

Living at Point Amour Lighthouse

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Gertie Fowler:

I'm here today with Sheila Sheppard Park and Sheila is gonna share with us today some memories that she have of living here in Point Amour, at the lighthouse. So Sheila or what memories or what brought you here and when did you move here to the lighthouse?

Sheila Park:

We moved here in October of 1964.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay

Sheila Park:

My father was a lighthouse keeper on a very isolated light station in the Bay of Islands.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmm...hmmmm.

Sheila Park:

Right at the mouth of the Bay of Islands. And the time was come when I had to go to school so he had to make a choice of putting his family ah... in Lark Harbor and him staying at the light station, or look for another lighthouse to work on.

We knew the light keeper that was here at the time, the man in charge. Because he dad worked for him on the other lighthouse.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Sheila Park:

So Mr. Elliott was here and he let dad know that there was a position open here on Point Amour and dad applied for it and got it.

So that's what brought us here. And we arrived in October by helicopter.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh. That was a big thing back then.

Sheila Park:

Well yes it was... ah.... we came by boat really to Flowers Cove and then....there was a coast guard boat, and they flew us across the Straits and we landed in a field out.... right out... well actually almost where this building is right now.

Gertie Fowler:

Is that right?

Sheila Park:

That's where we landed in helicopter.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Sheila Park:

So it was me and ah.. Max my brother was just seven months old. Yeah he was born in April and we moved here in October.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmm..hmmmm.

Sheila Park:

There was just two of us in the family, then.

Gertie Fowler:

So what was life like living here at the lighthouse?

Sheila Park:

Probably, some of the best days of my life.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah, I can imagine.

Sheila Park:

I know going to school like, some of the ... some of our friends would say you know that ... they'd laugh like and kind of like in a ... in a pleasant kind of way, poke fun sometimes about all the activity going on out at Point Amour and

Gertie Fowler:

Right.

Sheila Park:

.... L'Anse Amour, and Fox Cove. But putting all jokes aside, ah.... it was a good life.

Gertie Fowler:

So how many of ye was in the....

Sheila Park:

Ohhhhhh

Gertie Fowler:

.... In the class now when you were at school.

Sheila Park:

That's what I was telling my girls on the way up here today, probably sixteen or seventeen of us.

Gertie Fowler:

So that's a nice...

Sheila Park:

Because in Fox Cove. It was Mina.... Mina and Ed had Audrey, Verta, and Elaine and Irving ...four kids. Bill and Dora had seven, I think. And then there was ah....there was three of us.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmm...hmm..

Sheila Park:

Steward and Grace had five. Mr and Mrs. Elliott had one. Ethel and John had three or four.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmmm..hmmmm.

Sheila Park:

.....here. And in L'Anse Amour, Margaret and Wilfred had three, Cecil and Rita had four. Richard and Laura had seven, I think and Diane and Allen had six.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah, so I mean.

Sheila Park:

Five or six kids so, there was a lot of us.

Gertie Fowler:

To go to school. Yeah

Sheila Park:

Yeah. We had a one room school on top of the hill. First when we went to school, it was an old house belong to Aunt Bell Davis, and then they built a new school, right on top of the hill and part of that school is in Stelman's store in Forteau.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes maid.

Sheila Park:

The first when you go in where the cash register is to and the office?

Gertie Fowler:

Yes.

Sheila Park:

That use to be our school, part of our school.

Gertie Fowler:

That's still there.

Sheila Park:

Hmm. When he built.... he just built onto it right?

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmm. So do you have any other memories of

Sheila Park:

I got memories of going to school on farm tractor.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes maid. So how did that work now?

Sheila Park:

Well dad and Steward made seats for the tractor. We had... there was one almost like a bench...

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

Sheila Park:

We had one on the front of the tractor and one on the back, and that's how we went back and forth to school. A lot of the time when the road would be blocked to much to use the car, and we didn't have ski-doos first when we came here.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

Sheila Park:

And that's how we did it.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay. So now, ah... do ah... what about going like to the other communities, Did you ever get to go to the other communities very much?

Sheila Park:

Oh. Yes. Well I mean we'd make our weekly trip to the store. That was a treat. And Dad always loved to go to church, so perhaps on a Sunday, we might go to two or three church services.

Gertie Fowler:

Is that right?

Sheila Park:

Go to L'Anse au Loup to one and perhaps then in the night, go to Forteau to another one. And we'd go to Capstan Island. Always on the move.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah. So what was ah What was Christmas like here at the lighthouse?

Sheila Park:

Lonely.

Gertie Fowler:

Did you find it ?

Sheila Park:

Yeah.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Sheila Park:

Really lonely. That was one of the things, that I use to say to mom and them, you know, like I found it hard, moving here because I had to leave my friends. I mean, I was seven and I mean children are pretty adaptable.

Gertie Fowler:

Sure.

Sheila Park:

But it was almost like, this place..... it wasn't until I got older that it was really home.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Sheila Park:

And I'd almost go as far as to say that I really didn't appreciate it until I left it.

Gertie Fowler:

Until you...

Sheila Park:

And moved on somewhere else, right?

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Sheila Park:

But I found Christmas lonely, because we were here on the coast with no family. Just our immediate family.

Gertie Fowler:

That's right.

Sheila Park:

And all my friends, I'd see them on Christmas Day going around visiting their aunts, and uncles and their grandparents. And I'd think every Christmas, I probably had my cry.

Gertie Fowler:

You missed that.

Sheila Park:

I missed it, yeah.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

Sheila Park:

And I was determined, when I had my own children that I would never take them somewhere where they couldn't see their grandparents.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmm. Okay.

Sheila Park:

You know?

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

Sheila Park:

And I must stay, we're all here on the coast, most of us.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay. Yeah.

Sheila Park:

The cousins mixed together and that and it's something that we never had as kids and I can remember Max saying, you know my grandfather died, right? In Daniels Harbor, Mom's father and Max helped put him in his casket and he said it was just like putting a stranger in, like there was no emotion. He knew it was his grandfather, but never ever spent any time around him, didn't know the man.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah. So that would give him them feelings.

Sheila Park:

Yeah

Gertie Fowler:

Hmm.

Sheila Park:

So it was stuff like that, that we missed right?

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah, that's true.

Sheila Park:

Growing up.

Gertie Fowler:

There was advantages and disadvantages, I guess hey?

Sheila Park:

Yeah. But still I mean, all the people here ... we were like one... there was three communities but we were like one big happy family.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh, Okay. Yeah

Sheila Park:

I remember one time, everybody pulled together. Max was sick.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay. Yeah.

Sheila Park:

He was only a couple of years old and it was Christmas and he had the measles and sometime Christmas..... Christmas Day... he was too sick to even pay any attention to any of his gifts or anything.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmm .hmmm.

Sheila Park:

And Christmas night, he got really sick and by Boxing Day, like he was almost like.... well he was in a coma really. Once they got him to the hospital, I mean, we knew right?

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

Sheila Park:

But he wasn't responding at all and it was a stormy day, and all the men got together and they ah.... they got the tractor out.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmm. Hmmm.

Sheila Park:

And hooked onto the car. Got the car up from on the highway, cause they use to keep the car up in a garage, up by the main road, pulled the car down to the house. Cause we didn't want to get Max out in the cold. Got myself, mom and Max aboard the car, towed us back up to the main road and then we got as far as Lanse Amour. Bill came from Fox Cove and Steward and dad and they dug their way to L'Anse Amour and then Wilfred and Al, I don't know if Cecil went or not, but I know I stayed in L'Anse Amour with Margaret and Wil...with Margaret Davis.

Gertie Fowler:

Did you?

Sheila Park:

And mom had Max in her arm and they filled the car with men, and then left to go to the main road. And somewhere on the way, they passed or met Jim Letto in the snow plough and he was trying to ah... get the road open to black rocks because there was another sick child coming from West St. Modeste .

Gertie Fowler:

Busy day?

Sheila Park:

Yeah. Dr. Marquis was coming so far as Black Rocks on snowmobile to meet them right?

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmm. hmmm.

Sheila Park:

But anyway, they went behind the plough then, you know, once they....

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

Sheila Park:

...once they met Jim.

Gertie Fowler:

Got in on the highway.

Sheila Park:

...got in on the highway.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay. So everything turned out good?

Sheila Park:

And when they got to black rock ah... the other family from West St. Modeste wasn't there and Dr. Marquis was there with one of the brothers from the church.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

Sheila Park:

And they only waited a little while and he couldn't wait any longer, he said for the family West St. Modeste, because he was afraid Max was going to die right there in the snowmobile.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes maid.

Sheila Park:

And they took him and went on to Long Point with him but now the other little boy, got on okay.

Gertie Fowler:

To?

Sheila Park:

They got him up from West St. Modeste, I think the snowmobile must have come back and got him or something.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Sheila Park:

Yeah.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh well... he got...

Sheila Park:

He was up there in a coma for ... a couple of days, before they got him around.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay...

Sheila Park:

And mom often talks about it she says "didn't even come to me to get in the snowmobile to go with the baby". She said "I handed him over to the doctor and"

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah , let him....

Sheila Park:

"At them times" she said, "mothers didn't go to the hospital with their kids, right?"

Gertie Fowler:

Nope. Give them to the doctor or nurse.....

Sheila Park:

Give them to the doctor and They went on with him. And she said "when she got coming home, it hit her, like, I just passed my child over to the doctor and I might never see him again alive" she said and then she started to shake and tremble but there was nothing she could do about it then.

Gertie Fowler:

So did they go back up again after or what?

Sheila Park:

Well when the weather cleared.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah, when the weather cleared.

Sheila Park:

Yeah.

Gertie Fowler:

'Cause she could have went on too.

Sheila Park:

She could have went on, yes. Like no one told her not to come, but nobody said “do you want to come?” and ...

Gertie Fowler:

Back then, that's the way

Sheila Park:

Oh yeah.

Gertie Fowler:

That's how they did it.

Sheila Park:

But at one point Dr. Marquis told mom that they had... they made up a bed in the back of a snowmobile and one of them had to walk ahead of the snowmobile.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes maid.

Sheila Park:

That's how dirty it was.

Gertie Fowler:

So your father had lots of friends back here to help him...

Sheila Park:

My goodness, yes.

Gertie Fowler:

When things got rough.

Sheila Park:

Hmmm..hmmm.

Gertie Fowler:

So is there anything else that you'd like to add to your memories today?

Sheila Park:

Not really, I mean, there's lots of memories....

Gertie Fowler:

Yes.

Sheila Park:

...lots of memories of us as kids, playing and things we use to do and I was telling the girls on the way out, showing them where we would go sliding and

Gertie Fowler:

Sure.

Sheila Park:

Pond up on the hill where we went skating and I said there was a barn there and we had a little play house made in the barn and one little one... one of Alicia's friend said my it sounds like you had a lot of fun. I said "yes we did, and we were never bored". Never. And they said "never, ever, not once?" I said "no, never, ever, not once." And we didn't have Nintendo's and Game boys and.....

Gertie Fowler:

That's true.

Sheila Park:

But we learned how to entertain ourselves.

Gertie Fowler:

That's true.

Sheila Park:

Even just walking in..... walking in the old road and finding little birds nest and doing that all the time.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah. Keep yourself occupied.

Sheila Park:

Yeah.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah. Well I'd like to thank you then for your memories and thank you for taking your time here today...

Sheila Park:

No problem.

Gertie Fowler:

To come and visit and share your memories with us.

Sheila Park:

I could probably sit here with hours. (laughs)

Gertie Fowler:

Okay, thank you very much.