill near my home. As soon as I found the first blossom I would phone Nancy to tell her of my delight (flowers bloom much earlier on Gonzales Hill than in the Highlands). This year when I found my first satin flower I didn't know what to do with my discovery.

Lynne Shields knew Nancy for many years. She was a director of the Gowlland Foundation and frequently visited Nancy at her home in the Highlands.

Remembering Nancy, October 13, 2000

Thelma Fayle

We attended Nancy's memorial service at Caleb Pike House today. Friends talked of that smile, that warmth, that generous spirit, that novel approach. Everyone made an effort to celebrate Nancy's life, but the shock of our loss was still so large.

I loved her son John's description of Nancy's study. When he told us of the pictures on her wall and named the books she had scattered near at hand, it was as if he were describing her heart. The heart we all knew. He slowly read over the range of subject titles. It felt like one last luxurious visit with Nancy.

While listening to the thoughtful speeches and the skillful harpist, I watched three deer tiptoe around the Caleb Pike grounds. Imagine three deer coming so close to a group of about 200 people huddled outdoors under a marquee! They completely ignored us and nibbled on their veggie snacks. They moved with the relaxed grace that deer have, but stayed within limb's length of each other.

One after another, pleasant memories of Nancy came to mind. I remembered the day I called her to say I wanted to volunteer to work on The Highlander. I was nervous about committing to the time that would be involved, but I appreciated the lovely tone of her editorial, which called for help. I decided to follow my intuition. I told her I was interested in interviewing local people, and she said that would be a great contribution.

I loved her description of an approach she called 'the potluck' publishing style. Each member of the group could bring to the publication what their heart desired. Poetry, photography, drawings, recipes, writings about nature and local history, etc. She felt that if each member did something they truly enjoyed, that enjoyment would shine through in a good issue of The Highlander.

I remembered that we were always on a high when John

and I drove home along Munn Road after each Highlander meeting – even though it was 9 or 10 at night and we had to go to work early the next morning. The energy in Nancy's kitchen was unlike anything we had ever felt.

I remembered the day I was in hospital and had just been given a double hit of morphine when Nancy walked into my hospital room. I was attached to the usual after-surgery paraphernalia, and Nancy stood there holding a green, flat tray that she had filled with moss and some wild flowers that were growing in the Highlands. It felt as though she were handing over a little piece of earth to remind me of the beauty of home. I especially appreciated her smile that day. I heard her say she had been a nurse in her youth and that was why they had let her in the ward even though it was not visiting hours. In the haze of the drugs I remember thinking that naturally, everyone in the hospital knew Nancy. Months later when I mentioned her early nursing career, she explained that she had never been a nurse. I must have hallucinated that part.

I remembered the day we got talking about anarchy at her kitchen table. I told her about my twenty years of working with government and my frustrations with the bureaucracy. We agreed that there had to be a more productive way. I said that I was beginning to wonder if anarchy weren't the best alternative. She smiled broadly and went into the other room and came back with a book called The Anarchist. She loaned it to me. I learned that the word 'anarchist' could have a very positive connotation. After that, I always thought of her as a loving and gentle Anarchist.

The three deer came back into focus against the bittersweet sound of the harp. So many memories from just a few short years of our friendship.

I wish I could give Nancy one more hug.

"Feel the Sun and Rain"

Elliott Gose

During the thirty-three years that Kathy and I were her friends, Nancy never remained satisfied with superficial explanations; she asked precise questions that often left me realizing how little I had thought about what I knew. Sometimes, I found her quizzing embarrassed me, sometimes it irritated me, but usually it caused me to think harder, to plumb deeper. The Seventies were a time when new and old and foreign ways of thinking entered our culture. We three read and discussed the Seth books and other similar excursions into esoteric literature. We also discussed Buddhism and one summer decided to investigate Taoism. Because we had been brought up as Westerners with the

Christian idea of dominion over nature, the capitalist notion of hard work and self assertion and the technological belief in controlling and shaping our environment, we were intrigued by the quite different key concepts of Taoism.

The Tao is the Way, but it is passive rather than active. Individuals can be in harmony with the Way by emptying their minds, becoming still. For the westerner, this philosophy could be expressed as "Don't do something, just stand there!" Such reversals of our upbringing appealed to us, caught up as we were in our busy lives, especially the demands of work and parenthood.

We appreciated the concreteness of some of the Taoist paradoxes. The best known one is the dream of the butterfly. A Taoist sage dreamed he was a butterfly flitting in the summer breeze, just enjoying itself. Then he woke and was again himself, a thought-filled human being. He began to ponder: Had he been a human being dreaming he was a butterfly, or is the true situation that somewhere a butterfly now dreams that it is a human being? We enjoyed discussing questions such as where reality is to be found.

Since Nancy died, I have from time to time thought of her as a butterfly, moving from one wildflower to another by day, and at night dreaming our lives on toward a more balanced and harmonious state. As the Taoist sage put it, "We are born as from a quiet sleep, and we die to a calm awaking."

At the beginning of the Nineties, I retired, and Kathy and I moved to the Highlands. What prompted us to leave Vancouver after 35 years was the formation of the Gowlland Foundation and the excitement and promise it generated in us as we got involved with it. Nancy was not only a founding member of the Foundation but someone who had long loved the Gowlland Range, which she knew intimately. Saving the range became an important part of the Foundation's mandate. In my opinion, Nancy's part in its success was one of her crowning achievements.

Over the years, Nancy's passionate interest in both nature and the spiritual dimension of life came together with great intensity in the philosophy of the Foundation. To communicate our activities and our vision, the Foundation published the Gowlland Journal, of which Nancy and I became the editors. As you'd expect, she was superb in that role, — encouraging contributors, finding relevant material to reprint, writing wonderfully

articulate and inspiring editorials, helping me to sharpen and focus my own contributions.

A lot of what we were trying to do with the journal comes out in its actual name, *Connecting with Nature*. Helping that to happen was the aim of the Foundation workshops and of the work we published. A short poem by Thomas Hardy that we reprinted in the Journal, evokes the manifold continuities of nature and moves me now even more than it did then.

Transformations

Portion of this yew
Is a man my grandsire knew,
Bosomed here at its foot:
This branch may be his wife,
A ruddy human life
Now turned to a green shoot.

These grasses must be made
Of her who often prayed,
Last century, for repose;
And the fair girl long ago
Whom I often tried to know
May be entering this rose.

So, they are not underground,
But as nerves and veins abound
In the growths of upper air,
And they feel the sun and rain,
And the energy again
That made them what they were!

A Look at the Future, Mostly Questions

Muriel Sibley

With Nancy McMinn's death came a challenge recognised immediately by many in the Highlands: where do we go from here? Nancy's quiet power, the authority of her knowledge and vision are gone: can we follow in her footsteps? And which path would she have chosen? I may not be the best person to try to imagine this trajectory, but like many others, I was moved and influenced by Nancy. She made all who had significant contact with her feel known and understood; I shall diffidently assume a knowledge of her and risk this projection. Nancy, more than most of us, lived out her philosophy and dreams, and she communicated and worked for them gently but tirelessly; she also believed that life was to be lived based on deeply-held values. A value-based life can be slower and more deliberate than one based on expediency, but tends not to run off track. This is true on a personal scale as well as on the scale of a larger community.

A small example: Three of Nancy's values — appreciation of natural materials, knowledge of local history and craft, and belief in the worth of hands-on, personal labour — directed how she made her garden fence in the months before her death. She knew that the long stems of the native bush, Ocean Spray, had been used by early Highlands settlers as fence material, that they were strong and flexible when green and strong and rigid when dry. Ocean Spray is a prolific and fast-growing plant that tends to crowd out sun-loving wild flowers, so there was no danger of depleting it. Later, Nancy ruefully admitted that the process had been tedious and time-consuming. However, the fence that she made is a lovely reminder of her vision and her values. A "bought" cedar fence, using wood from somewhere else, milled and finished by unknown others would not have been so.

Another example: When we moved to the Highlands, Nancy dropped in on us one day (we didn't have a phone at the time.) In her gentle, humble way she welcomed us to the neighbourhood, inquired about us, our business and our family. We learned about her belief in home-based business as part of an integrated community and her love of and knowledge of the natural surroundings. She invited us to a Community Association meeting. The visit lasted nearly an hour; she was a delightful guest - warm, personable and helpful to us as newcomers.

Nancy's belief in the importance of community prompted her visit, but it was her acknowledgement of us as individuals, not as a means to an end - like "community" - that endeared her to us. She could have just dropped off a pamphlet and left, a welcome enough gesture, but instead she gave of herself and her time and left an enduring impression. Can we continue to make the Highlands a "value-based community?" Do we share the same values? Does it matter?

Let me list some of the values I think we share and then see if I can imagine where they might lead.

Love of and care for the Highland's natural environment

There is a lot already happening in this department. We have an Environment Committee, a Parks and Recreation Committee and the Trails Committee; there is the Lake Stewardship group which monitors water quality in several Highlands lakes, and a Planning and Land Use Group, all looking after our municipal natural environment. Our Councils have placed priority on park acquisition and environmentally sensitive development. But how about our personal relationships to the natural environment? Do we "re-use, re-cycle" and periodically re-examine our habits? Ours is a resource-wasteful society; can Highlanders be leaders in demonstrating a better way of living? One of the unfortunate facts of our life here is how much gasoline we use going to and from Victoria. If the transit company won't furnish a bus for us, is it possible to do it ourselves? Is a co-op bus, running a couple of times a day, a possibility? Could we at least look more seriously at car-pooling? Nancy would call a group together to study an idea around her kitchen table over some mint tea and cookies. Perhaps there is a kitchen table somewhere in the Highlands waiting for just such a group. Caring for the environment needs people who are educated about it. Maybe we should organize a series of talks by the biologists who live here (if they're willing!) How about an art show of "nature art"? How about a Hiking Group for Young Naturalists? There are many resources available to us, both natural and human. Nancy once wistfully mentioned wanting a school in the Highlands that would be nature-centred, where the landscape would contribute in the areas of biology, art, and physical education, among other possibilities. Isn't that a great idea?

Neighbourhood

The Highlands as a Village, where we can meet each other, help each other, listen to each other. Nancy organised many a community event, and there continue to be many to get involved in, including the community picnic, the Halloween parties and the Saturday night coffee house. Some of us have had on our wish list a Community Hall, where dances and parties could be held, lectures and theatre might take place, indoor sports have a venue. I know that Nancy worried that a large central hall would take away from the neighbourhood feeling of a small place and was in favour of several modest-sized buildings in different parts of the Highlands. How about both, since we're dreaming? Over the years my life has become more centred in the Highlands. Most of my friends are here, and I would love meeting them casually at a Highlands Hall, perhaps one with a coffee shop or a little store. Or we could have a movie society, and show films once a month. Or cheer the kids at a basketball game. Could we build it with volunteers? Contribute our talents and energy to making a special place for all of us?

The integrity and goodness of people.

Nancy McMinn's life demonstrated her belief in people. She hated adversarial politics, thinking that it alienated people from each other and always left someone a loser. She would often invite individuals on different sides of an issue to meet together (again, around the kitchen table!), confident that meeting and listening led to understanding and that understanding led to solutions. Do we in the Highlands share this value? How often do we really listen to each other? Though our North American culture has begun to stress the value of co-operation and non-violence in raising our children, oddly, in our adult society we still depend on adversarial and confrontational systems. How could we evolve to an integration of our principles and our practices? One possibility might be to set up a panel of volunteer mediators, to help settle disputes in our "village"; another might be to institute "discussion groups" on hot issues, before anything as formal as a Public Hearing happened.

Once, a few years ago, the people who live on our road met at the Caleb Pike House to discuss the future of our road. About forty of us sat in a big circle and expressed our views on a subject about which most of us had strong feelings. I remember how fine it felt to be "on a level" with everyone. We saw each others' faces and expressions clearly and there was little or no sense of "them versus us." Is there a place for this kind of dialogue in our municipal politics? And how would it be if we sat in a big circle even for a Public Hearing?

A value-based life, whether personal or corporate, is an integrated life. And I think that's what most of us are looking for in these times of fractured living. Not all our values will be the same, of course. Having values, however, and respecting other people for having theirs, will bring us to the same path. Then, if we really listen and pay attention to each other and our world around us, we will be able to walk together. Nancy McMinn believed that.

NANCY: A BIOGRAPHY

Bob McMinn

I am grateful to my family (Davyd, Diana, Libby and John), Nancy's sister, Carole, and several of Nancy's close friends for their reminiscences and to all those who have supported me in writing these recollections of Nancy.

On September 23, 2000, Nancy and I celebrated our 48th Wedding Anniversary. Thirteen days later, we parted in the way we had affirmed in our wedding vows. Nancy's death on October 6 ended a relationship which had lasted much of our lives. I have attempted in the following pages to give you something of my sense of the life of this beloved and remarkable woman.

Nancy was born in Vancouver on 26 May 1927, the first child of Kenneth (Ken) and Gladys Wallick. Her sister, Carole, was born in Calgary, five years later.

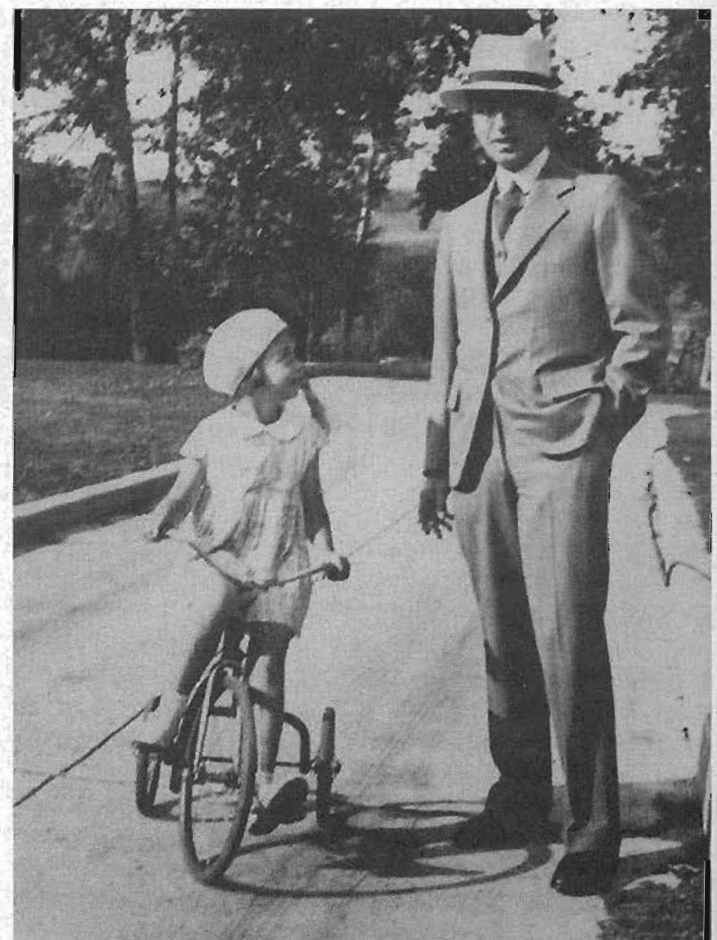


Nancy, with her father and her Nana, Mrs. Alice Shrimpton

Nancy's father was a department manager at the Hudson's Bay Company's store in downtown Vancouver when she was born. He had arrived in Canada some twelve years earlier to start a new life, glad to be free from the restrictions he felt inhibited him in his native Denmark. Mr. Wallick began his career in Montreal with Morgan's, a prestigious department store. When he transferred to the Hudson's Bay Company, he was posted to Vancouver, shortly before Nancy was born. While in Montreal Nancy's father married Gladys Shrimpton. Gladys was known as "Sunny Jim" because of her happy disposition. She was a strong believer in Christian Science, a faith imparted by her mother. Christian Science

philosophy and teachings were powerful influences on Nancy, engendering a lifelong interest in things spiritual and a doubting attitude to conventional medical practice. Nancy, however, was too independent to become a Church member.

Nancy started school in Calgary, where her father was transferred a few years after she was born. Summer holidays at a cottage on the Detroit Lakes provided her strongest memories of Winnipeg, where the family lived when her father was transferred again. Her favourite school was Saint Marina's, a "dame school" in Vancouver's West End which she attended when Mr. Wallick was transferred back to the coast. As an adult, she spoke most fondly of her years at Saint Marina's. Like most dame schools, it was run on a shoe string by a compassionate single woman who attracted teachers devoted to the well-being and development of their charges. Reduced rates for students whose parents needed financial help put the school on a less than secure footing, but friendship with these students helped to foster Nancy's lifelong compassion for those less fortunate than herself. Her passion for literature and language was encouraged by an inspiring teacher at this nurturing



Nancy and her father in Calgary, early 1930's



Nancy, bridesmaid to her beloved Auntie Dor, early 1930's school. She felt less at ease during her years at Prince of Wales High School. Nancy was not comfortable with the importance given to social status and she found the school too large for the close friendships she had enjoyed at St. Marina's.

When her father was transferred to the Bay's Head Office in Winnipeg, Nancy opted to stay in Vancouver as she planned to attend the University of British Columbia. Instead of living on campus, she decided to stay downtown in "Queen Margaret's Hostel for Young English Gentlewomen Seeking Employment in British Columbia", another example of her independent spirit. She did join Delta Gamma, but sorority life, she



Carole and Nancy at the family farm, Coquitlam, early 1940's



Nancy, with her mother and sister Carole at the Detroit Lakes about 1936

considered, was not a major influence during her undergraduate years. One of her fondest memories was the fascinating discussions in Room D of the old U.B.C. Agriculture Building where the returning veterans introduced her to a wider world outside the experience of her teen-aged contemporaries.

Nancy really wanted to study animal husbandry at U.B.C. She had fallen in love with horses on the family's little farm near Coquitlam. Weekends and holidays on a farm in the Fraser Valley gave Nancy freedom to roam the hills and dikes along the Fraser River where she became friends with some of the area's unconventional residents. Unfortunately, in 1944, animal husbandry was not considered appropriate for "young ladies". She was persuaded to enroll in horticulture which she liked but not, she thought, as much as she would have enjoyed her first choice.

Nancy graduated from U.B.C. in May 1948 in time to help in the great Fraser River flood. In those desperate days, she worked in a canteen providing meals for the men sandbagging the dikes around the clock. As the flood waters receded, she headed off to the Okanagan on one of the first trains to travel the newly emerged tracks. She picked fruit at Naramata with her good friend Eira. The farm's owners became lifelong friends who visited Nancy periodically in later years during their winter stays in Victoria.

When the fruit picking season was over, Nancy hitch-hiked to Winnipeg for a farewell visit with her parents before returning to Vancouver to head off to England. She had persuaded her friend, Joanie Bayne and Joanie's mother, who were going with Nancy, to travel on a Dutch passenger/freighter sailing through the Panama Canal.



The UBC Graduate, May 1948

Nancy thought the canal route would be more interesting than a regular transatlantic crossing. Although nominally their chaperone, Mrs. Bayne was a good sport who did not hamper Nancy and Joanie's enjoyment of the ocean voyage.

In England Nancy landed a job at East Malling Research



On board the Delftdyk, with Mrs. Bayne, Joanie, Nancy and Barbara Woodward, Nancy's cabin mate, 1948

Station, an institution supported by the apple grower's association. She fell in love with England and in particular with the wonderful diversity of people at the Station. Although English social structure was still quite hierarchical, as a Canadian Nancy was not slotted into a particular niche. She rejoiced in a sense of freedom which she felt contrasted favourably with the restrictions imposed by Canadian middle class life at that time. Nancy loved the life and atmosphere of the converted country estate where the Station was located. Research and problem solving she found exciting and rewarding. She was particularly struck that all staff from scientists to temporary assistants attended the Saturday morning meetings to discuss problems and progress. These lively sessions were the model for the Kindwood Farm meetings of later years.



At East Malling, after spending the night measuring freezing temperatures in the apple orchard, with Cedric Slater, 1949/50

While in England, Nancy decided to seek out her family roots. She visited relatives on her mother's side in the midlands and on the south coast. She went to Denmark to meet her father's kin. On the train to Copenhagen at Christmas time she was surrounded by students chatting in many different tongues. She felt somewhat inadequate with English as her only language. At Flensburg, where the train entered Denmark, she responded in confusion to the border official with "I am so sorry, I only speak English". His reply in cultured Oxford tones, "My dear young lady I *am* speaking English" both embarrassed and relieved her.

Perhaps this incident, and certainly her characteristic desire to make the most of her opportunities while in her father's native land, prompted Nancy to study Danish. Knowing something of the language helped her to feel at home and join in with the Dane's puckish sense of humour. In the spirit of Christmas, she sewed tiny bells into the lining of her uncle Bob's overcoat. A gentle tinkling accompanied him down the street to everyone's amusement. Nancy visited other relatives in Norway and hitchhiked in France where she enjoyed French country cuisine and fended off Gallic enthusiasm for amour.



With the mermaid, Copenhagen, New Year's Day, 1949



Nancy hitchhiking, somewhere in France, 1950

Fortified by her experiences at East Malling and in Denmark, she returned to Canada in October 1950 with new confidence in her ability to lead the kind of life *she* wanted to live. She enrolled in the Biology Department at U.B.C. to study for a master's degree in plant physiology. East Malling had shown her that physiology was at the core of plant research. She became research and teaching assistant to her major professor, Dr. Wort. Although a meticulous scientist, he believed that accuracy should be taken only as far as needed, a philosophy that Nancy took to heart.

Nancy and I met in a graduate plant physiology class following my return to U.B.C. to study for a Ph.D in forest ecology. I fell in love with her enthusiasm and zest for life during the hours we spent in the Biology Department's labs and study rooms. Her generosity in sharing her greater knowledge while tutoring me in plant

physiology helped me to get good marks in the final exam. When we decided to marry, I thought it proper to follow the time honoured tradition of asking her father's permission. He responded that he was glad to give it but that Nancy would probably do whatever she wanted regardless of what he said.

By the time we had decided to marry, I had been offered a job at the Government of Canada Forest Pathology Laboratory in Victoria. During her undergraduate years Nancy spent a weekend in the Highlands with her friends Eira Bowen and Joan Warlow. Joan's parents owned Second Lake. Nancy's lifelong love for the Highlands began during this prescient visit. One afternoon, Nancy, Joan and Eira hiked up Cory Road to call on Frank and Sybil Gregory in their pioneer home near Fizzle Lake. This meeting sparked Nancy's enthusiasm for Highlands' history, and the articles she later wrote for The Highlander on the Mitchell and Gregory families. Sybil's parents, Elizabeth and Fred Mitchell lived in the cottage on Mitchell (First) Lake during the first quarter of the twentieth century. This visit to the Highlands determined where we were going to live when we came to Victoria.

Nancy and I were married on September 23, 1952 at the United Church in Coquitlam. After the reception at the family farm, we took the midnight boat to Victoria. In the more leisurely times of fifty years ago, this was a popular way to reach the Capital City. We had a brief honeymoon in Victoria, before heading to the log cabin in the Nanaimo River Valley which was my base during my Ph.D. thesis field studies. Nancy assisted me in a working honeymoon. Blake Dickens, who had helped me during the summer, joined us.



Nancy, Eira Bowen and Joan Warlow at Second Lake, 1947



During our honeymoon at the cabin in the Nanaimo River Valley, September 1952

Nancy gave up work on her Masters to help me complete my Ph.D. We lived our first months of married life in a small house in Kerrisdale which was handy to the U.B.C. campus. On a house hunting trip in November 1952, we bought a stone-faced farmhouse on the Millstream Road in the Highlands. Nancy had been quite sure where she wanted to live when we moved to Victoria and I did not take any further convincing as soon as I saw that beautiful house in its wooded setting.

In April 1953, Nancy left Vancouver a month before the end of term to get a head start on our life in the Highlands. When she arrived at our new home, the problem of not having a key was solved when one of the guinea hens, left for us by the previous owners, flew through a window. Nancy gained entry by reaching through the shattered glass to undo the catch. At that time, the Millstream Road was a gravel track leading out of Langford which still had an operating sawmill where Westbrook Plaza now stands.

The Highlands was a remote and rugged hinterland, known to few Victorians. A revealing incident the previous summer illustrated this. While on a trip to Victoria on my own, I asked a gas station attendant for directions to the Highlands. He responded that I must mean the Uplands, since he seemed never to have heard of the Highlands. I was somewhat surprised to find that I was in a suburban neighbourhood when I followed his directions. That this was not Nancy's vision of our future became evident when we went house hunting and settled on a place in the Highlands. Nancy was not at all bothered by the thought of living out of town without a phone.

I followed Nancy to our new home in May, but hardly had time to unpack before I was off to Mesatchie Lake (near Cowichan Lake) to start my field research for the federal forestry lab. While at Mesatchie Lake, I was able

to get home most weekends, although in those days the 5 1/2 day week included work on Saturday morning. Since we had no phone, I could not alert Nancy if I were able to get home early. Nancy was sufficiently comfortable with life in the country that one Friday evening when I arrived unexpectedly she was sleeping so soundly I could not rouse her. I had to climb a ladder to gain entry through an open second story window.

When my work took me to the West Kootenays during the second half of the summer of 1953, Nancy was introduced to the shape of things to come for the next 30 plus years. That year Nancy was left home alone for only a couple of months. In the years following, I was away for the whole field season, generally May through September. In 1955, I was even away for October. I drove back from New Denver on Halloween Evening arriving home on November 1. During the 1950's, visits home were generally limited to the July 1 and Labour Day weekends. "Forestry widows" were common in Victoria at that time.

On Easter Saturday 1954, our life at the old farmhouse came to an abrupt end. A crack in the chimney let flames ignite the cobwebs and dust of half a century accumulated between the roof and the second floor ceiling. The chimney, which had no clay liner, had been shaken by an earthquake a few years earlier. When our house burned down, Nancy and I were left with only the clothes we were wearing because our bedroom was too hot to enter by the time the fire was spotted. Fortunately, most of the furniture and family keepsakes were downstairs which made them easier to save. Loss of the house and the experience of the fire aroused painful memories even years later when Nancy saw a burning house.

While visiting that fateful Easter weekend, Nancy's parents took the opportunity of viewing a log house a couple of miles deeper into the Highlands. Since Nancy's mother did not want to move to such a "remote" location, there was no conflict when Nancy and I decided that we would try to buy it. Fortunately our negotiations were successful. Less than two weeks after the fire, Nancy and I had moved into the house that was to be our home for the next 46 years, in fact for the rest of Nancy's life.

While the house was not small, there were only two bedrooms when we moved in. This became a problem as we grew to be a family of six. Davyd was born in April 1956, followed by Diana 15 months later in July 1957, Libby came 18 months after that in January 1959 and finally John after another 21 months in October 1960. We enlarged the house in 1963/64, so that all the children had their own bedrooms. Nancy did most of the tongue and groove wood panelling upstairs and finished the doors and drawers on the kitchen cabinets.

A little over a month after Davyd's arrival in April 1956, Nancy was left alone with her newborn when I went to

the West Kootenays. There was still no phone, but this did not daunt Nancy during her early years in the Highlands. She never complained about being left alone or worried about isolation, even though the nearest neighbours were a couple of miles away. In September, when Davyd was 5 months old, Nancy drove our 1947 Chev to Arrow Park, a tiny community in the West Kootenays. Driving around hairpin bends on the steep, gravel road over the Monashee Mountains was an endurance test which Nancy took in her stride even with a 5 month infant aboard. She came to give Ma Evans a break by milking her cow and cooking for my field crew who were boarding at Ma's house. Fortunately, milking was a skill that Nancy had acquired on her parents' farm in Coquitlam.



Nancy weaving the curtains that now hang in the dining and living rooms at Kindwood, 1960

Nancy was determined to be a stay-at-home mother, available to her children. This resolve was helped by her background of making do with whatever money she had. Although she had been brought up in a home where money was not really scarce, the Depression reinforced the inherent cautiousness of her parents' generation. Moreover, during much of her father's childhood, money was not plentiful. Consequently, clothes for Nancy and her sister were commonly sensible and long lasting, bought with price rather than fashion in mind. These childhood experiences and that of being on her own in England helped foster Nancy's sense of thrift. She thought buying second hand, for example, gave her the best value for her money. She cooked and sewed and got much of her "entertainment" from the outdoors which stretched from her doorstep as far as she could walk with four little ones. She served home-made raspberry juice

rather than pop. Virtually all our furniture was second hand, but enlivened by slip covers made by Nancy from bright coloured materials, the marked down remnants from bolts of good quality fabric. She enjoyed making tasty meals from basic ingredients. Processed foods and TV dinners were not on the menu.

She got up early on Christmas mornings to make "Viener Brot" and other old world delicacies. The Joy of Cooking, Nancy's first cook book, is now tattered with use. Over the years, she acquired an impressive shelf of titles ranging from Larousse Gastronomique to The Vegetarian Epicure. The clothes she sewed for the children were of "professional" quality, although this did not stop some of them from yearning at times for the latest fashion from the mall. She provided opportunities for our children to expand their horizons with music and speech lessons and even took them to French lessons before bilingualism was politically correct. She never complained that my salary did not provide enough.

Nancy's attitude to the condition of the Durrance Road in those early days was another example of her spirit of independence. When she took the girls to their weekly music lesson near Deep Cove she carried a sledge hammer in her VW beetle to break rocks sticking up through the gravel. She had no intention of asking the Ministry of Highways to fix the road because she was sure that its ambience would be changed by Highways doing too much. Once, when she came to the sentry box at the edge of Heal's Rifle Range, she was warned that firing was in progress and that if she proceeded she did so at her own risk. Proceed she did because she was already late. One of our daughters recently reminisced "Mom was always late picking us up". Nancy usually tried to squeeze in one more thing before she went to fetch the children. Her attitude to the children, and to all who wanted her attention, was to make them feel that they were the centre of the universe and that she had all the time in the world to hear them out. If that ran her late, so be it.



Nancy and Davyd having fun in the snow at Kindwood, about 1959

Nancy enrolled all the children in Mrs. Thomas's Duke Road Montessori School. She thought small classes and individual attention were important. Nancy was a keen Montessori mother who attended evening sessions at the school to hear about Maria Montessori's teaching methods and see her "materials" demonstrated. Christmas and summer concerts, which were a joy to watch, called on Nancy's sewing skills to make the children's costumes.



The First Lake Choristers, Christmas concert, 1978

Over the years, Nancy was hostess for many gatherings of family and friends at Christmas, New Year's, Easter, midsummer, Thanksgiving and other occasions. The upper Millstream Lake Road Christmas party and potluck dinner was held in our house for nearly thirty years. In the early years, there was considerable rivalry among the various households to produce the best skit or performance. Nancy was an enthusiastic impressario and performer in the shows put on by the First Lake group. The children's birthday parties were enjoyed by a dozen or more racing, shouting, laughing friends. On one memorable birthday, Nancy organized a treasure hunt. The treasure was hidden at the top of Lone Tree Hill. As well as baking the cake, Nancy had to lay out the clues because, as usual, I was away from home. As the hunt



Kindwood family Christmas, 1994

neared the top of Lone Tree, Nancy was only moments ahead of the racing boys who had charged from clue to clue much more quickly than she had expected. There was great hilarity at another birthday party when each child had to find its place at the table by recognizing which hard boiled egg Nancy had decorated in their likeness.

Nancy loved spontaneous gatherings when parents and children just dropped in for a swim, skating or a hike. She would whip up a wonderful meal with ingredients from her capacious, 1940's restaurant refrigerator which had come with the house. She could make soups from just about anything. Subtle seasonings made them legendary.

Even in the early years, Nancy never thought of life in the Highlands as being remote. She often walked to visit neighbours a mile or more away. On Friday evenings she drove her friend, Elizabeth Mabblerly, the mother of eight, who lived a couple of miles down the road, into town for the weekly grocery shopping and a cup of coffee. I was left at home to look after the children who were indulged with "Get Smart" and "Gilligan's Island" in black and white, their weekly chance to watch TV.



Nancy on the run during Libby's birthday party, January 1966

During the children's pre-teen years Nancy thought they should have some real life experience with animals. There had been dogs, but they were pets. Our Saanen goats became pets too, but they also provided the experience of milking, keeping utensils clean, mucking out the goat shed and the joys of new life when kids were born and sometimes the heartbreak of a stillbirth. The particular charm of goat's milk was not appreciated by the two older children, but the two younger ones readily took to it. The goats were taken for walks, sometimes on the Highlands' roads, to the amusement of the occasional out-of-District motorist who had braved our gravel tracks.

During several summers in the early 1960's, Nancy took the children camping on the beach at Cox Bay near Long Beach. These were long, carefree days spent roaming the beach, splashing in the surf and looking into tide pools. Nancy came armed with field guides so that she could help the children understand what they were seeing. One evening after they had settled down for the night, Nancy was warned that there was going to be an extra high tide. They struck camp and moved their gear in the dark, stumbling back through the salal just in time to escape the advancing salt water.



A wet day at Deer Park, in the Olympic Mountains, 1963, a rehearsal for the 1966 TransCanada trip.

In 1966, Nancy decided it was time for the children to see more of Canada. She loaded them into the family's 1955 Chevy station wagon (actually a panel van with windows cut in) and set off eastwards accompanied by Elizabeth Brook. "Auntie Boo", as Elizabeth Brook was fondly known, lived in the cottage where Diana now lives. I saw them off and then went back to field work in the Kootenays. Nancy had a letter of credit in case the venerable vehicle died enroute, which fortunately did not happen. In fact, in nearly 10,000 miles it gave them virtually no trouble. When they camped out, which was quite often, the children slept inside the vehicle while Auntie Boo and Nancy slept under a tarp tied to the side. That arrangement worked well except for the night in an old prairie graveyard when a thunderstorm and torrential rain drove the two adults into the vehicle where they sat up much of the night watching the lightning. They drove as far as the Gaspé, taking in Montreal and the developing Expo '67 site en route. There were no crowds the year before Expo opened. In Quebec, the children were encouraged to speak French. One of them still remembers her terror at saying a much rehearsed "Avez vous de la crème à acheter, si vous plait" at a Gaspé farmhouse. There was also the lighter moment when Nancy asked the waitress for "jus de pomme de terre", potato juice instead of apple juice - jus de pomme.

Nancy was influential in the formation of the Highland District Community Association, or the Ratepayers Association as it was originally known. By the mid 1960's she had become very aware of growing development pressure. Up to that time the Highlands had been remote and largely ignored. She suggested to me that an association should be formed so that residents would have an organized say in the future of the Highlands. I took the hint and set about organizing an association and became the first chair. Nancy attended many, many Association meetings. Even in those early days she recognized that roads set the ambience in a rural landscape. In the late 1970's she organized a small group of residents to write the first Highlands local area plan. Nancy enjoyed working with small groups, although she was diffident speaking to large assemblies. The residents' plan was so well received by the CRD planners that large parts were used virtually unchanged in the first Highland Community Plan adopted by the CRD Board in 1982.

In 1968, Nancy used a small inheritance from her mother's sister, her beloved Auntie Dor, to buy a boat to cruise B.C.'s coastal waters. Everything about this venture was typical Nancy. With the advice of a boat building cousin who lived near Duncan, she put in a successful bid to Crown Assets for a hydrographic survey launch that had been declared surplus. The "Albatross" was a vintage 28 ft, narrow beam wooden hulled boat. Nancy painted it grey, befitting its ex-work-boat status. Her cousin installed an Isuzu diesel motor which cost next to nothing to run. He fitted enough bunks for six, some of them quite small because the family was still young. Small pieces of Douglas fir bark were the favourite fuel for the small wood-burning boat stove. Piles of bark, hidden among the driftwood, were eagerly sought whenever the crew went ashore. Although Nancy had crewed for a friend during her late teens, she had little experience in navigation. Nothing daunted, she enrolled in a coastal navigation course.



Nancy and John on the "Albatross," during the haul out, 1972

While I continued field work in the interior, Nancy explored the waters between Vancouver Island and the mainland. Much of the summers of 1969 and 1970 were filled with adventures reminiscent of the Curve of Time, Cappy Blanchette's story of her experiences while cruising the inland waters in the 1930's. Nancy said that as soon as her supplies were stowed aboard the "Albatross" she entered another world far from the cares and stresses of everyday life. White knuckle experiences, however, were not unknown. She weathered choppy seas south of Cape Mudge, and being out in the Straits of Georgia during a small craft warning. When the propeller was fouled by the dingy's painter she dove into the frigid waters of the Fraser River. When it happened a second time it was my turn. Fortunately for me we were then in the warmer water of Desolation Sound. Days aboard the Albatross were some of her most cherished times, shared all too briefly by First Mate Bob during a couple of two-week summer holidays down from the interior. During a B.C. Ferries strike, the "Albatross" rescued Nancy's sister and her children who were stranded on Saltspring Island waiting to make their way home to Georgia at the end of the summer. After 1970, we enjoyed shorter trips until all the children had left home when the "Albatross" was sold.

In 1971, it was Europe's turn to provide the setting for the children's adventures and learning experiences with Nancy. Armed with Britrail and Eurail passes, she shepherded them through England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Holland. Finding that they could not cover enough ground walking, Nancy rented bikes in Ireland undeterred by Libby's underdeveloped cycling skill. The cycling experiment was deemed sufficiently successful that bikes were bought in France to speed the family on its way for the rest of the trip. They often slept under the tent that Nancy had made before leaving Canada. Nancy's courage and temerity were remarkable. Who else would



Visiting friends in England, during the 1971 European trip



Nancy, Davyd, Libby, Diana, and Bob at Ten Mile Point, 1973

have had the audacity to cycle through the centre of Paris, from one railroad station to another, round the Arc de Triomphe, guiding a flock of children ranging in age from 10 to 15 years? I joined them in Denmark and again in Sweden after a forestry tour which took me from Stockholm to Lulea in the north. The family, in the meantime, had hiked in Swedish Lapland where Nancy had a few anxious hours when some of the children wandered off on their own. An excursion to Narvik took them to the far north of Norway. Nancy had been the linguist until we reached Germany when it became my turn to resurrect my rusty German. Nancy seemed quite able to cope in French and Danish (which also served in Sweden), but I was relieved to get back to English in the old country on my way home to Canada.

By the late 1960's Nancy recognized that driving the children hither and yon did not give them enough independence to visit with friends and follow their own pursuits. Reluctantly we concluded that living in town would be advantageous during the children's high school years. In September 1971, when we came back from Europe, we moved into a rented home on Ten Mile Point which became the family's winter stomping ground for the next six years. However, Nancy did not want the children to lose touch with their roots in the Highlands. Early each June we returned to our Highlands home. During the last month of school the children were dropped off at a bus stop at the edge of town to make the cross town trip to Mount Doug High School and Frank Hobbs Elementary School. Most of the time that we were away from the Highlands, we traded houses with the same group of young people. Each fall and early summer, the family moved into town or back to the Highlands on the same day that the other group moved the other way. The drivers of pickups and station wagons loaded with chattels waved to each other as they passed during the twice annual shuttle. In 6 years, we moved 13 times, the extra move being along Ten Mile Point to a bigger house so that my mother could join us. Nancy's father had already been living with us since the fall of 1972 when Nancy's mother died.

Nancy's time at Ten Mile Point started a new phase in her life because the University of Victoria was only a few minutes away. Creative writing courses rekindled her interest in writing, and she sometimes attended evening gatherings at the home of poet and Department Head, Robin Skelton. Nancy studied linguistics and philosophy, including environmental philosophy, to make formal contact with topics that had interested her for years. The university squash courts were a bonus which I especially enjoyed, and UVIC's Phoenix Theatre was close by.

Returning to the Highlands in 1977 after six winters in town was the beginning of another new era for Nancy. There were no children at home, John being away at Brentwood College and the others by then had begun travelling and living in Europe, Israel, South Africa and the West Indies. The log house, however, was by no means an empty nest because Nancy had taken on the job of homemaker and caregiver for her father and my mother. She lovingly cared for them both until her father died in 1980 at 82 and my mother's death in 1982 at 96.



Nancy on the Ford tractor off to turn the compost piles, about 1980

As well as being the year in which we returned full time to the Highlands, 1977 marked the start of a herd of Highland cattle at First Lake. Doug and Ev Andrew took up residence in the cottage and stayed 18 years to help develop Kindwood Farm. Highland cattle, we had been told, could thrive on almost anything, including salal. Before long it became obvious that to produce prime beef even Highland cattle needed good pasture and ample feed. After land was cleared by bulldozer and excavator and the stumps burned, Nancy got busy chipping branches and clearing rocks and stones. She made compost from truckloads of chicken manure. She turned 100m windrows with our twenty year old Ford tractor. She also used the tractor to load our old dump truck to haul and distribute the compost. Hand raking did the final spreading. Setting irrigation pipes and watering ground enriched with compost finally turned our cleared land into lush pasture. Consistent feeding with spent brewers mash, potatoes, hay, and oats for finishing, produced succulent beef that all our customers said was the tastiest they had ever eaten. Kindwood's Highland herd was maintained for 20 years although Nancy's involvement

in the operation waned after the first ten years as she moved on to other interests that became dearer to her heart. She, nevertheless, retained a compassionate concern for the wellbeing of our herd. On one occasion when Nancy thought that I was being unkind to our cows by feeding potatoes that were too far past their prime, she served me some for supper. I was sternly reminded that I was lucky because she had allowed me a knife and fork so I could pick out the best pieces, an opportunity not available to our cows. She had made her point: questionable potatoes never appeared in the feed troughs again.

Nancy's prime interest by the mid 1980's turned to protecting the Gowlland Range and fostering a new connection with nature in a world that generally regards land as a commodity for sale, and other forms of life as exploitable and expendable. She became a founding director and driving force in the Gowlland Foundation. She collaborated with Michael Bocking in developing a beautiful brochure to show the value of the Range and the need to think differently about land if humankind is to reverse our present destructive course. With the help of Gowlland Foundation directors and members she organized hikes which showed hundreds of Capital Region residents the unique beauty of the land overlooking Finlayson Arm. This helped to form the "constituency" which was so important in preserving the Range in its natural state.

With Elliott Gose as co-editor, she started the Gowlland Foundation Journal. Its title *Connecting with Nature* epitomized the thrust of the Foundation. The Foundation hosted a memorable weekend photographic workshop at our house led by Adele Curtis. Participants were encouraged to take a close up look at nature through the lens of their cameras.

Nancy helped to develop the concept of clustering the number of houses allowed by the current zoning onto part of the Gowlland Range so as to conserve the remainder in its natural state. She was instrumental, together with other Gowlland Foundation directors, in interesting the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Government of British Columbia in using this plan to create the Gowlland Todd Provincial Park. This land was the first of thousands of hectares which became the parks of the Commonwealth Nature Legacy. Nancy received the 1994 Minister's Environmental Award, and in 1995 she was recognized by the Nature Conservancy of Canada for her outstanding contribution in the preservation of the Gowlland Range.

Following incorporation of the District of Highlands in 1993, Nancy served on the first Roads Advisory Committee. Thanks to her research and enthusiasm, new Highlands roads have been constructed according to traffic calming principles. She was also part of a group that worked with Western Forest Products Ltd to pioneer a lot layout plan incorporating Conservation Areas with Residential Use Zones. Scenery friendly access roads are integral to this

rural residential development strategy. The Highlands became a pioneer in the use of Conservation Covenants for land conservation in residential developments thanks to the work of these farsighted residents.

Early in 1996, Nancy took over responsibility for publishing The Highlander, the journal of the Highland District Community Association and Highland Heritage Park Society. She believed that knowledge of the District would increase a sense of community and appreciation of the Highlands amongst its residents. She also thought that The Highlander would reach more people if it were an appealing and professional quality journal. It became largely self-supporting because businesses thought it worthwhile to advertise in such an attractive publication. Nancy became proficient at desk-top publishing to cut costs, although she commonly made up revenue shortfalls from her own purse. Her articles on the history of the Highlands and its pioneers were eagerly read features in each issue.

Her studies at UVIC in the 1970's included a search for greater understanding of the spiritual side of humanity. Mysticism, which she found was a common thread in many religions, impressed her. The writings of Carlos Castaneda (The Teachings of Don Juan), Joseph Chilton Pearce (The Crack in the Cosmic Egg), Eileen Caddy (on the Findhorn experience), Arne Naess (on deep ecology), Fritjof Capra (The Tao of Physics), Dorothy Maclean (To Hear Angels Sing) and many others prepared her receptivity to Jane Roberts' Seth books and to participate in a channelling group. Gradually she developed her own ability to channel and tap into sources of wisdom not accessed by mainstream western culture. Through channeling she gained insights about herself and helped many others in their search for understanding. Her contact with this spiritual world led her to an enhanced appreciation of the healing power of nature, the importance of living in the moment, letting go of worry about the future and following her heart. Through Nancy I received unexpected and valuable insights.

In November 1996, Nancy became seriously ill with congestive heart failure. Her strong conviction that she should be able to heal herself, perhaps originating with her Christian Science background, but certainly reinforced by

her more recent understanding gained through channelling, made her want to eschew medical attention. Out of deference to her family she did seek help from our neighbour, Dr. Leah Norgrove. We are grateful to Leah for helping an independent-minded patient pull through to be with her family, friends and community for four more years. Nancy's own conviction that she could heal herself likely played a major part in her recovery.

During her lengthy recovery, Nancy recognized that she could no longer rely on her inherent strength and energy to be involved the way she had been. She also came to recognize that her interest and involvement in so many things were at odds with her desire for spiritual contemplation. She saw her illness as a strong message to

help her focus more on being rather than doing. While she did become more circumspect in what she took on, her activities would still have taxed many younger people. She continued to publish The Highlander, provide advice and counsel, help her family and remain an important conciliator in the community.

In 1999, Y2K inspired Nancy to enlarge her organic garden. She was delighted that the vegetables she lovingly tended became a substantial proportion of our diet. She continued to sleep outside on the porch as she had done for nearly a decade so that she could greet the dawn and be close to nature. She swam in the lake daily from May through September even in 2000.



Nancy and grand daughter, Rowan, Ross-Durrance road walk, 2000

I remember most fondly Saturday September 23, 2000, a glorious sunny day when we pedalled a section of the

Galloping Goose to celebrate our 48th wedding anniversary. Nancy died less than two weeks later in full stride with many projects on the go, including the next issue of The Highlander and re-establishing native plants around the new municipal office. Since she would not have wanted to linger in ill health, the shock of her sudden death on Friday, October 6, 2000 was somewhat ameliorated by knowing that she lived to the end fully present and involved in all that surrounded her. Nevertheless, the words of Alfred Lord Tennyson epitomise my feelings:

"But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand
And the sound of a voice that is still"

The Fence

Nancy McMinn

One of Nancy's short stories, written for a creative writing course at U.Vic. in the Seventies

When they finally came back, they buried the gelding right there. Just the other side of the fence, where the grass grew green and thick and sweeter than water or shade on a blistering day. The fence cut across below the barn, down along the edge of the wood where the trees thinned out and the creek ran, except in late summer when everything dried up. From there it skirted the track that led up from the road, and made a right angle bend by the maple clump that sheltered what had been the chicken run, next to the barn. They'd got rid of the chickens in the spring when they knew they'd be gone a month. They'd eaten them, one by one, just boiled in the stew pot, with maybe a carrot or two and a turnip thrown in. And they nailed shutters on the downstairs windows before they left, although no one came that way any more.

There was a water trough against the fence, under the maples, with a line running down from the barn. They left the tap open enough to produce a steady drip, and asked the boy from the next farm to look in now and then. The bottom and sides of the trough were covered with green slime. He was there, rubbing his neck on the maple trunks when they left, banging and rattling down the track in the old Chev. Where the flies had laid their eggs in the moist warmth under his mane, maggots were beginning to emerge, and the rough bark eased the irritation.

There was enough grass in the field to last all summer, but as the weeks wore on it became dry and brittle. The sweet green morsels at the base of the stalks became brown and tasteless. The faucet dripped steadily, but by mid-afternoons, when the sun came round, and the maples cast their shadows outside the field, he'd drunk the trough dry, so that the slime stuck to his big soft lips, and got into his mouth when he tried to rub it off.

It was unusually hot that year. Once or twice, the air got so heavy that thunder broke out. Rain poured down, making pock marks in the parched ground. He raced up and down the field, bucking and roaring, shaking his head and whinneying in delight. The rain made pools on the dry soil where his hooves churned up clods.

He rolled there, back and forth, kicking his legs in the air, delighting in the warm moisture that soaked into his skin. Afterwards, the sun came out, the field dried up, and nothing had changed. Beyond the fence, where the woods thinned out, were springs, recharged by the summer storms. Here the grass grew green and thick. Going down on his knees, he stretched his long neck under the fence to nibble the succulent leaves. When he drew it back, strands of his dark mane were left on the barbed wire.

Something bad happened during the storm. Perhaps one of the power poles along the track had come down. Whatever it was, the tap stopped dripping a few days after, when the storage tank up on stilts behind the house went dry. By midday he'd licked up the last drop of water, even the slime, which felt good on his parched lips. The windmill, by the old well made a motionless silhouette against the bright sky. Most of the afternoon he lay panting by the maples. In the early evening a breeze, stirring the windmill, brought some relief before the sun went down. During the night he stood quietly, occasionally munching some of the dry stalks.

Next day it was hot when the sun was scarcely over the horizon. He paced beside the fence, stopping often to lean towards the lush green clumps. The fence creaked with his weight. Once or twice he ran to the trough and sniffed at the crumbling crust of algae that lined it, reared and ran whinnying down the fence line again. The grass on the other side was blue green and seemed to shine with dampness.

He ran haltingly across the field, lower jaw dropped, panting and snorting, turned and made for the fence again. Crickets clicked as his hooves flung the sods in a grey cloud. A mass of cool green beckoned him. Stumbling on a stone, he staggered, and pulled himself up. He ran toward the fence, gathered his remaining strength and jumped. As his forefeet reached the ground, his hind legs caught in the wire, the barbs seizing his flesh.

They buried him there when they came back, under the green grass which was sweet enough to kill a horse with longing. It was all they could do.

One of Nancy's "HIGHLAND CALENDAR" nature columns which appeared in *The Goldstream Gazette* during the 1980's.

Sept.12

This morning I visited a nearby Hardhack swamp. As if a protection against intruders, thorny sprawling branches of Swamp Rose lined the edge of the bog, their small bright redorange hips indicating its margins. Only a few rosy spikes of Hardhack remained. Most had faded, producing branches of knobby greygreen fruiting bodies, which opened to reveal five small capsules arranged like a star, each of these splitting to disperse several tiny boat-shaped seeds.

Here it is miraculously damp, when all around after the long hot summer is dry and dusty. For the moment the standing water which characterizes the bogs is gone and one can safely penetrate this temperate jungle, given sufficient fortitude to push aside the dense six foot Hardhack and venture out onto a springy network of bent over stems which keeps you a good foot or more above the ground. Peering down to the black earth below, one can see Skunk Cabbage spreading its huge, decaying leaves wherever the winter water flows, however slowly, preventing stagnation. The soil itself is fibrous and resilient, pure decaying vegetation, accumulated during the twelve thousand or so years since the last ice age. At first, ponds were formed, filled with glacial meltwater, and replenished from rain and underground springs. The

first vegetation - Pondweeds and Burr reeds - died back at the end of each summer, and fell to the bottom to decay, accumulating over the years. As the pond filled in, there was a succession of plants adapted to less and less water until at present they thrive in the seasonal flooding.

These peat bogs formed the gardens of the early Highland settlers. Even today, one occasionally comes across the remains of a drainage ditch or a few eight foot pickets, hand split and sharply topped against the deer. Void of large trees and stone free, they were relatively easy to prepare. They were always moist as well, a considerable asset in those days of hand dug, shallow wells.

We used one of these gardens on our arrival in the Highlands thirty years ago. But despite our best efforts to clear the old ditches, the water remained so long that it was midsummer before we could till our garden. We wondered how the pioneers had managed. They were not only dependent on these gardens for their food but for part of their livelihood, earned from selling produce in Victoria, a long day's drive there and back once a week. It was a while before we twigged to the reason. The bog was shrinking. When the settlers dug their ditches, and the water drained away, it was replaced by air. The oxygen in the air had been oxidizing the soil - pure organic matter - reducing it slowly to water and carbon dioxide which simply drifted away. Our garden was succumbing to a slow burn.

From an Editorial in *Connecting with Nature*

Nancy McMinn

In this issue of "*Connecting with Nature*" we focus on "a sense of place." There is something in the nature of certain places which attracts us, some energy which resonates with our very being. As when we place a key in a lock, we find these special places a way of opening to the natural world and making a profound connection with nature. We are touched by feelings of harmony, of peace, of being at home....

Sacred places, where the power of place is most evident, have long been known as focal points for deeply intuitive and healing experiences. Yet... any place we are strongly attached to can become for us a sacred place, a place where we transcend our ego selves to come more in touch with the universe itself.

Strange as it may seem, our relationship with the natural world is one of mutuality. Although we are conditioned to believe otherwise, as we respond to aspects of nature which attract us, nature in turn responds to us. Just as in

human relationships, where we are attracted to a certain place, a kind of loving energy develops and the place becomes more powerful. As it becomes more powerful, more people are attracted to it.

This harmonious interaction with nature is more than a pleasant or esoteric pastime. It is essential to our health and well-being, to say nothing of the health and well-being of our society. Those who are not deeply connected to their environment experience a sense of impermanence, of rootlessness, of disharmony within. Yet merely to think of a place that evokes pleasant memories affects us physically. Such thoughts, for example, have been shown to strengthen certain of our skeletal muscles....

In contrast to modern society, ancient peoples lived closely in touch with the earth, guided more by intuition than rationality. In their world-view, all the cosmos was one unbroken continuum whose harmony and balance must be maintained for their own survival....

In times past... men and women felt a sense of brotherhood with plants and animals, water and wind. In reverence for the earth it was the custom to give back an offering in appreciation for gifts given in meeting human needs. This gift giving was a deeply felt acknowledgement that life was taken to support human life. Such rituals invite a sense of conscious relationship. In our time, we forego such acknowledgement and in doing so, desensitize ourselves to the damage we inflict upon the natural world.

It appears that, not only for the sake of mankind, but for the sake of the planet itself, we need now to join ourselves to the whole earth in a meaningful way as did our forbears in the distant past. We cannot do so without first finding a point of contact, and this is why discovering a sense of place, a sense of our place, is so important. Places that attract us can act as touchstones, first to unite us deeply with the natural world, and then to bring the sense of harmony derived from this experience, into all of our relationships with the earth.



On the Gowlland Range, early 1990's

My Mother's Study

John McMinn

Thoughts expressed at Nancy's Memorial held at the Pike House, October 13, 2000.

Coming home in the last few years, one of my favorite places to spend time with my mother has been in her study. It's a lovely quiet room overlooking the lake. As much as the house and its surroundings are steeped in her presence, her study has been for me the most special place to find her and discover her path in recent years, her ever evolving thoughts, her endless curiosity about things and ideas.

The room is crammed full of the many things that occupied her as the botanist, spiritual seeker and healer, the writer, editor, hiker, activist, local historian, gardener, planner and proud, proud grandmother. I've often thought that much of a person can be found in her bookshelves, and this surely can be said of the shelves in Nancy's study. There's the History of Western Trees, Ecopsychology, Paradigms in Progress, the Seth Books, Christopher Alexander's The Pattern Language and A Timeless Way of Building, The Secrets of the Soul, The Analects of Confucius, The Reluctant Shaman.

There's also the hefty volumes of the Canadian Encyclopedia, and the Oxford Concise Dictionary, The Practical Stylist, and two faded well thumbed cloth bound volumes of an English/Danish Dictionary. There are tools for paste-up and layout of The Highlander, as well as various computer software manuals, indicative of her determination to master the difficult beast, to enable yet more elegant layouts of her beloved community journal.

There's a storage frame packed with local maps, and here and there are files of various things she's been involved with: the Gowlland Foundation, the Municipal Hall Landscaping, the Roads Committee, Kindwood, and of course the First National court case. There's a tape

recorder, and bundles of cassette tapes from her channeling.

There are boxes of wonderful family photos, and there's a light table for viewing the hundreds of slides in binders and carousels, of houses that fit well into their surrounding landscape. These were organised for a slide show and possible publication which she and Diana worked on for several years.

On one wall she has kept an evolving gallery of photographs, clippings, and quotes. We have all remarked how interesting it has been to come and see what she had pinned up from time to time. As she left it the wall is mostly full of pictures of her grandchildren, along with a few humorous cartoons. The one I like the most shows a formidable looking woman with a storm in her brow - mother nature - holding a baseball bat with the words "weird weather". In the background is a factory spewing out smoke. And the caption reads "Morn looks kinda upset about something."

In this peaceful room, within these purposeful and seemingly chaotic piles of things she was working on, I find her quiet creativity, I find her steely determination, her stubbornness and optimism, her fears and her joys.

As a mom and as a friend, she often defined our expectations and then so many times surpassed them.

The woods are fragrant... and she too has earned her time to sleep.

A Work in Progress

Libby McMinn

Thoughts expressed at Nancy's Memorial held at the Pike House, October 13, 2000.

As we sorted through old photographs this past week, I began thinking about Mom when we were small. Looking back at those photos of four little children, all within five years of each other, I continue to be in awe.

The same energy that Mom brought to the Gowlland Range and Highland roads, she brought to mothering. She made our clothes, baked our bread and cut our hair. With haircutting the results were sometimes less than perfect. On one occasion, she glued a chunk of John's hair back on for a school concert when the shears came a little too close to his head.

Mom shared with us her desire to reach out and learn about other places and people. She packed us in the old blue Chev, and we drove across the country. Later she bought a boat, learned to navigate and took us through small craft warnings and narrow inlets as we toured the Gulf Islands. Another summer she took us to Europe where we traveled by train and bike. I had barely learned to ride a bike at that time. Undaunted, Mom rented bikes for us in Ireland and with my pack on my back, on narrow cobbled streets, I

learned quickly. She's quite an act to follow, but as Diana has reminded me, once you stop trying, it's OK. Despite incredible energy, Mom had the ability to stop what she was doing, pull up a chair and listen, to really be with us in our growing pains. Those conversations continued over the years as she helped me bring patience and trust to my own mothering.

I think often of her simple advice - everything seems harder when you're cold, tired or hungry. Have a piece of toast, put on a sweater or lie down with a hot water bottle and things will probably look better.

Sometimes when I'd tell her about some small thing I was involved in, She'd say, "Oh Lib, you're amazing," and I'd think, "not really Mom, not like you", but she meant it. She did not see herself as amazing, outgoing, or courageous. She simply was all that, in her energy, her curiosity to know more, and her capacity to love.

Mom was not perfect, as any who felt the 'cold touch' can attest. She was a work in progress like the rest of us. What she honoured was not perfection, but change, transition, growth, and she supported that in her children and in all of us. I feel blessed to have grown up with her.



Nancy with her girls

Origins of Nancy's Spirituality

Dorothea Vickery

Like Nancy, I was brought up in a spiritual environment colored by the theology of Christian Science. Because of this background, I could recognize how both its subtle and apparent influences contributed to the shaping of Nancy's independently developed spirituality. While she chose to dissociate herself from organized religions, she stood steadfast in her own acquired personal spiritual beliefs. Christian Science was just one of several influences which led her to look at and experience the power of thought, and the practice of faith and trust in the Divine Plan and its principles.

Christian Science is well known for its emphasis on spiritual healing both of the physical body and of humanity and its affairs. This healing is carried out by both its members and its many "practitioners" - certified church members who have healing practices. Founded in the late nineteenth century, at the same time as the theosophical movement, the First Church of Christ, Scientist is one of the forerunners of later New Age Churches, such as Unity and the Truth Centre, which believe in the positive evolution of human kind. Nancy's exposure to the Christian Science teachings was most evident in her emphasis on the power of thought -

right thinking - one pointedness of purpose and vision. She developed a strong belief in a Universal Power centered in "the divine principle of being - God is Love" (a quote from a Christian Science book, *Science and Health with the Key to the Scriptures*). Nancy applied and practiced these principles not only in her private life but in the public causes in which she involved herself. She believed in a life of service for the greater good,

demonstrated in her interactions with individuals, groups and the natural world with which she was spiritually and practically connected.

Dorothea Vickery is involved in alternative healing, spiritual study, practice and quiet service to human kind. She and Nancy were close friends. She lives in Brentwood Bay.

Hand and Heart

Bonnie Chapman

Through the creative reverence of hand and heart, the ritual of creating the sacred space at the Pike House for the celebration of Nancy's life brought extraordinary connections with her and others. These connections were extremely vivid and pure. Communication became communion. Never was I more aware that there are no permanent relationships that stay the same, since they would be limited by time and space. I remembered that saying, "spirit is the lightest form of matter, and matter is the heaviest form of spirit." It felt like truth. That diaphanous veil lifted intermittently, creating ephemeral openings between spirit and matter, and I was nourished by that bridging beyond words.

I spoke with Nancy on the evening prior to her death to fax my submission for the upcoming *Highlander*. Our conversation was short and cheerful, an ordinary, everyday connection. Hearing the news the next day, I wished I had hand delivered my article, to see her, hear her laugh, to have one of our spontaneous passionate three hour chats, over tea about life's mysteries, to hug her goodbye and tell her I loved her one last time.

Several days later, I was honored and humbled by the McMinn family's request to create the environment for

Nancy's ceremony. Without hesitation I agreed at once to do this. That night, reflecting on what needed to be done in just a few days, I had my moment of panic. What needed to be done indeed! How was I going to pay proper homage to her life, her memory, her legacy? My mind chattered on and on. Greenery yes, flowers yes, but what would be the heart of it, what would be the soul that would speak to people of Nancy? TRUST. It will become clear, my heart silenced my head, and I fell asleep.

I awoke early and began to brainstorm, making a list: blue, copper, red geraniums, Bamm's chrysanthemums, Michaelmas daisies...baskets, candles, hearts, greenery, pottery...dried fruits, tea, flowers and herbs...open, welcoming, warm, comfortable. It suddenly struck me as a conscious realization that my intuitive listing was adding up to something: Nancy's kitchen!

Her kitchen was a metaphor for her heart. Always open to others, it felt like "heart's true home" with the woodstove's warmth, the comfortable seating and the welcoming aroma of Nancy's baking. For decades family, friends and community had gathered in that ambience to discuss matters of ecology, politics, roads, spirituality, native plants, *The Highlander*, alternative healing, orienteering, sustainable development and... the heart; sometimes they were one and the same. Always there were mint or ginger tea and muffins, Kindwood strawberries, homemade soup and Italian Bakery bread..I'm certain many readers will add to these listings.

Trust had brought clarity and definition. I would recreate Nancy's kitchen inside Caleb Pike, where food and drink would be offered after the ceremony outside, under the large white tent, which would be transformed to symbolize the Highland's forest and flowers she loved so well. Thankfully Bob and Diana resonated with my inspiration, and graciously took it to the rest of the family. Bob called, and with familiar low key humor told me I could "...raid the place, take whatever you need, we'll be out all afternoon ...oh, except the sofa." O.K., no sofa, reframe the vision, chairs would do nicely.

At the time, I was also facing the death of a relationship, and was driving my friend to the airport that afternoon. There were errands to be done, so we drove an unusual route. We were discussing Nancy's ceremony. Friends had



Nancy's kitchen, mid 1960's

generously responded to requests for cedar boughs, salal and ocean spray, but I knew more would be needed. Where would it come from? I thought, I need a truckload of greenery. We were driving up Goldstream, and seconds later at Colwood Corners I saw it, a truck loaded with evergreens. As my brain was still catching up to what my eyes were seeing, I said aloud offhandedly, "There's my truckload of greenery." Then, with the deep, gleeful recognition of receiving what I had asked for, I boomed out, "THERE'S MY TRUCKLOAD OF GREENERY!" and laughed joyously.

I distinctly heard Nancy say, "The universe has a sense of humor too!" and her accompanying laughter was music in my ears.

Due to time constraints I couldn't stop, and I prayed fervently the truck would be there upon my return. Two hours later it was, and I parked waiting with anticipation for the driver. Half an hour passed. I left a detailed note and drove to Kindwood; it was very quiet and no one was home. The warm afternoon sunlight filtered through the paned glass, giving the kitchen a softened, hushed quality of timelessness. I could hear the birds singing outside and the grandfather clock chiming. Time seemed to stand still with me, as I stood drinking in the suchness of Nancy. Her physical carrier had dropped away, but her quality of aliveness remained.

With reverence, I carefully unhooked the delicate dried garlic and onions from the ceiling, collected tea tins with masking tape labels, gleaming copper vessels, baskets that had held rich juicy tomatoes, wild mushrooms and luscious plums, hand dipped candles, a cosy mohair blanket, 'Nancy blue' pottery mugs with tiny creatures posed on the handles, rustic stools, wooden heart plates, old serviceable pillows, native plant books....and so it went. I gathered with gentle hands, feeling centered in my heart, cherishing these mementoes of a life.

I stopped in at various friends' homes on the way to Caleb Pike for "Nancy blue" tablecloths, vases, and candles, and also to check my answering machine. The "treeman" had called! After some telephone tag we connected. He was genuinely enthusiastic, and glad to help. "Yes he knew Millstream Road...yes he knew the Homestead....yes he'd deliver early Friday morning." There would be greenery in abundance! I drove to the Pike House singing.

The caterer and I were going to move the chairs and most of the tables out to the front porch. She was delayed, so I started in, and just as I began to feel my energy draining and wishing I had help, a woman's voice said, "Would you like some help?" I wheeled around. She had long blonde hair, rosy cheeks, a total stranger. (After that I saw her frequently, enjoying her daily constitutional walk.) We introduced ourselves, chatting as we worked. I shared my creative intentions, mentioning I'd like to find more flowers to tuck into the evergreens surrounding the tent poles. She said, "Oh, I have a good number of cosmos I was going to dig up that you could have. Would someone walk up the road and collect them in the morning?" Another gift!

After she left, I began to focus to achieve a state of inner spiritual harmony, from which I could give as I was meant to, translating that state into outward harmony. I was blissfully aware that this period of my life seemed to be "in grace." A

few friends popped by and then it was my time for solitude and sharing with Nancy. I hung the empty wrought iron candelabra given to the McMinns by community friends in the center of the wooden ceiling. I placed the first candle and lit it, celebrating the light in Nancy. The other candles honored her simplicity of living, her balance of the spiritual, physical and intellectual life, and the space she created for beauty, trust and love. Hanging baskets, candles, dried flowers and vegetables radiated outwards in spokelike fashion from that central hub of light. As my fingers cleared away soft delicate cobwebs to hang the dried garlic, onions and flowers, I thought about Nancy's closeness to Nature that strengthened her faith and understanding of the variety of life: life of human relationships, creative life, and life of spirit. I bumped my head on the candelabra and realized I was tiring.

It was crystal clear again. Nancy's voice. "Won't you sit down and relax, have a drink of water. You don't have to do all this at once." Nancy's spirit permeated the space. For a split second I felt it, knew it. This was her energy beyond form. I took her advice, and walked across to the dairy in the fresh night air. Opening my heart more and more deeply as each of her things passed through my hands, I thought, love is stronger than death, and does find a way of working beyond body and time. I finished a number of hours later, and as I closed the door and turned out the lights I said, "To the deepening celebration, Nancy."

It was Friday, October 13th, the day of Nancy's ceremony. When I arrived at Caleb Pike, the tent was already up and familiar smiling faces greeted me good morning. I began to prepare for the wonderful crew of volunteers that would arrive shortly. Highlanders flooded in with Kindwood chairs, pots and pots of Bramm's chrysanthemums, tea and muffins to snack on, florist's arrangements, beautiful forest cuttings and Michaelmas daisies for the large rattan and willow baskets and huge glass vases on the altar table. Then the truckload of greenery arrived. It was a true pleasure to meet that generous, beaming samaritan.

Hands and hearts were everywhere: cutting string to bind evergreens to tent poles, arranging flowers on windowsills, hanging a large cedar bough fashioned into a heart from the highest point inside the tent, gracing the washrooms with wildflowers, tucking cosmos into the greenery.

Several folks shared how contributing to creating the sacred space, and working with the flowers was quietly healing for them. Abundance was overflowing.

The ceremony was beautiful, with great numbers attending, indicative of the love and respect for Nancy from many diverse communities. It rained, which seemed fitting as Nancy had always said, "Rain is nice too."

Two years ago this month, I wrote Nancy and Bob a letter, upon my return from South Korea. The letter describes a dream. The dream's imagery was so powerful, I decided to translate it into a tangible artwork, (which seems a very appropriate and synchronistic offering to accompany this story.) The letter has been edited for brevity.

October 26, 1999

Dear Nancy and Bob:

I understand you are riding some rough seas. I believe you will weather this storm and others will learn from your grace, character, service and love. I have a deep trust in your faith, perseverance and courage. Calm peaceful waters will come in time.

A glorious dream came to me the other night of us sitting at a picnic table bathed in the splendor of warm golden sunlight. We were carefully creating openings in a soft mesh net with our fingers to retrieve fruit which had been transforming into a dried state. The fruit was encased in a wooden wheel. The richly colored, aromatic fruit lay nestled, protected between the wooden spokes. Soft laughter, tenderness, joy and heart permeated the dream. It represents some beautiful symbolism for me. The warm sunlight is all-seeing divinity, the center of our being and intuitive knowledge. The wheel represents the sacredness of circle and cycle of life, rebirth and renewal, the Self. We as circle's center are everywhere and our circumference is nowhere. We are wheels, the center is our point quiescent which produces the radiation and power of love, the circumference the manifestation. The 'wheel of life' of each of us revolves unceasingly and at times unrelentingly.

The fruit is our essence, transforming, the culmination and result of one state and the seed of the next. The wood of the wheel represents the cradle and the coffin, the marriage bed, wholeness and the primordial paradisaal state. The net is the energy and love our friendship embraces that goes beyond a mere time-space sequence. The net, our friendship, is formed of the visible and invisible, it is unity.

Perhaps a song, poem or painting will be inspired by this, yes, it will happen and the title will be Creating Openings. I hold this imagery in my mind's eye and send much love. I came across this poem by May Sarton and thought of you both.

Help is to be the always
hopeful
gardeners of the spirit
who know that without darkness
nothing comes to birth
as without light
nothing flowers.

I am manifesting being back in the Highlands soon. You hold a special place in my heart.

Love Bonnie

Thank you Nancy, for your gifts of wisdom, guidance and kindness, your open mind, being a dreamkeeper for others, your friendship, for nurturing the growth of my consciousness, and of truly being present, trusting and living in the moment from your heart.

Education Rather Than Regulation

Bob Flitton

Nancy McMinn made an impression on me of which I am constantly mindful. Nancy expressed the importance, when developing or building on undisturbed property, to minimize the disturbance until one understands their long-term goals or use for their property. The point being that once the native flora is interrupted, it is extremely difficult to return it to its original nature. I believe it is a message that needs to be shared with all newcomers to the Highlands. As Nancy explained, we come to the Highlands to enjoy what it offers yet may be too quick to change it before we fully understand the consequences.

Nancy also believed in achieving community goals and objectives through education rather than regulation. She believed that people should have the ability to be creative and original. I respected her intelligence and her coaching manner immensely and often bring to mind "what would Nancy do in this circumstance?" I hope that we can find a way to commemorate her contribution to the Highlands in a lasting and visual way.



"Creating Openings"

"Where We Were At"

Diana Tolson

Dear Nancy, spirit of the Highlands, how good it was to know your friendship. I loved you the very first time we met, over twenty years ago, a small occasion yet so typical of your caring and desire to do things right. We'd ordered a side of beef from you and Bob, and Len and I went out to pick it up from a butcher in Metchosin where it was being cut and wrapped. And there you were! Typical. You'd made a special trip out simply to make sure everything was to our liking and in order. Bless you! There was a cheese co-op, later, and I remember the same care and fairness in those transactions.

Through the years we didn't have a great deal of personal contact. You were fully occupied in Highland affairs and I, belonging to a spiritual group, the Emissaries of Divine Light, had my focus townward. Yet a special friendship evolved. We'd meet every year or so to go on a hike up a Highland hill, delighted to exchange our deepest thoughts on Life or where we "were at" spiritually at the time. We trod different paths in that regard, but there was magic in the fact that each time we reconnected we found our vision had expanded. We'd grown! And there were always parallels. More than once you stated, "Diana, you're good for me!" That touched my heart; that you, lovely lady, found some form of truth in my expression. It seems odd that our meetings were so few when we each felt so keenly in the other a kindred spirit. But I suspect now that it was all just right.

Our most recent outing was when I took you to Metchosin to meet my old pioneer friend, Joan Yates, who is in her late eighties and has perhaps the most wonderful organic vegetable garden on the island. You thoroughly enjoyed Joan's vast historical knowledge of the area and intelligent wit. Afterwards we sat outside at Metchosin Cafe for lunch and a cider. Your treat! For both of us it was a lovely day.

I'm so appreciative that you have been in my life. It is apparent now that your spirit of love and care and stewardship permeates this beautiful Highlands through the people that you touched. New friendships are emerging that are richly based in a common bond of loving you. Nancy, my friend, your legacy is wondrous.

Another Step Towards Home

Robbie Anderson

"The purpose of life is exploration. Adventure. Learning. Pleasure. And another step towards home.

One does not have to stand against the gale -
One yields and becomes part of the wind.

Freedom is not an illusion.
Freedom is the natural way of being.
It is your birthright.
It is your home."

In searching for words to share in this memorial and tribute to Nancy, I kept coming back to the above quote which Nancy wrote on my birthday card August, 2000. It describes, for me, much of Nancy's life, her intense curiosity and passion to understand the deeper wellspring of Life.

Thank you Nancy, for being my friend, mentor, co-explorer and spiritual mama.

Thank you for your unconditional love, acceptance, patience with my struggles, and gentleness when I was caught up in anger and judgement.

Thank you for teaching me so much about loving and connecting with our beautiful and fragile Earth.

Thank you for reminding me, over and over again, to look more deeply at what is the essence, what is really going on with this person or situation underneath the obvious behavior.

Thank you for quiet talks in front of your kitchen stove sharing questions, plans, hopes and fears; excited dialogues in your studio about books we were both reading, helpful guidance in the garden.

Thank you for your quiet determination and courage in making the Highlands (and the planet) a better place in which to live.

And mostly, thank you Nancy for being you, an elder woman I could respect, honour and attempt to follow. I am profoundly grateful for your presence in my life for four years. I miss you. Love to you always, wherever you are on your journey to freedom.



A traffic calmed road — Rose-Durrance

Nancy's Contributions

Karel Roessingh

Nancy's many contributions to the Highlands were immeasurable. She was responsible for much of the social character of our community, starting many of our regular events in her own kitchen. She also had much to do with the political character of the Highlands. She was on the Roads Advisory Committee from the beginning, hosting the first meetings and providing tea and snacks for the members as she did for any visitor to her home. And she gave Highlands roads a huge amount of thought, concern, and careful consideration. She spent a tremendous amount of time researching ways to mow the roadsides with minimal damage to the native vegetation, and pioneered the concept of rural traffic calming.

But I think Nancy's greatest contribution was her unending search for common ground through consideration, communication and conciliation. She was an excellent listener and questioner, and did not fear to tackle even the most controversial of issues with directness, honesty, and a healthy sense of humour. Her manner and style serve as an inspiration, and she will never be forgotten as one of the true founding members of her beloved Highlands, as well as a dear and precious friend.

Memories

Diana McMinn

Thoughts expressed at Nancy's Memorial held at the Pike House, October 13, 2000.

Lying in bed this morning, I was remembering all the times that Rowan and I would walk over to Mom's unexpectedly. The kitchen would be empty, so we would go upstairs and knock on her study door. No matter how busy she was, she was always delighted to see Rowan and me, whether she could only spend a few minutes playing with Rowan or had time to chat for an hour or so.

A few weeks ago Mom arrived at our kitchen door. She had brought a beautiful bunch of Michaelmas daisies from her garden. The colours — pinks, mauves, deep purples were so vibrant. As well as the flowers there was a tub of bright red strawberries, also from her garden. Her generosity was wonderful. This past Easter, when we got home from the Pike House Easter Egg Hunt, I went upstairs for some reason. There on Rowan's bed was a sight that made me gasp with surprise and delight. Nestled in a little basket lined with grass was a chocolate rabbit pushing a wheelbarrow full of blue, yellow and pink foil wrapped eggs. I knew instantly that the Easter bunny had been Mom. So did Rowan when I lured her upstairs to find it.

The night before she died, Mom came over to bring some directions for Jean. He was going off the next morning to an oven building workshop that she was helping him attend in Washington State. I was frantically trying to make some cookies before walking over to my yoga class. I wasn't very welcoming because I was feeling rushed. Mom was out of breath when she arrived and sat down at our kitchen table. She and Jean talked about the workshop for a while. Just before she left, I asked her what she was going to make for our family Thanksgiving supper that we were to have the next Sunday. I told her that I was making pumpkin pies. She said she had been thinking of making pies too. I felt annoyed with her, as I'd already got everything I needed for mine. She could see that I wasn't pleased and she said in her impish way "Well there isn't any point in making them if I can't make them better than you can, — and I can't." She pulled herself away from Rowan, who wanted to play, saying that she needed to go home and make supper for Dad and that was my goodbye to her.

The Sound of Trees

by Robert Frost

Read by Davyd McMinn

Read at Nancy's Memorial held at the Pike House, October 13, 2000.

I wonder about the trees.

Why do we wish to bear
forever the noise of these
more than another noise
so close to our dwelling
place?

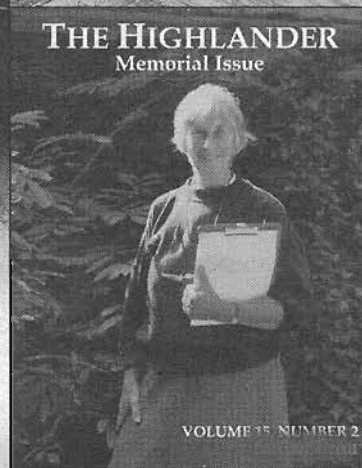
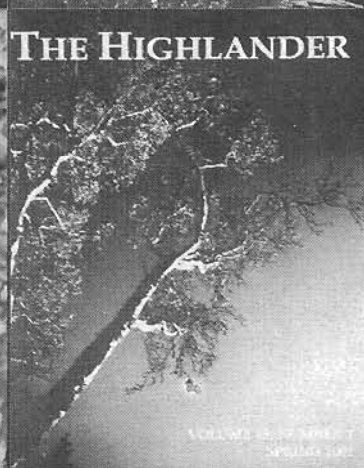
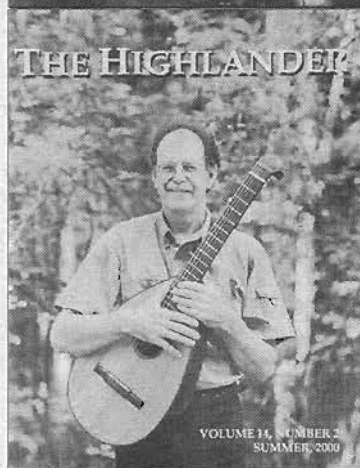
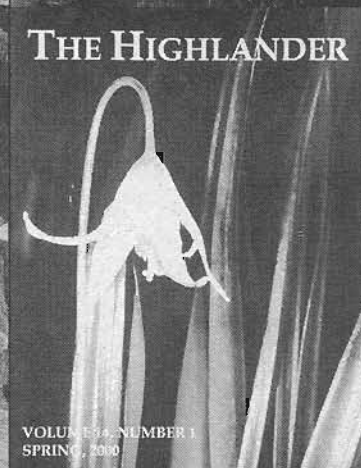
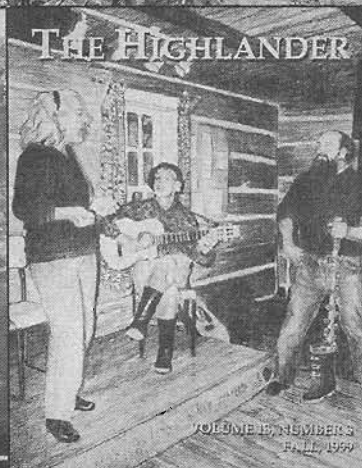
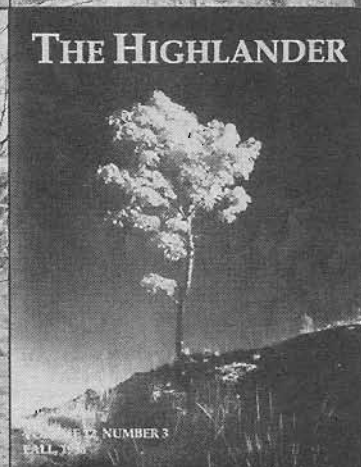
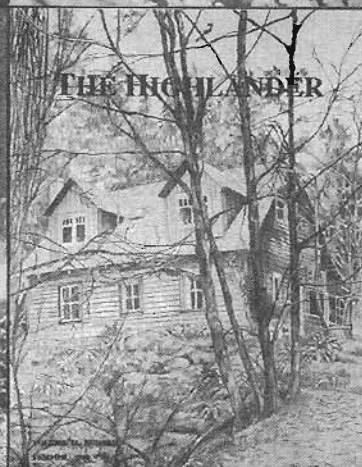
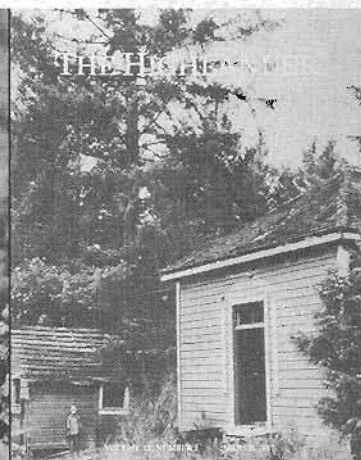
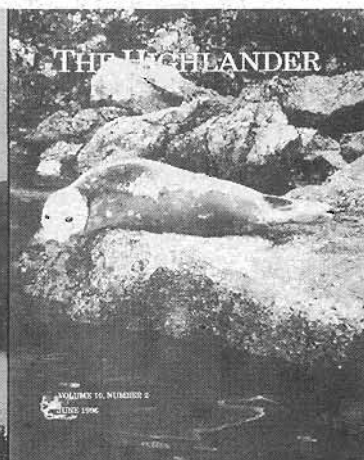
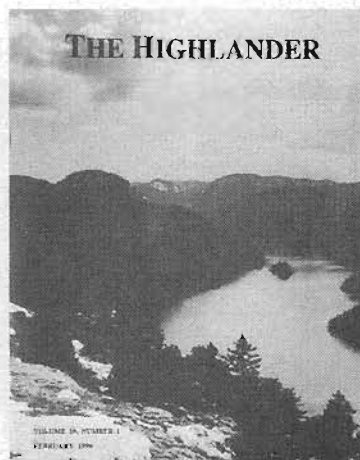
We suffer them by the day
til we lose all measure of
pace,
and fixity in our joys,
and acquire a listening air.

They are that that talks of
going
but never gets away;
and that talks no less for
knowing,
as it grows wiser and older,
that now it means to stay.

My feet tug at the floor
and my head sways to my
shoulder
sometimes when I watch
trees sway,
from the window or the door.

I shall set forth for
somewhere,
I shall make the reckless
choice
some day when they are in
voice
and tossing so as to scare
the while clouds over
them on.

I shall have less to say,
but I shall be gone.



**15 Issues
and Six Years
of the
Highlander
Since Nancy
Started the
Current
Format
in 1996**