Thelma Colburn

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Interview by Cathy Eaton and Adele Wick

I met Charles Eaton accidentally, waiting in line in the days you had to stand in line. Charles E dropped a quarter accidentally. It rolled under a radiator. On hands and knees trying to reach quarter, a little boy pulled it out. Charles reached in pocket and gave him $5. He had white shoes on – men didn’t wear white shoes in my childhood (I was about 10, now reached 75), but I knew he was a good man.

I have a hat. It’s just that one of our boys got a PhD from McMaster’s – that’ s the company that he works for JDS Uniphase. We were in Amherst one day. This guy jumped out of a car – “I know where you’re from: Ottawa!” Close.

I was Thelma Mattinson, born in Pugwash. Dad a lumberman with a little lumber mill. He had 8-10 men working for him. They shipped lumber on boats and by rail. Sons were great. Daughters were just a bit of liability. Boys – 2 brotherss worked for him and got paid as if they were men. I worked for my mother for my board. The only thing girls did anyway was get married. Pugwash didn’t have Grade 12 in my day, but Tatamagoosh did. You were allowed to send child there if you paid taxes – dad paid taxes, so my brothers and I could go. Dad questioned the sense of me going to school there. But mom had teachers in family, so eventually I was allowed to go. Glenn, my brotjer, decided to be minister. No child of my father was going to go to university and waste his money. He decided he would loan us money. Other kids could borrow from him, but not his. Both started at Mount Allison. After 4 years, I owed my father $4000. After graduation, I said, “Now daddy, I’m teaching at a school for the blind at Halifax, and I will pay you so much a month.” He said, “You graduated, and I didn’t think you’d do it. You don’t owe me anything. So Glen became a minister and I married one. I just attended the 50th anniversary of husband’s ordination.

I taught a couple of years while my husband was still studying (continued post Mount Alison.) And then the babies started coming. I substitute taught a bit. We lived everywhere, including Cape Breton. There a lot of unemployed. They said, “Well now, we’ll put your name down, but you’re exactly 400 on the list.” So, I decided lots of people in Cape Breton needed a job more than I did. First, we lived in Labrador. “Would she object to Labrador? My wife doesn’t know a thing.” So, we went. NW River, Mud Lake, Cartwright and 11 other places. We had a little motorized boat. A heavy snowmobile thing. Dog teams and mail plane brought visitors. People never knew who was coming. No communication, no news of whether he was okay. Wonderful people, wonderful time. Mixed ancestry – Indian or Eskimo. Took off glasses- steamed up. A little girl asked, “Something wrong with your eyes?” I replied, “What?” She commented, “They’re blue.”

United Church. Quebec so his kids could be bilingual. Labrador. Question of separation new. Elgish resented idea of speaking French, so wouldn’t. French wanted to get rid of English. Here we were trying to learn something no one wanted. Evening classes to which no one applied. Very different later. Finished his years in Ontario. We didn’t have a place to live – always provided. So she taught developmentally handicapped. Wondered whether I could do it. Same wonder with blind children. But soon they wern’t blind children. They were Westley, etc. Same for this case. You’re a remarkable person. Oh, I don’t know about that. 4 children – 2 each. All around country. 1 girl went to vet school for a year so became a PT – dad – so, you don’t mind seeing people suffer (why she left veterinarian medicine).

Born in 1935. My only involvement is what I would hear because by the time they started I was gone. Married 1958. I was not around. Started university about 1951-2. Around the summer Yuri Gagarin was here. At a meeting in the park, people all lined up on chairs in front; the parade went down to stage. When started down, all the people filled in the space where procession was going. I sensed Gagarin was a little fearful of what would happen to him. Howard Elliot – no obvious security – didn’t sense police presence – a VIP of village, tried to move the people back. When Gagarin spoke, the translator translated. He seemed happy, almost honored to be here – Made me feel good – even if these people wanted to eat him up. I was pushing a baby carriage at the time, so didn’t have a lot of time to help and we were living in Labradore…

The other times I knew there would be conferences and I’d be here when they were. The delegates would walk around town. I could tell them because they wore white shoes, long hair, shorts, sandals…So out of touch with what went on in Pugwash. Most of the people were quite honored and just amazed at what CSE did. Now, my father didn’t, “You know, that Cyrus Eaton is just getting in with the Russians.” Father was totally against him. My mother would say, “There are good Russians and bad Russinas, just as there are good Canadians and bad Canadians.” I’m thinking I got a good education from my mother. She was the reason I went to university. Ivy Carter Mattinson, and Charles eloped. Unheard of! They went to Great Village. Mill somewhere around Wentworth. They told people they were going for lumber, kept on going to towards near Bay of Fundy. They went to a minister. My dad was bald, my mother was grey. “I guess I don’t need your parents’ consent. 47, 31. A week later or so, mom reason to go by train to Pugwash Junction. Who was on train, but dad’s own girlfriend, who was working Iin Boston. She sat with my mother. She said she’d decided to settle down – with man mom had just married!

Another thing I found is that the conference goers were very friendly. They always spoke to you, maybe in a different language. I didn’t feel in the least bit threatened. We lived in other part of town in big old white house, so came down here. (Durham Street). . Father’s father had a mill, but also went to Boston and learned to build houses, cut logs, sawed them. He made everything but the nails, glass and plaster for his house. It had 12 rooms. Mom vowed she’d never live in that ark. Mom tallied lumber. “Girl who worked there decided on move; kids picked bedrooms….Came home to new digs. Lived there for 50 years.

I went to Mt. Allison. My husband met me on way to library one day. “Come on. I didn’t make much of an impression if you don’t remember. “ Mt. A: 400 eligible young men – just 4 in Pugwash. Why would I notice?”

I used to help some in the dining room as a teenager. I had a friend, Gladdy Lockheard, who working in dining hall, worked for friend when she needed time. Not during conferences, but just when open dining room for anyone who wanted to come. Meetings occurred here of other groups – women’s society. I watched the fire at Thinkers Lodge from a point. It was very sad for me. Afterward, we drove around and the fire was out! People carrying things over to Dining Hall.

Lots of girls who worked here from my vintage.

Dad bought a land lot. We discovered land had blueberries. He said, “Let people buy.” He decided to sell them himself. My brother and I both worked in blueberry field. I kept track of boxes picked. My brother did “winding” – blew leaves and dirt off berries.

Pugwash today is going to get better instead of worse. I was devastated by a lot of the goings on that have been going on in the last years. People are beginning to see where they were heading. Don’t want to go there. I’m optimistic. Now there is much more positive, cooperative attitude. I try to be friends with everyone, regardless of their stands on anything. They’re still my friend. I think that is better than trying to confront people. I’m within myself quite optimistic.

Note: Thelma joined Paola, Cathy, Mandy and Adele in a drive directed by tape of Cyrus Eaton giving a tour in 1970. She proved, as expected, a treasure trove of information, past and present.