

*Cycling*  
**NEWFOUNDLAND  
& LABRADOR**  
for Child Care



HOWARD CLIFFORD

## CYCLING NEWFOUNDLAND FOR CHILD CARE - 1994

The first leg of this cycling/kayak trip took me from the Pacific Ocean to the Arctic and to mid-Canada (Winnipeg). The second leg took me from Winnipeg to Sydney, N.S. This third and final leg is Newfoundland and Labrador. The trip therefore covered every province and territory.

As described in the first leg of this trip entitled "On the Road for Quality Child Care – A Vision Quest" the trip grew out of my own mid-life type of crisis. I had been ready to leave civil service, If the truth be known I was more than ready. I was looking forward to turning my attention to wilderness conservation and helping adults and children to understand and appreciate nature through wilderness settings. Our family has a 1250 acre parcel of beautiful wilderness near Flower Station – about an hour and half drive from Ottawa. The plan is to preserve this as a wilderness sanctuary for future generations to enjoy. The dream is to use wilderness as a healing back-drop to meet the physical, emotional, social, educational and spiritual needs of people.

The problem I had faced two years ago, at the beginning of the trip, is that all too familiar trap that has beset so many people. Psychologically the time to leave my employment had come but I was still at least four or five years away from retirement. I didn't want to spend those four years as Henry David Thoreau would describe as a life of quiet desperation.

The first two legs of the trip did wonders for my soul. I felt alive and connected to a great cause and to people who were making a difference in the lives of people. During the 1993 winter I spent a fair amount of time reviewing the history of Newfoundland. Oh I had been to St. John's a number of times in my position of National Consultant on Day Care. The problem of flying into a capital city like St. John's is that you visit the government offices and perhaps take a walk in the vicinity of the hotel. This does not provide a true perspective of the province.

It is easy to forget how young a country we inhabit. As a child, at the age of eight, it seemed preposterous that my father had been eight years of age when Alberta became a province. I suspect my children at the age of eight would be equally surprised if I told them that I attended a party in our grade four class to celebrate and welcome Newfoundland into Canada.

To most Canadians, although Newfoundland and Labrador is our newest province, it is the least known and perhaps the most mysterious. Part of the reason is the difficulty and expense to visit it. Travel is by airplane – too expensive for family vacations. The alternative is by ferry. This too is expensive. For this trip we had been told to expect to pay about \$500 for our family with a car and a small utility trailer for a one way passage from Sydney, N.S. to Argentia, Newfoundland.

Unlike our western provinces, which was settled later than was eastern and central Canada, Newfoundland, in terms of settlements, is much older than Canada. In fact St. John's is one of the oldest settlements on the continent. Newfoundland, from this historical perspective, could claim that Canada joined them in Confederation! John Cabot discovered Newfoundland in 1497 just a few years before Christopher Columbus "sailed the ocean blue". However according to archaeological evidence Columbus was a very late comer. The Vikings are believed to have landed and established a primitive settlement at L'Anse au Meadows almost 500 years before Columbus sighted America.

According to Farley Mowat the Vikings too were late comers. He presents some evidence in his book "The Farfarers" that the people of Alba which he calls the Albans came from Scotland to the New World long before the Vikings. He states that these people had deep rooted connections to non-human animals which helped them survive as they produced a culture that sustained them through the eons.

Of course what my grade four teacher didn't tell us as we celebrated Newfoundland's entry into Confederation in 1948 was just how close Newfoundlanders came to not choosing Canada. I guess I would have understood if they had chosen to join the States – but in my mind the States would have been a very distant and poor second choice. We were not told that the choice was not between Canada and the U.S. The plebiscite was a choice between joining Canada or remaining under the control of the Commission, or returning to self-government. We were not told that only a minuscule majority of two per cent chose Canada.

It is likely that our teacher didn't know herself about the fierce battle and political intrigue that had taken place. Even if she had we were far too young to comprehend. Even to this day many Canadians don't know why the Catholic church was against Confederation. Some suggest it was that the church was supportive of the business establishment who adamantly opposed joining Canada. Besides the Water Street Businessmen, the pulp and paper companies poured great sums of money to influence a decision. It is said they were against change because they were benefiting from sweet-heart deals awarded to them when they established their mills including not having to pay corporate taxes. The Forest industry also benefited from other incentives which many felt was at the expense of the common good.

However for those of us who fear that democracy is often up for sale to those who have the most money to influence the election, the Newfoundlanders resisted the money interests and brought forward a victory for the masses. At least that is my, admittedly not fully informed, take.

Newfoundland and Labrador's long and unique history created a correspondingly unique people. The stark, harsh, brutal landscape – magnificent in its beauty, resulted in a wonderfully hospitable people with a ruggedly independent spirit and a resourcefulness unsurpassed anywhere. My anticipation grew with each passing month. We would be cycling through the newest province, the oldest settlement, and one of the most difficult areas in Canada to reach.

Finally the departure date of Friday July 15, 1994 was only two days away. The trip planning was checked and rechecked. Everything seemed ready to go. Except for one item. I had read and reviewed a new piece of equipment that had just hit the market. It was a "Therm-a-nest" I had ordered it but it hadn't arrived. I had given up on it. On Thursday morning I received a message from U.P.S. that it had just cleared Canadian Customs and could be picked up in Ottawa Friday morning. I really wanted to take it. It is the size of a single sleeping bag but sleeps two. The bottom has a thin covering with two pockets to insert two therm-a-rest mattresses. This keeps you off the ground and the top section provides the traditional warmth. So one sleeping bag takes the place of two and in addition keeps the mattresses in place. This complicated our get-a-way quickly plan but we thought it worth the effort.

#### FRIDAY JULY 15TH DEPARTURE DAY

I arrived early at the U.P.S. station to pick up the therm-a-nest and then headed to the office. Jean had taken Friday off and with the help of Chad and Tania were packing the trailer. They would wait for my late afternoon arrival at Barrie's apartment in Ottawa.

Upon my arrival at Barrie's I eyed the small Mazda, carrying four bicycles, hauling a fully packed utility trailer and knew we were to squeeze in five passengers – last year all over again. Chad was driving. We pulled out in threatening rain. Fortunately, although rain was all around us, we seemed to be missing it. Our luck held until we reached Quebec City where we faced a sudden downpour. To make matters worse the heavy loaded trailer brought the rear of the Mazda down making the headlights too high to see the road properly. Chad was forced to stop in the heavy rain to adjust the lights.

Not a good start. No one wanted to be putting up tents in this kind of weather so we kept our eyes open for a motel. We pulled into four different ones none of which had vacancies. We were tired, cramped for room, but somehow no one voiced a complaint. About 50 km from Edmundston, N.B. we spotted a campground. Fortunately the rain had more or less stopped but it was pitch dark. The first time in a season putting up a tent, in the dark, was challenging. A cardinal rule is to field test a new piece of equipment before leaving home. However the therm-a-nest worked as envisioned and both Jean and I gave it a thumbs up.

#### SATURDAY JULY 16, 1994

I was wide awake at 7 a.m. and content to lay back listening to the rain on the tent. There is hardly a more soothing sound except when you realize that you have to take it down in the rain and put it away wet. By eight a.m. the rain had stopped and we began breaking camp. Hopefully this evening will be rain free and allow the outside of the tent to dry. Considering the trying conditions yesterday, everyone was in a good mood and made more so by stopping at a restaurant an hour down the road for breakfast.

Just outside of Fredericton was a large ice-cream stand that was too inviting to pass. The additional excuse to stop was I wanted to phone Susan McGibbon. She and Alex had been our gracious hosts during this part of last summer's trip. It was nice to hear her voice and to learn they were doing well. We talked briefly about fond memories from last year and then she wished us well in our Newfoundland journey.

We were headed to the Seafoam Campground and as we were arriving a large crow landed on a telephone wire about a 100 feet away. It looked at us, lifted its head, and puked. I was glad we were not any closer. We hadn't made reservations and was surprised that it was nearly full. After we picked our tent site, there were only two spots left. Lucky we stopped early.

After setting up our tents we took a stroll along the beach. I noticed a cemetery on a rise off to the left. I found it interesting to look at the old tombstones, some of which dated back to the 1880's. As I read the inscriptions I tried to imagine what their lives had been like.

Upon getting back to camp Jean prepared a supper of chicken and potato salad. It hit the spot. The red sky spoke of nice weather. What a contrast between last night and tonight. Barrie took out our large scope that we sometimes used at the Alba Wilderness School back home and got nice views of the moon and of Jupiter. Barrie is our family's expert on night skies.

#### SUNDAY JULY 17

Last night's red sky proved accurate. It was a beautiful morning. It was an easy drive to Sydney and we arrived at the hotel around 2:30 p.m. There was a message from Sharon at the registration desk asking us to phone her before checking in. A friend of Sharon had suggested that we might want to take the 11:30 p.m. ferry to Newfoundland instead of going tomorrow morning. He said that we would have to wait for all the vehicles to get off the ferry before we cycled to avoid traffic. Then we could go about 30 km to the first campground. We talked this over and decided against it. We may not sleep that well on the crossing and would be tired. More importantly it should be more interesting to cross in daylight to see whatever could be seen. Another consideration was that Sharon had set up a CBC and a newspaper interview in the morning which we would miss. Publicity for day care is a vital part of our objectives.

We checked into the hotel and got nicely settled when Sharon and Ron and her friend Bonnie came with Lasagne, salad, and ice cream which we ate on the roof balcony of the hotel.

## MONDAY JULY 18

Sharon arrived just before 8 a.m. to drive me to the C.B.C for an 8:30 morning interview conducted by Nina Wincham. The interview went smoothly. We returned to pick up our trailer and drove the 21 km to the ferry. There we were met by staff and children from the Sydney Day Care Centre and from the Kinsman Day Care program. The children were excited as the staff had played up the importance of this trip for child care. However it was very hectic because there was so little time before the ferry was to leave. Sharon received word that a reporter, June Collins of the Cape Breton Post, was running late but was on her way. Our car was already on the ferry and Sharon checked with the authorities to make sure we could catch a ride on the bus that would be the last vehicle to go on the ferry.

I chatted with the children and answered their questions. The reporter arrived, took several pictures of the children interacting with me. I think she was amused when two different children asked if I was Santa Claus. The white beard has fooled more than one preschooler. The bus driver signalled that we had to board. It seems like shades of the last two summers. A hectic schedule and never quite enough time.

Later someone forwarded me a copy of the journalist's article that appeared on July 19<sup>th</sup>. It included a nice picture of myself with the children. I smiled when she referred to me as the pied piper. Julie Collins had also written about the trip prior to my arrival at Sydney. I am grateful to see the continued media interest in child care and the excellent coverage of the trip.

I settled in a seat on the ferry next to Jean. It was a beautiful morning. Jean seems to be lucky in terms of ferries. Last year she had fretted about the possibility of rough weather before taking the P.E.I. ferry. Both then and now the weather made for great crossings.

Soon we noticed a flurry of excitement and went to investigate. Whales close to the ship. Every couple of moments we would spot the tell-tale spray of water sprouting. The whales reminded me that I had read that whalers had sailed around this extreme southwestern tip of Newfoundland as far back as the 1500's. Except for the small settlement the scene before us was likely not that different than what they saw. I might think bicycling here is an adventure but compared to their oceanic adventures without modern technology, our trip pales in comparison.

Following a few hours of smooth, relaxing sailing covering the 108 miles, the ferry pulled into Port aux Basques. The official beginning of our third and final leg of "On the Road for Quality Care." Just as Winnipeg was the end point of the first summer and the send-off point for the second summer, Sydney took on the same role for the second and third portion of the trip. Both places had been a beehive of activity. The enthusiasm of the day care community was amazing.

We waited until the motorized traffic debarked. I used this time to call Corriene Murphy. She had taken on the responsibility to schedule our Newfoundland events. Not an enviable task. She had faxed the list of events to Sharon but I wanted to confirm that nothing had changed. She was not at home but her husband stated that a reporter, John Tomkins of the Evening Telegram, requested that I telephone him when I landed in Newfoundland. I dialed the number but there was no answer.

It was now after 7 p.m. and we were faced with about 30 km of cycling to the nearest campground. Sharon expressed some concern that she might slow our progress. She repeated that she wanted to go at her own pace and wanted us to do the same. We would each arrive whenever we arrived. I thought

back to the end of the 1992 summer trip when Sharon, Martha Friendly, and Dorothy Dudek had met us at Eli to bike with us into Winnipeg. Sharon had not biked before. It turned out that the distance was further than Dorothy had thought and since the Mayor of Winnipeg was waiting I was directed to go on by myself as the others, not used to distant biking, couldn't keep up. Harry Martin who had biked with me on the first leg of the trip stayed with Sharon and they eventually arrived but too late for the festivities. It was a courageous act of stick-to-it-ness. She was rightly proud of her personal achievement. Now she was going to bike Newfoundland with us. A real stretch to go from about a 45 km trip to nearly 1600 km!

However there was no need at this point to go at different speeds. We were just heading to a campground. There were no event, interviews, or other appointments that demanded a certain time of arrival. We had not gone very far when we were confronted with a large highway warning sign. The warning was about terrible winds of up to 200 miles per hour that had been known to occur. I couldn't imagine being out in that kind of storm. One guy noticing us looking at the sign pulled over and said: "Take it seriously. I once had the wind blow my transport completely over and I was lucky to survive." I saw him glance sideways at Skooter and I could almost read his mind. My used Alex Moulton bicycle had been the butt of jokes from the start of the trip. It actually is a great bike and I have fallen in love with it. I knew it would be futile to try to convince him that this small bike belonged on these roads.

Sharon kept up a relatively slow but steady pace and we arrived at the campsite shortly after 9 p.m. Certainly no complaints there. Sharon told the lady at the campsite registration office that she had been promised a pass for our group. She had not been informed of this but said she would phone the regional director in the morning.

I used a phone in the park to contact John Tomkins. This time I reached him and we had a nice chat about the trip. More publicity – good.

## TUESDAY JULY 19

We awoke to another pleasant day. The park attendant informed Sharon that she had received confirmation from the Director that we had been awarded passes to their campgrounds. Since there would have been a \$9.00 charge for each tent (a total of \$36 for our group) this represented a significant savings over the course of a few weeks. We were grateful.

She said she would let the next campground, our destination for tonight, know. It was 130 km down the road which meant a late arrival. This was only our second day of cycling. Sharon said she had set a personal goal of 60 km a day. She would then ride with Jean who was driving our vehicle. Tania said she would likely ride part of the day with Jean as well.

This was typical Newfoundland country – at times quite hilly. Considering the hills I wondered to myself if Sharon had not set her goal a bit high. Coming down one hill we saw a sight which is an important feature of Newfoundland – a large moose. I have seen a number of moose on our journey across Canada but the sight is still uncommon enough to make each time exciting. There is something primeval and majestic about this animal that stands out from most of the animal kingdom and speaks to me of Canadian wilderness.

At a rest break about 70 km from our last camp, Sharon joined Jean in the car. She had a triumphant smile on her face. Ten km further than her goal and over difficult terrain as well! Tania also took a couple of breaks from cycling to ride with Jean, This gave Jean a break as well by providing her a little

company, especially when she parked waiting for our arrival. Usually this involved a distance of 20 km or so where we would get a drink and occasionally a cookie or some energy booster.

As we got close to our destination, I appreciated even more what Sharon and Tania had accomplished. The hills were wearing me down, A hundred and thirty km may not seemed like a big deal – having done this distance frequently last summer. I had underestimated the time it takes to get back into shape . One or two days were not enough. We stopped for a break and I turned to Chad, Tania and Barrie and admitted that I was close to hitting the wall. As I uttered these words we glanced down the road and saw a very long steep hill waiting for us. They looked at the hill and then looked at me leaning over my bike and broke into a fit of laughter. They knew I had made a commitment to cycle every foot of the way. There had been times when keeping this commitment was difficult, Surely after all the previous challenges, I couldn't break it now.

Somehow I gritted my teeth and reached the campground. We were a little disappointed to learn that the park had received a letter stating we would not be getting a free pass but would be given a 50% reduction. This of course was still a great help. I know every government department is under pressure to operate as economically as possible.

#### WEDNESDAY JULY 20

Morning found us putting on our rain gear. It was not a heavy rain but one that would soak us in a short time if we didn't have the proper gear. Corner Brook was 62 km away, a nice distance for the day considering the long day we had yesterday. Sharon's parents were going to meet her at Corner Brook and had reserved a hotel room where she could stay the night with them. The rest of us were going to stay the night at the home of Dr. Wayne Eastman who is the coordinator of Early Childhood Education at Westviking College.

About 25 km from Corner Brook, the weather was still miserable. Sharon suggested that we head to the hotel where we could get hot showers. This sounded like an excellent idea. We found the hotel somewhat difficult to find and stopped to ask directions at least twice. It was located at the base of a steep hill. To our surprise Jean was not there. After about an hour waiting for her we became increasingly concerned. Sharon contacted the RCMP and just as they arrived at the hotel, Jean pulled in. She had come to the exit she thought was the right one but wasn't positive. She asked a motorist who told her that the next exit was a better route. Unfortunately it wasn't and this accounted for her delay.

We arrived at Wayne's home and got settled in. We didn't have much time to visit as I was scheduled to conduct an outdoor circle time for children at Bowater Park. Wayne drove me to the park. As stated earlier the weather had not been cooperative. As we arrived at the park it was still drizzling. The circle time had to be cut short but it was still a nice experience with the kids. On the upside, the rain made it possible to have a longer interview with CBC radio and with Frank Carroll, a reporter for the Western Star. The newspaper devoted a good spread, complete with pictures, outlining my thoughts on child care issues. The Western Star had also written articles about our trip prior to our arrival to Corner Brook. Over and over again during the cross Canada trip I found that interest in child care was just as high in smaller cities and in the rural areas as it was in metropolitan areas.

Corner Brook has delightful scenery. It is the second largest city in Newfoundland and is a major producer of pulp and paper. The wood and paper industry was the moving force that brought Corner Brook into existence in 1925. It was only the second Pulp and Paper mill to be built on the west coast following the construction of a mill in Grand Falls. The site was chosen at the mouth of the Humber

River where a small stream ran into the Bay. It was this stream that gave the town its name. The area had been surveyed as early as 1767 by the renowned Captain James Cook.

This evening we had a nice visit with our hosts Wayne and Karen Eastman. Given that we had to have a very early start in the morning in order to travel about 33 km for a nine a.m. appointment at a day care centre, we turned in early. Shortly after retiring for the night an event took place that could have had disastrous consequences for our trip. We were awakened by loud noises around our bicycles. We all rushed down stairs and Barrie being the first to get there scared off the intruders. Thankfully we had wrapped one chain around the bikes and this chain had been yanked almost free in their attempt to get the bikes.

Wayne was surprised as this kind of behaviour was very rare in Corner Brook. He thought it might have been teenagers coming back from a party and on a lark was trying to take the bikes for a joy ride. As long as we could have located them and if there had been no damage it would have not interfered too much with the trip. Anything more sinister would have been terrible. Wayne suggested we move the bikes into his shed.

#### THURSDAY JULY 21

A hectic morning – toast at 6:30 a.m. – Sharon arrived, driven by her father, at 7:30 a.m. – we were off. Originally we had been told it was 25 km to Pasadena but then was told it was 33 km. It was going to be tight. I thought back to Winnipeg when I had been asked to leave the others behind in order to make the appointment with the Mayor. I hoped this was not going to be a repeat performance. I know Sharon would be the first to urge us to go ahead in order to meet the appointment. We would not be faced with this decision for at least an hour – then we could determine how we were doing for time.

Luckily the first estimate of 25 km proved correct. Our group pulled up to the Sugar and Spice Day Care Centre at 8:30 a.m. – a half hour to spare. We had averaged over 25 km an hour. Not bad at all. Kathleen Garrison greeted us and introduced us to the staff and to the parents as they arrived with their children. It was a pleasant visit and they expressed appreciation for being included in our trip schedule. It was mutual – we were glad we had the opportunity to meet them.

We were away by 9:30 a.m. For the next few days there were no community child care events planned. This was our free time. We were headed for Gros Morne National Park. What better place to have a few days to explore and enjoy the Newfoundland wilderness. It was still going to be a long day as we hoped to get to Rocky Harbour by tonight. The distance from Corner Brook to Rocky Harbour is just over a 120 km. - A good distance by bike.

At a rest stop I took a moment to read the messages written in our guest book. The first was from Wayne and Karen Eastman. It read:

“We very much enjoyed your company and want to speak to you, the family, the mountains after the northern peninsula.”

The second message:

“We hope you enjoy the remainder of your trip half as much as we enjoyed meeting you and your family.” Kathleen, Trena. Soyna – Sugar & Spice Day Care Pasadena

An hour down the road we gathered around Jean who had parked for another rest break near Deer Lake. As we relaxed a CBC vehicle pulled up. The reporter said she had been dashing down the

highway in the hope of finding us. This was a pleasant surprise as we didn't have any events planned between here and St. Anthony. The reporter expressed her amazement that we were undertaking such a trip and said she felt she just had to talk with us. The interview lasted a full ten minutes.

The Deer Lake area is one of rugged beauty. It is known as a good salmon fishing destination and commercially is important for its lumber and power producing capacity. It is here we turn north to cycle the unparalleled Northern Peninsula. This is what I have been waiting for with much anticipation. Once the Gulf of St. Lawrence is reached, it has been described as perhaps the most breath-taking drive in Atlantic Canada. It is truly a place of grandeur or as John Muir, the outstanding naturalist, would have said if he had been privileged to visit this rugged awesome spot, "Glorious". John Muir sought out the most untrammelled places on the continent – the wilder the better as far as he was concerned. He often described such places as "Glorious". His editor once timidly suggested he might want to find other adjectives as well to describe these special places. He responded: "Glorious means God Filled. What better adjective would you suggest?" Known as the Father of National Parks, I have no doubt he would have given his full stamp of approval to the setting aside of Gros Morne.

The clear icy waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence with its rocky cliffs and crashing waves, so much wilder and magnificent – so much more austere in its grandeur than it is further south in Quebec and where man's footprint have detracted so much from its wildness. To our right the rugged Long Range Mountains. I love the Canadian Rockies – a priceless treasure. However the Northern Peninsula has not had the degree of tourism and industrial impacts and it is the better for it.

All winter long I had looked forward to cycling Newfoundland. So many things it offers. Fishing communities, austere landscapes, beautiful but often hostile coastlines, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the Atlantic Ocean, fascinating and unique histories, its people with stories I wanted to hear. I didn't want to miss any of it. Yet the one thing that kept coming to mind was Gros Morne National Park with its fresh-water fjords, towering cliffs, mountains, its wildness. Now we had turned north heading for the Park. All of us to some extent wondered what we were in for. I suspect Chad and Barrie were not dwelling on the difficulty of the climbs. Both were young and fit. Chad having the Cape Breton Trail behind him. Nevertheless at least a dozen people had warned us about the hills. I had hoped that those who were familiar with the Northern Peninsula, and given that Chad and I had successfully cycled to the top of all the passes on the Cabot Trail, they would have said we would face nothing as bad or at least no worse than what the Cabot Trail had to offer. Not so! Some still expressed serious reservations. I have stubbornly cycled every peak in our trek across Canada – admittedly exhausted on more than one occasion.

I didn't want Newfoundland to deny Skooter and me these bragging rights. I am sure Tania had doubts but she was quite prepared to climb into the Mazda if the hills proved too tiring. Perhaps Sharon, having the least amount of cycling miles under her belt, held the greatest doubts. Her parents were driving as far as Rocky Harbour and were there for her as of course was Jean.

Our discussion soon turned to what we would be facing between Wiltondale and Rocky Harbour. This stretch had the "big" hills. Since there were two vehicles, we decided that each person go at their own pace, take a respite by riding in a vehicle as desired. Sharon's parents would get a cabin for themselves and Sharon so they could have more time visiting with their daughter. The rest of us would get set up in a campsite, each arriving at their own leisure. Then we would either meet at the Park Information Centre or leave a message there.

Not too long out of Wiltondale we came to a big hill. People in the restaurant had warned us about this one. It was a tough hill and what made it worse was the distance – 6 km of climbing. How tough was

it? I find that difficult to answer. I remember when we first started the trip in 1992 we were immediately faced with a long, long climb out of Prince Rupert that had intimidated me. It was hard. However it was the first day of cycling so I can't judge how it would have been if we had months of cycling under our belts. Certainly highways through the Rocky Mountains passes are of high standard and their grades not nearly as steep as would have been true for roads created earlier. Certainly not as steep as the Cabot Trail. Almost every community, where there were high steep hills, residents warned us about their "Suicide Hill" or "Hungry Hill" and other nicknames. Each of these were hard. The Dempster Highway, 600 miles of gravel, going over several passes, provided many challenges. There were tough hills in the Yukon and surprisingly tough ones in Northern Ontario. Even after the passage of days or weeks we found it difficult to compare one against another. Some of us found one harder than another found it. However I tend to think of the Cape Breton Trail to be near the top if not the top. We had been guests of a cycling club who were doing the Cape Breton Trail. They had invited us when they learned about our trip and knew we were headed to Sydney.

I still recall being introduced to their group. Most of them very fit, experienced cyclists. In a group session the evening before they were to start they discussed the protocols. They warned the group about the difficulties – adding the warning that each year a cyclist or two had to be scraped off the walls because they let their speeds get away from them on the down stretches. They also stated that it was best to have at least 21 speeds on their bikes. They took a look at my bike, Skooter. They had a puzzled look and asked how many speeds? I admitted Skooter only had 3 speeds. They looked at each other. Then one said "Well you will be doing a lot of walking!" Then as if to reassure me, said "You will not be alone. We always have a few who end up walking the last portions of the worst hills."

I admit my confidence was shaken. Having come so far and cycling every inch of the way I had assumed the worst was over. So near to the Atlantic Ocean and now questioning if this trail would defeat me. I remember the last hill. I let a few cyclists leave before me as I didn't want to impede their progress. I was half way up, feeling tired, and glanced up hill to see how much further remained. I noticed two or three cyclists had stopped. No they were actually walking their bikes. I dug in deeper and then I noticed a person running towards me, clapping her hands, urging me on. Finally I saw Jean parked at the top. A number had gathered to witness the climb. I was so proud of myself. Jean gave me a big hug. Minutes later we saw Chad making his way up. He smiled and asked "Did you make it all the way?" I could tell he hadn't thought I could do it either. This was the first time I saw him sweating from the exertion. This may be the reason that North Mountain remains fresh in my mind while other mountains have dimmed in my mind with the passage of time.

So yes this hill was tiring. As I made my way to the top Jean passed me with Tania in the car and dropped her off at the top. My verdict – it is tough but not as tough as a few others, including the Cape Breton North Mountain. Tania and I biked together and found it an exciting ride down the other side. Now we faced another steep hill just outside of Rocky Harbour. We took our time and slowly made our way to the top where we stopped for a breather. Chad and Barrie were somewhere ahead of us. I wondered how Sharon was doing and scanned the highway as far as I could see. No sign of her. Then Jean came back and told us that Sharon had decided to catch a ride with her parents and anticipated arriving Rocky Harbour shortly.

Jean went on to reserve a campsite. She arrived at Berry Hill Campground and was told we needed two sites at \$11.50 each. The lady seemed intrigued when Jean mentioned that we would be arriving shortly on bikes. When she discovered the nature of the trip she said: "It's a great cause. As far as I am concerned you are all one family and I will only charge you for one site."

The hill to the campground was fairly steep. Given we had come 178 km I could excuse myself for being weary. I laid down for a half hour nap before supper. After supper we drove into Rocky Harbour

and reserved tickets for the Western Brook Pond Tour – scheduled for 10 a.m. tomorrow. We then went over to the Cabin Sharon's parents had rented but they were not in. We left them a note about our plans for the tour as we hoped they would join us.

Back at camp, three or four people noticing our bikes came over to chat. They expressed sincere interest in the trip and asked many pertinent questions about child care.

Later I mentioned to Barrie that I had been pretty weary by the time I reached the campground and he said he had been tired as well. He discussed the wisdom of going so far in one day, especially so early into the trip and since there had been no appointments that had to be kept. He thought it might have been more enjoyable to have did it in two days and take more time to enjoy the scenery. At the same time he liked the idea of having an extra day to explore the park. This is always the dilemma. If only we had more time. Its rough having to work for a living. Work certainly cuts into one's day. Perhaps Thoreau was right when he questioned why so many would indenture themselves at the expense of their freedom just to have a few extra material things,

## FRIDAY JULY 22

Shortly after going to bed I heard raindrops on the tent. The steady pattern created a pleasant rhythm that is a bit mesmerizing. Soon I was asleep. It rained all night.

The two main things we wanted to do while in Rocky Harbour was the Western Brook Pond Boat Tour and to climb Gros Morne Mountain. The weather was doubtful. At the hotel where we were to purchase the tickets they were not sure if the tour would be going and told us to wait 40 minutes for a final decision. It was a no go so we then booked for the one o'clock tour and waited at the cabin with Sharon and her folks. Things were iffy. One moment it would start to clear but then would take a turn for the worse. Then we decided to book the 4 pm trip. The first part of the afternoon the weather teased us but increasingly it became obvious there would be no tour today. We booked for tomorrow morning. The rest of the day we did what Jean loves to do – visit craft shops. My attention was drawn to a bake sale by a senior citizen group on behalf of a hospital. I purchased a loaf of bread for \$1.50, a pie for \$2.00 and a pair of wool socks for \$7.00. Can't beat the prices and it was for a good cause.

I walked into one of the shops looking for Jean and there she was carefully examining different craft items. Just as we left the shop it began to pour. Luckily Chad, anticipating something like this, had put up the tarp before we left camp. Barrie and Tania took refuge in their tents while Chad worked under the tarp trying to make sure the heavy rainfall would flow off the tarp and not collect in a depression caused by the weight of accumulating water. After supper Jean and I went for water and then did the dishes. She washed and I dried.

The rain continued but slowed to a drizzle. Jean and I, in rain gear, took a stroll to a pond. On the way we were struck with the beauty of wild Irises that provided just the right touch to a perfect nature scene. When we returned we found a couple from Nepean, a suburb of Ottawa, chatting with Chad, Tania and Barrie. One nice thing about campgrounds is the number of times you strike up conversations with interesting people that you otherwise would not have met.

## SATURDAY JULY 23

Disappointment – the weather is still miserable. Time is running out. We will have to be on our way by late Sunday or certainly by early Monday morning. The two things we want to do while here are weather dependent. The boat tour does not go if the visibility is poor. It wouldn't make sense to do so. Likewise the Park officials do not want people hiking in poor visibility on Gros Morne Mountain. At

2644 feet, it is the second highest mountain in Newfoundland. It is rated as a fairly strenuous climb and has not had, thankfully from my point of view, much trail building. Apparently it is relatively easy to find your way to the top but if the clouds descend the return down the mountain can be dangerous. The officials told us that in such circumstances it is easy to get lost and added "It's not a place where you would want to get lost.!"

I am pleased that they do not have well marked, man-made trails. There is an essential role for wild places that feed the soul as no cultivated gardens or engineered forests can. To walk among old growth, multi dimensional, diverse landscapes shaped by natural processes – self governed - brings a mystery – an awesome humbling sentiment that you can't explain. Occasionally people misquote Thoreau. They quote him as saying that in wilderness is the preservation of the world. He actually said "in wildness" is the preservation of the world. There is a feeling of freedom in wildness – a balm to the over regulated lives that we live.

I think it was Mark Twain who said that in the beginning God created man and man has been returning the favour ever since. Someone else said a true forest is like a trillion piece jigsaw and the deeper we delve into its intricacies the more humbled and awestruck we become. We need places where we do not see reflections of human design but see something powerful, primeval, moved by forces long before humans made their appearance – eons of accumulated wisdom.

At any rate it would not make sense to climb the mountain when we could not be able to see the vistas from the top. We re-booked the Western Brook Pond once again for tomorrow.

There are other marvellous places to visit in the area. With this in mind we drove the Trout River road to the trail head leading to Green Gardens. Jean privately expressed her concern to me. The hike has been described as strenuous if one attempted to do the round hike in one day. She, both last summer and on this trip, provided the vehicle back-up and had little opportunity to get in shape. Certainly not like the rest of us. The problem as she saw it was that we would start hiking down the trail which is easier and she may find herself unable to manage the difficult return climb. I assured her that I would go at her pace. If the trail is easy to read she could always turn back, take pictures on the way and enjoy the outing. Jean is not one to be afraid to walk alone. If the trail is difficult to read she could find a spot to wait for us. Failing that I would return with her while the others continued. She was okay with this – she just didn't want to spoil it for others.

Green Gardens got its name from the long lush green meadows caught between the high ridge forests, the impressive volcanic cliffs, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence below. It is located between Trout River and the mouth of Bonne Bay and includes a three mile stretch of coast line.

When we started our hike the visibility left something to be desired but at least it was not raining. The trail took us over a rocky section with boulders placed without any particular pattern. It then led to a bare ridge where we reached a junction. We chose the more southerly trail which took us from an elevation of about 750 feet down to the sea. We picked our way carefully as the trail was steep and wet from the rain. A fall could cause injury due to the roughness of the stone clustered trail. We found ourselves going through a valley and then along delightful wooded slopes. Finally we came to the Gulf – it had taken about an hour fifteen minutes. Not bad time. It was now 11:30 a.m. and although we wanted to savour the experience we didn't have too much time to dally.

The beach was deserted. That is in terms of humans, we had it to ourselves. The beach itself had piles of driftwood and we kept being attracted to various seaweeds and other things dropped on the beach by the crashing waves. The waves were not huge. The visibility was not great so you seemed to be looking out into a mist covered void or expanse. Looking in-land one was taken with the high and

varied cliff forms. Made from volcanic activity, they presented interesting colours ranging from black, white, and red hues. As we continued to hike along the beach the tremendous sea stacks acted like a magnet. Short of time, we hurried faster than we would have liked in order to get a close up view. It is a shame we didn't have more time to spend a night here. By the time we reached the sea stacks we had been on the beach about half an hour and then it started to rain. The rain was a bit cold made worse by the breeze coming off the water.

On the climb back, Jean found the trail tiring, especially on the steepest parts. I was surprised she didn't opt to stop for longer rests. She may not be in shape but she does have good stamina. It only took fifteen minutes longer to ascend the trail than it did to descend. I had estimated it would have taken double the time. We all agreed it was a fine a hike as one would find anywhere.

We got back in the Mazda and dove to Trout River to a nice restaurant looking over the seaside. It is only opened from Mother's Day to September. The combination food plate was delicious and the view was something most establishments would die for. The owner came by and chatted and left me with one memorable quote: "Only mainlanders would hike in weather like this."

It was still drizzling at 5 pm when we got back to camp. Jean went for a shower and the rest of us retired to our respective tents. I noticed Chad was reading his Tom Brown Book.

## SUNDAY JULY 24

Today is our last chance to see the Western Brook Pond. There is the possibility that we might still be able to do it on our way back from St. Anthony. The people at the hotel said they were hopeful but didn't know for sure. In fact they didn't think it would be known until the very last moment. They suggested we walk the 3 km trail from the parking lot to the launch site which included crossing a wooden sidewalk across the bog. It was a pleasant walk.

Sharon's parents had taken her bike to our campsite and then drove her to the parking lot so she would join us if the tour went. They were leaving having enjoyed the journey. It was nice they could share the beautifully unique Northern Peninsula scenery with Sharon.

As we arrived at the launch site it was raining but the fog didn't seem as severe. To the last second they were uncertain and then made the decision to go. We could see the great gorge in the distance but just barely. The mist shrouded lake gave a feeling of the mysterious which was very inviting. As we entered the gorge the cliff edges at the top could barely be made out. The magnificent walls were straight as if they had been cut in two and then the space between filled with black-blue water of unknown depth. The sides of the cliffs, in places, reminded me of the Grand Canyon.

This fresh water fjord lies at the bottom of the Long Range Mountains at the very point the mountains reach their highest elevation. A full 2000 feet drop down a sheer cliff. First I heard and then saw a stream rushing into the far end of the pond. The high waterfall appeared as if it was coming out of the rocks itself and then dropped straight down into the water. We were told that at the far end of the gorge was the spot hikers are dropped off to make their way to the top to begin a multi-day hike. It was obviously the only place in the gorge that offered a way out. I would love to take this hike. Oh, if only life was not so fleeting. The tour guide tells us that these massive cliffs are a billion years old.

Too soon the two and half hour tour is over. It would be nice to see it in clear sunshine where our views would not be obstructed by mist and where the sun would play its magic in the shades and hues upon the rock and water. Nevertheless there is something a bit primeval peering through the mist and from time to time have the mountain cliffs break through. We were glad we had come.

At the parking lot we piled into the Mazda (three in front and three in back) to drive to the Berry Hill Campsite, had lunch, packed the trailer, and was on our bikes by 4 p.m. Our destination, Shallow Bay, was 50 km away. This is a fair distance to be covered before dark. It felt good to be on Skooter again. The first 20 km was easy due to the tailwind but during the next 20 km the wind generally seemed to be against us. Not terribly against us but still making its effects known. I am impressed how well Sharon is doing. Although each of us are going at our own pace knowing that Jean will look after any stragglers, Sharon is never at any point more than three or four minutes behind and she ended up biking the whole 50 km.

We were a little taken back by the attendant who said that he had to charge us \$8.50 per tent. We had been spoiled by the Berry Hill Campground who had only charged for one site. Here they were charging for 4 sites. It does seem a little discriminatory. Cyclists have small tents. Someone with a gas guzzling SUV or a motor-home takes up the room of several small tents. Cyclists are environmentally friendly and have a light foot-print. One would like to think that government policy would encourage such environmentally friendly approaches or at least not penalize it. Sharon is sensitive to injustices but neither she nor I forcibly argued our position. The attendant seemed to enjoy the discussion and appeared sympathetic but of course like every place the front-line person has very little leeway.

He actually encouraged us to fill out a suggestion/criticism form. I got the impression he would especially like to see the reaction from his superiors in light of how a private campground had handled the situation.

## MONDAY JULY 26

Monday morning presented itself cloaked in sunshine. Sharon left about five minutes ahead of us wanting to have a head start. The next 60 km, biking wise, proved to be three different experiences. The first 20 km was easy with favourable wind conditions, the next 20 km was neutral and the last 20 km was harder.

We stopped for lunch at Daniel's Harbour. A person struck up a conversation about our trip and said that the wind may be worse when the highway juts closer to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence. This turned out to be true but in my mind was offset by the expansive ocean side views. The Gulf is wide for this whole section and doesn't narrow until we reached St. Barb.

Biking at our own pace unfolded naturally. It was special to have so much time to soak in this awesome environment. Beauty layered upon beauty. I can't imagine any scene that would surpass the views of the Northern Peninsula. Riding a bicycle brings you so close – so immersed in all the elements – the breezes, the smells, the sun, the feel of everything. It is like staring into a beautiful painting but which you could step into and be part of. It wasn't that I have not seen picturesque coastlines before. On a number of occasions I have driven the Eastern Seaboard as well as some magnificent ocean drives on the West Coast. This was indescribably different. Primeval, aloof, oblivious to man. It was sufficiently stark as to strike a mortal blow into our human false sense of being the pinnacle of creation. Much of what confronted my senses made me realize that this was largely what I might have seen five or ten thousand years ago. Not there for us but for its own sake.

The Dempster country in the NWT and Yukon brought forth similar feelings. Perhaps this is kin to what Thoreau experienced at the top of Mt. Katahdin. It was the first time he had encountered nature

untouched by man in all its aloofness and indifference to man. He felt alienated from it. He was so much a product of a sanitized rural area that this encounter affected him deeply. It was wildness beyond anything he had experienced.

Not that I was having this kind of epiphany but it did bring the realization of how special such places are and which also produces the sinking feeling of how rapidly such places are disappearing. We have been brain washed into thinking that all growth is good – unreservedly good. Good for business – good for our importance in the scheme of things. It is a bit irrational. Consider how many people flee the cities whenever they can. They want their little piece of nature. Yet what small town or county doesn't put forth efforts to attract business and growth. The result ultimately is the same thing the residents had fled from in the first place. We have deep longing for solitude and natural beauty. It is only when we are re-exposed to nature we realize how deadening the mundane artifacts of civilization can be. Some have never known anything but the paved streets with perhaps the odd street lined with trees. I have been struck by Japanese and European tourists who travel thousands of miles to experience the remnants of our wilderness.

It is normal to be blinded by the appeal of good wages when a major oil or mineral strike is made. We seldom ask what might our great-grandchildren have liked us to do. Would they be pleased that we traded this wildness splendour, the majestic silence, the inexorable power of nature to speak to the very essence of our souls to be replaced by denuded forests, paved over parking lots, high density populations. The man-made structures are said to be worth billions, no trillions of dollars, but this God given beauty is considered an economic wasteland. What despoiling arrogance.

This 'On The Road Tour' has reopened my eyes. I think back to being the first cyclist to bike the relatively new road (as in 1992) from Ft. Nelson to Ft. Simpson. Twenty five years before that I kayaked from Ft. Nelson to Fort Simpson and there were no roads in or out. In the first leg of the On The Road trip we kayaked from Ft. Simpson to the Arctic Red River – a distance of 1200 km. There were no roads. However even then we saw development underway to build a highway. In my lifetime I have witnessed these changes and the tentacles of civilization changing cultures, landscapes – changing everything. Soon there will be none who will have known what has been lost. Perhaps it is well that they won't remember. It may be better, like Esau of old, not to realize we have traded our birth right for a bowl of porridge.

Biking alone in such a setting seems to bring out philosophical ramblings.

We travelled 125 km and were feeling a bit worse for wear. The decision is taken to look for a suitable campsite. I had gone about 18 km when I saw Jean coming back with Tania in the car. She said that they saw one possible spot about 6 km down the road. She said Chad and Barrie were going on another couple of km to see if there was anything better.

Tania flags Jean down after 120 km of cycling. This represents a personal best for her. Her previous record had been 96 km. They are now heading back to pick up Sharon. The last time Jean spoke with her she had said she was trying to make 100 km. It turned out she did 115 km – a new record for her too.

Chad and Barrie located a gravel pit overlooking the ocean which they thought was the better of the two sites. Chad, Barrie and myself had cycle 144 km. A long day considering the detrimental wind conditions.

After setting up camp Jean, Sharon and I decided to walk across the highway and down to the ocean to fetch water for dishes. I led the way and was soon into patches of seaweed. They looked like it they

may be slippery. I gingerly tested it with one foot. It was indeed slippery. I decided against trying to make my way down the slope to the ocean and turned to a pool of water that had been created by the actions of a recent storm. I turned around to warn Jean and Sharon to watch out for the seaweed. Just as I called out, down went Sharon. Somehow she managed to fall without hurting herself. I am not sure how as the rocks are very sharp.

The plan tomorrow is to reach the ferry at St. Barb and take it across to Quebec and Labrador border and bike to Red Bay at the end of the road. Jean had phoned the ferry service and was told we had to be there at least one hour before the scheduled crossing.

What a pleasant evening sitting around a campfire. I sat for a period of time entranced by the ocean scene. A gravel pit seems like a strange spot for a campsite. I had previously been told that gravel pits were the Newfoundlander's campsites. I thought the person was joking but was assured that he wasn't. I can see this. It is an easy place to park and is often located close to splendid scenery and to boot no camping fees.

#### THURSDAY JULY 26

Away by 8:10 a.m. with 50 km to the ferry. On the way I stopped at Tucker's Garage. An elderly man, the owner, came out to look at Skooter. He introduced himself as Harold and inquired about the trip. He said he was 68 years of age and had never seen anything like Skooter. He wasn't impressed.

“You must have picked it out without trying the others! Can't tell me that smaller wheels are faster. I had a log cutting wheel and it was the big wheel that did the work. I tell you boy, when you get to Labrador you will ride in the car. You didn't do the hills in Gros Morne, did you?”

We bantered back and forth until the others pulled in. Harold looked them over and turned to me: “I thought you were the Skipper Boy.” I laughed. I have been called many things – some complimentary and some not. Skipper Boy was a new one.

We reached the Ferry at 10:20 a.m. Two hours and ten minutes to cover 50 km – not bad at all. I don't think Sharon believed at the beginning of the trip that she would be averaging this kind of speed.

There was a delay getting on the ferry due to some problem in loading of a big truck. Crossing over the Strait of Belle Isle we debarked and stopped for a sandwich in the Baker's Delight in Blanc Sablon at the Quebec/Labrador border. There was a big hill going out of town. Sharon left before us to get a ahead start. It proved to be a tough climb and I got to the top of the hill just in time to see Sharon's bike being loaded into the trailer. From a distance I figured she was tired and decided to ride. That would not be a surprise as it was a gruelling climb. To make matters much worse the flies were out in full force. Going slowly up a steep grade make it almost impossible to take your hand off the handle bars to swat the flies as you would lose control of the bike. As I got close I saw blood streaming down her face. Oh no! She's had an accident. I got to the car and hopped off the bike to see how bad her injuries had been. No injuries, It was the work of the vicious flies. At the first town, Lanse-au-Clair, we took a break to visit craft shops. We couldn't help but notice that there was another big hill leaving town,

After our break Tania decided she would bike a little further. It too was a bad hill and I was now taking Harold's warning about big hills to heart. I have heard so many prophecies about Skooter not being able to make the next “Monster Hill” that I had quit giving them much credence. Maybe this time Harold might prove right. Not about Skooter but about there being tremendous hills to challenge us. I was riding beside Tania and before we reached the top of this second hill she told me that she had made

a mistake and now wished she had got in the car. At 30 km, where Jean was parked, she did just that. Barrie joined her as well. The weather was warm when we started out and Barrie was biking in cycling shorts and a sleeveless shirt. Then a blast of arctic air descended along with a hard rain. One would think that the upside of the cold air would be to slow the bugs down. No way! It just seemed to make them more ferocious. Barrie said it would be insane for him to continue with the clothes he had on – no protection from the elements nor from the bugs.

I couldn't believe it. The next few hills were even harder. I have been in the Yukon, the NWT, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec and therefore know something about bugs. I have never – NEVER - experienced bugs like this. Going uphill was a killer and the bugs took full advantage of my slow speed. Every outdoor's person is aware that bugs are attracted to heat and sweat. The conditions were perfect – for them that is. Struggling to the top I eagerly looked forward to going down the other side. By coasting down the steep hill I would be free from the physical exertion required to climb the hill and outrun the bugs. A win – win scenario. What I didn't reckon on was a very different and scary situation. The down hill was not only steep but had sharp dangerous curves.

Skooter's brakes are questionable at best and these rain soaked road were slippery. What a hair-raising experience. When Chad and I pulled up to the parked car we seemed equally miserable. Jean rolled down her a window a crack as she didn't want the bugs swarming inside. She said there was a town 20 km down the road and suggested getting a cabin. She asked "Can you guys hang on until then." "We will try – you go ahead and get the cabin and we will be there as fast as we can."

Chad and I continued in silent misery. Neither of us had seen the like before. It was hellish!. Finally we saw the town of West Modeste. Bad news. No vacancies. The motel owner kindly telephoned Red Bay and we were fortunate enough to reserve their last cabin.

It was still 38 km away and both of us had enough of biking. I felt discouraged. I wanted to be able to say when the trip was over that I had biked every step of the way. Over coffee at the cafe in West Modeste I talked privately to Jean. "Would you consider getting up early tomorrow and drive me back here so I could bike to Red Bay before breakfast. It shouldn't take more than 2 hours. The others could sleep in. Jean didn't mind telling me that I was nuts but also knew it meant a lot to me. All six of us piled into the Mazda. It was very cramped but anything beats the bugs. It was great to get into the cabin.

#### WEDNESDAY JULY 27

I was up at 6 a.m. and was surprised to see Chad up as well, He had decided to join me. Jean drove us back to St. Modeste. We arrived at 7:15 a.m. planning to have breakfast at the restaurant before heading back. No luck. It was not open. The conditions were not much better. It was overcast but at least was not raining. We were also better dressed to face the onslaught of bugs.

The country side has its own beauty. It is still hilly but not as big as the previous ones. We arrived back to the cabin by 9:30 a.m. and joined the others for breakfast. Biking time an hour and fifteen minutes.

A lady, who we had seen on the ferry, walked over from the cabin next to ours. She said she had been thinking about us. "How in the world did you bike in these nightmarish conditions."

She was from Halifax and was very interested in hearing about our trip. She, herself, was an adventurous type. She had hiked to the top of Gros Morne and also the Green Gardens. She was car

camping. She described last night as an Alfred Hitchcock movie. When she parked her car at the Pinware Provincial Campground the bugs were so thick she couldn't see through her car windows.

"There was no way I could possibly set up a tent. The only thing I could do was to spend an uncomfortable night in the car squeezed somehow among all my stuff. Then this couple who I had met on the Ferry drove in and said they had rented a cabin and I was welcome to share it with them. Thank God for these good Samaritans!"

We visited the tourist centre and looked over the exhibits and watched their featured film. Red Bay is at the end of the 50 mile highway from the Ferry. It is rich in history. In the 1500's Basque whalers took advantage of the untouched virgin ocean resources. Work is currently underway excavating the remains of their whaling station. A Basques galleon sank here in the mid 1500's and its remains were discovered near the harbour and had been well preserved by the cold waters. It is considered to be the oldest known shipwreck north of the Caribbean. From the shipwreck a considerable amount of valuable information has been garnered concerning the life of the estimated 2000 men who caught and processed the whales at the height of their activity. The town got its name from the prominent red coloured cliffs.

In spite of the bugs I was pleased that we included this stretch of Labrador. Staff at the Information Centre seemed interested in our trip as well.

We left at 1:30 p.m. and the weather took another turn, The mist rolled in and soon we couldn't see more than a few feet ahead. We were all in the car (we only bike one way). It was a slow nerve wracking ride as we made our way back to the Ferry. I was glad Chad was driving, He seems to have nerves of steel.

Once on the Ferry it began to pour. Since it would be getting close to supper time when we arrived in Newfoundland, we decided it made sense to splurge on a hotel room in St. Barbe. With the bike I could get off more quickly than cars and told Jean I would rush to the hotel to book a room as we were sure others on the Ferry might have the same idea. None of us wanted to bike in the rain just to get a couple hours down the road. Not that biking in the rain would be bad but putting up the tents, preparing supper, and likely taking the tents down the next morning in the rain was not appealing.

At the registration desk the clerk told me there were two rooms left. Before I could open my mouth the couple behind me yelled out that they wanted one of them. The clerk asked how many were in my party. When I told her she said: "Oh I heard about your bike group. Something about child care isn't it?" She smiled and advised that they had one housekeeping cabin left that would be much better for us.

#### THURSDAY JULY 28

I looked out the window. Good its not raining. Following an early breakfast Sharon left a few minutes before us. She stated "I like to get a head start as I am not the fastest cyclist in the group. As I am sure you have noticed." She laughed and was on her way.

It was about one and a half km to the main highway and we faced a bit of a head-wind. However upon reaching the highway and turning north the wind was at our backs. It was heavenly. Soon I caught up to Sharon. She said "I didn't expect you to catch me so soon. I guess I am going to have to pick up my speed." "No Chad, Tania and Barrie are not going to leave right away. Just enjoy the day. We will all end up at the same campsite. Jean will make sure of that." She replied: "I am really enjoying it. So nice to be away from the bugs."

A few kilometres further found me flying down a hill – I feel like an eagle – this is great! I glanced at the odometer and it reads 53 kph. Hey! And I am not even peddling. Then suddenly a gust of wind hit me broadside and for an instant I lost complete control. I have never had a freak twist of wind hit me with such force. I immediately, with my heart in my throat, slowed down. I began to worry about Sharon and Tania. A few km's later Chad caught up. A minute or so later we saw Barrie sprinting to catch up. He said he had stopped when he saw Tania walking her bike. She said she was taking a breather. She then admitted that the gusts of cross-winds had shaken her confidence. The winds had taken the strength from her arms. She asked Barrie to let us know.

This could be a problem. If she can't cycle it's too far to walk the 10 km where Jean would be waiting. Our thoughts also turned to Sharon – was she in the same boat? I suggested that Barrie and I cycle to where Jean was waiting so she could come looking for both of them.. Chad was going to wait for Tania. As we pulled out I suggested to Barrie, since he was faster, to go ahead. He began to motor and I did my best to keep up. I did so for awhile but on the flats he gradually increased the distance between us.

Still I was only a minute behind when he reached Jean. Barrie was just pulling out of the service station where Jean was parked. I wondered where he was heading. Jean pulled out and stopped to ask me to stay at the service station while she went looking for Tania and Sharon. Barrie was going to scout for a possible campsite.

I noticed a drift log and decided to sit there to wait. The ocean was the essence of wild and free – whitecaps while the sky above was dotted with windblown clouds – like rudderless boats.

I saw Tania and Chad approaching the service station. Tania said she had only walked a couple of short distances. “Just when the gusts seemed too strong.” She was in a good mood. Jean pulled in and said that Sharon was only a couple of km back and didn't want a ride. Jean told of watching one guy trying to bike against the wind and he was actually panting. Tania thought it must have been the same guy she had seen. He was no longer cycling but hitch hiking. Chad told of watching a bird trying to fly against the wind was hardly moving.

Someone had warned Jean: “Watch out for the moose, especially at night.” A mile or two down the road we came across Barrie enjoying the ocean views. He joined us and a few miles down the road saw our car parked next to a building. No surprise to find Jean parked there. It was a craft store – a magnet to Jean. They had some very impressive boots and gloves made from seal-skin. The lady went into interesting details about their workmanship and advantageous qualities. Among them, without the fur, the boots were waterproof.

Everyone was in excellent spirits. The wind remained at our backs and the sun had come out. I soon stopped to take off my jacket. Chad studied the map and thought the highway looped back toward St. Anthony which suggests that the wind may be against us for the last ten km. Given the strength of the wind we groaned at the prospect.

Fortunately our fears were not realized and the wind was either with us or at least not against us except for perhaps a half km. Jean had told Sharon we would wait for her at the outskirts of town. There was a pay phone so I made contact with Jenna Johnson. “Are you here already? I didn't expect you until later this evening” I explained the tail wind. Someone had previously mentioned that there was a campground near the Viking College. Jenna said there wasn't but there was a new one called Tripple Rock back down the highway. I phoned and made reservations.

Having already biked this stretch we put our bikes on the car racks and drove back. We came across Sharon walking the last hill. She had made it to the St. Anthony's sign. She stated: "I have truly enjoyed the day but have started to feel a few body signs telling me I am tired."

What a nice campground. Only \$10.70 for our site. There were no charges for showers or laundry. The owner said if the weather turns nasty we were welcome to spend the night in the games room where we could play movies on the VCR. Very friendly and hospitable.

FRIDAY JULY 20

St Anthony is near the top of the Northern Peninsula. Originally settled in the mid 1800's by fishermen. Dr. Grenfell chose a small hospital in St. Anthony to be the headquarters of the International Grenfell Association. He is a Canadian icon. No doctor's name is better known in Newfoundland and this likely holds true in all of Canada with perhaps the exception of Banting and Best. To me his life is the most fascinating. He was a medical missionary and his team of doctors and nurses served northern Newfoundland and the coast of Labrador – their acts of courage and heroism is unmatched.

Jenna Johnson was expecting us at 9 a.m at the day care centre in West Viking College. Sharon and I arrived on time and saw a sign at the front pointing to the day care entrance. Walking into the centre we seemed to have caught the staff off guard. Upon learning that we had not come in the back way as they had anticipated, we were quickly ushered outside to the back. They smiled as we took in all the signs the children had created to welcome us. The kids were excited having planned for the event days in advance. A reporter was stationed to take our pictures when we made our entrance.

We had a great time with the children and enjoyed meeting the parents who were able to be there. One child shouted: "Tell us a Skooter story." I suspect Sharon might have told Jenna about Skooter being a hit at various day care centres and she had passed it on to the kids. I did and the children seemed enthralled with the stories. Their eyes were riveted on Skooter as they tried to imagine all the places he had been and to receive his greetings from children from as far away as the Yukon and NWT.

Skooter has proven a great prop. One child brought a smile to my face as he somewhat timidly asked: "Hey boy, how do you know what Skooter is saying?" I replied: "I use my imagination. Perhaps you have had a stuffed teddy bear that you loved. You talked with him and although you knew he wasn't really alive but in a sense he was your personal friend." I then told how I developed this kind of friendship with Skooter.

When we first started this trip people laughed at him. He was funny looking. One person said he belonged in a circus not on a real wilderness adventure. He would never be able to go so far or climb such big hills. You know some people said the same thing about me. Some said you are too old to bike across Canada. You have never done anything like this before. You don't know what you are getting into – you shouldn't even try. You know something. I will tell you a secret. When I listened to so many friends telling me this was an impossible dream, I at times feared they were right. Sometimes when I came to a big hill and had trouble making it to the top I would think maybe I am silly to try this. If I am not able to do this people will say I told you so and will laugh at me. If I had of listened to them and not even tried then I would not be here today and wouldn't be making friends with you. So Skooter reminds me of myself. He really is small and one might think he couldn't possibly come all this way. But guess what? All those who laughed at him were wrong. There were times struggling to get to the top of the hill and it seemed so far to the top I would whisper to Skooter "come on old friend we can do it." Just like with your Teddy bear. I felt Skooter was my friend – a psychological support. So imagination is good."

A child gave his approval: "We like you too Skooter." Soon they were gathered around him. Honking his horn and speaking to him as a friend.

One parent stands out in my memory. He had red hair and beard and began to share his experiences. He and his wife needed someone to look after their children and had tried sitters both in their home and outside their home. He was grateful to them but "What I now have at this centre is reliability and I can't believe how much they are learning and how much they love this centre." He continued; "I am sure many think that small places in remote areas would not need day care centres. I myself believed this until I witnessed the difference. Please keep up the good work. Your message is important."

I replied that I have been in the field for more than two decades and knew that child care was needed in rural areas but admitted I was pleasantly surprised at the enthusiasm and support showed to us on this trip. This held true even in areas where we went by inflatable kayaks because there were no roads in or out.

One of the staff talking to Jean told her about a whale watching boat tour that we might find interesting. After we said good bye to the children and staff we booked the 6 p.m. whale boat tour. We arrived back at the campground shortly after 11 a.m.

The next thing on our agenda was to visit L'Anse aux Meadows, a historic site of the first Viking settlement in North America. I thought it was 13 or 14 km away and suggested to Jean that she might want to bike it with us. She had not done any biking on this trip and this offered her a chance for some exercise. Chad was willing to drive.

We had only peddled one km or so to the junction and the sign pointing to the historic site revealed it to be 29 km. Jean wilted. "I can't go that far! I will try to make it half way then it will be my turn to climb into the car." Then came a few hills, Jean made them all. At 15 km, the halfway point, Chad pulled up in the car. The wind had been with us and in spite of the hills Jean was holding up fairly well. I asked if she wanted to continue and she thought she might be able to do it. I thought of Meralynne Gammon who last summer had planned to bike half way to a campground with us and to our and her surprise ended up going the whole way.

Barrie was impressed and went ahead to wait at the top of the next hill to capture his mother actually biking up the hill.

At about the 22 km mark the wind was no longer with us and the hills were taking their toll. She was obviously tired. Then at 28 km, a couple of km shy of our destination, we came to a long hill. Jean said: "I am not sure I can make it Howard." Just before the start of the long climb there was a store and I suggested a ice cream break. "If after the break you don't think you can make it I will go ahead and send Chad back with the car.

It was about a 2 km climb but she made it. Chad was waiting at the turn to the visitor centre. I think he was amazed she had made it. Shes does have a lot of grit.

It is a very interesting place. Archaeologists carbon dated the ruins to around 1000 A.D. The Viking site has been restored and recognized by UNESCO. There is a replica of Viking mounds, sod and peat covered housing. There are side rooms, cave like with fire pits. Ventilation is through the top of the roof.

Following an early supper we drove to the launch site for the boat tour. We were the only passengers. Consequently we had the owner's sole attention. It was a beautiful evening. Although it had rained a little in the afternoon it was now perfect conditions for whale watching. The whales didn't disappoint. It is always a thrill to be so close to these monarchs of the sea. They seem to be as curious about us as we about them. The owner had suffered as the result of the collapse of the fishery and decided to try his hand at this. He had just started this new business at the beginning of the month and he thought it was already showing promise to become a viable venture.

As he witnessed our enthusiasm at each encounter with the whales, his conversation took on a conservation tone that I found very interesting. I always look forward to obtaining the perspective of those whose livelihoods give them first hand experience that is needed to be heard as the issues are discussed. He was adamant that it had been necessary to ban the hunting of whales. "The Japanese would have taken every last one." He also had strong opinions on other conservation measures. I was a little surprised to hear him say that seals were not, contrary to popular sentiment, destroying the fishery. "They cannot swallow a whole fish any more than we can and they need to bring them to the surface to eat. They are not the cause of the collapse." He didn't think the government program to help the fishing community was completely thought out. His main criticism of the program was its wastefulness. "Many women are getting stamps because on paper their husband fished but in reality were not fishing. So they are getting help they don't deserve and never had it so good. Even if the fish return they wouldn't want it reopened."

The tour was more than worth the money. To me it would have been money well spent just to listen to his experiences and perspective. His stories about the life of a fisherman kept me enthralled. One time about sixteen years ago he went out to the ice floes in a speed boat. He got trapped and was adrift. It took the coast guard several days to locate him. He told of one time being caught in a storm which was so bad that he couldn't see the coastline because the troughs were so high. He had to wait for every third wave. The third wave was not as high as the others and if he took advantage of it he could make a little headway. To me talking to a person of the land and of the sea enriches the trip beyond measure.

I should mention that in addition to having marvellous close encounters with the whales he took us to the cliff caves and showed us active Eagle's nest. As we neared the nest we saw the Eagle flying nearby.

We returned to the campground fully satisfied with the outing. I sincerely hope his business does well.

The owner of the campground shared his experiences with us too. He first started dreaming about opening the campground about twelve years ago. First a service club had tried to make a go of it and then a community developer tried his hand. Both failed. He saw their failures as his opportunity. However the going was much tougher than he anticipated. "The main problem was the government red tape. It was unbelievable and the bureaucratic delays were something else. Finally I said I am going ahead without permits and ask for forgiveness later."

As I mentioned earlier, he was a great host. A further example of his bending over backward to make our stay a pleasant one occurred when he heard we wanted to visit the Viking site. He hadn't realized most of us were going to bike there. We could hardly believe our ears when he said "Here are the keys to my car take it. You won't be so crowded with two cars."

The people you meet on a trip like ours add a dimension of richness that is immeasurable. Cycling opens up so many opportunities to meet people and this is certainly increased when a cause like quality child care is involved.

Before turning in for the night I bought my dairy up to date. Then I glanced at the guest book. The last note was signed by Gina and Tracy, Riddles & Rhymes Day Care, St. Anthony, N.F.

“Thank you for coming to visit. The children have been looking forward to seeing you. Good luck on the rest of your trip.”

## SATURDAY JULY 30

We were away by 8 a.m. but first said our goodbyes to Sharon. As planned she was taking the ferry back down the coast to Lewisport and would meet us at Springdale. Hugs and best wishes and we were off. Having biked all the way to St. Anthony, we were driving back to the spot where we had not biked. The day started overcast and then a slight rain. The rain stopped about half way to Rocky Harbour and considering there were five adults packed into the small Mazda 323 we enjoyed the drive back. Such a different experience from cycling.

Twice within the first hour we saw a moose. The first crossed the highway at a trot and the other was a hundred yards off to our right. In the drizzle and slight mist, its large antlers, long snout, and baggy beard (bell) gave us the impression of staring through a curtain into a prehistoric past.

We stopped at a restaurant for breakfast. I stared out the window, still mesmerized by the sea. I thought back to the days when it was claimed a person could dip a pail and catch a cod. It's strange we are such a short-sighted species. Its hard to imagine a time when these ocean waters thrashed with fish. Perhaps it is understandable that at that time the supply seemed infinite.

It reminded me of a famous lumber baron in Ottawa who boasted that there was enough white pine in the Ottawa Valley to meet the needs of the whole world for a thousand years. How wrong! How utterly wrong! Today it is difficult to find small patches of old growth white pine, the emblem of Ontario, in the Ottawa Valley or elsewhere in the province. Even where these small patches exist the environmental groups still have a battle to protect them. Gobbling up natural resources for short term gain blinds us to our future prospects. When the resources run out who is left with the despoiled environment? Not the international companies. It is heart-breaking to read and hear tales of Newfoundlanders not even being able to fish for their family's supper.

We arrived at Rocky Harbour around one o'clock. We had hoped to climb Gross Morne Mountain. Nature was not in a dickering mood. Mists coming down the mountain foiled our plans. So instead we drove though the park and rented a cabin about a mile from Wiltendale.

Having secured the cabin we drove to Woody Point to hike to Big Lookout. The trail proceeds along the base of the hill and then takes a turn leading us down through a treed path. Then we start up a steep rocky slope. An hour and a half later we are rewarded with a fantastic view. We could see for miles. On a sunny day I am sure we would see even further. As it was, some of the details of the distant hills were lost from view. Magnificent nevertheless. From our shaggy rocky outcropping Bonne Bay presented a picture card like splendour. No wonder Bonne Bay is highlighted over and over again in the tourism literature. Oh to have more time. Jean said “I have just caught my breath and we have to descend.”

We climbed into the Mazda and headed to Trout River for supper. On the way we pass tantalizingly close to the Tablelands. Too tantalizing! It was now 5:30 p.m.. “Who's game for a rapid climb to see how far we can get?” Jean said there was no way she could do another hike right on the heels of the

last hike. Tania declined as well. Barrie, who among our group, is the most interested in rocks said: "We won't be able to make it to the top and get back before dark but I would like to go at least part way. Jean responded: "Why don't those who want to hike go and the rest of us relax and enjoy the spot." I looked at Chad. He was ambivalent. Finally he opted to stay with Tania and Jean.

Barrie and I hit the trail hard. What helped is that the highway provided an unusually close access point. When I say we hit the trail hard we actually picked our way up the shortest and easiest route we could find. Our information brochure stated that the summit was only 350 feet lower than Gros Morne. Both Barrie and I were in excellent shape from daily cycling and although breathing heavily from the exertion, we managed, to our surprise, reach the 2000 foot rim of the plateau in well under an hour.

What a delight! Neither of us have ever witnessed any thing quite like it. One could see why they called it the Tableland as from the distance it looks like a mountain that had been sliced and smoothed over into a tabletop plateau. However from the top it looks like a jungle of indiscriminately placed rocks, small and large. On first blush you might think you were on a lunar landscape. The first thought that came to my mind was that this must be what Mars looks like.

There is a reddish hue that reminded me of pictures of Mars. It is truly a delight to the geologist and to the botanist alike. The Tableland is undoubtedly one of the reasons that Gros Morne National Park was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.

The literature states that the Tableland is one of the world's most outstanding demonstration of the forces that shaped the continents of the world. It is no wonder that we felt ourselves to be in alien circumstances standing on the plateau. What we were standing on are what you would find lining the deepest ocean floors. It is a large chunk of the inner earth's mantle that broke loose and was thrust violently upward from many miles beneath the ocean floor – heaved and tossed sideways to finally rest at the top of this plateau.

What rare circumstances for original ecological developments. Only very unique and specialized plants could take advantage of the chemistry that is only found in rocks that really belong deep inside the earth. Not far away is the lush green vegetation of Green Gardens where we had previously hiked. That greenery could not take root or begin to survive on Tableland. Consequently the tiny flowers and plants that exist here face no competition from the surrounding vegetation. Plants so rare that they bring botanists from all over – the rocks a treasure house to the geologists. Oh for more time!

Barrie and I descended quickly not wanting to try to find our way down in darkness. We arrived back at the car at 8:15 p.m. So glad we made the effort. Now on to Trout River for a late supper at the same restaurant we went to following our Green Gardens hike a week ago.

## SUNDAY JULY 31

How quickly the time has gone. Finished biking the length of the great Northern Peninsula and now back into the car to drive to Deer Lake. It was at Deer Lake where we turned North on our bikes just a short 10 days ago. So much has transpired in too short a time frame. Now we get on our bikes to head to Springdale.

We left Deer Lake at 8:25 a.m. and experienced a tail wind for the next 40 km. In spite of climbing hills we averaged a respectable 20 kph. The next 20 km was much harder as the wind was partially against us. We stopped for lunch and then found the wind with us again. A further 65 km – a total of

125 km for the day – brought us to Springdale. I telephoned Judy Rafuse who was to be our host tonight and tomorrow morning.

She gave us directions to her home which was just two and a half km away. We arrived shortly after 3 pm. It felt good to have had a relatively short day of cycling. The evening was spent pleasantly talking with Judy and her husband Jim.

## MONDAY AUGUST 1

Hard to believe, calendar speaking, we are half way through our trip. It's to be a busy morning and will prove to be even more eventful than we imagined. As the detective stories go: "It started out like any other day..." Well not quite. It started out as most of the days do "On The Road for Quality Day Care," Hectic. But more is to come!

We said goodbye to Jim and thanked him for their hospitality. He had to leave about the same time we did in the morning to open his Fitness Centre. Judy took me to the college where we had breakfast with the day care staff. Breakfast was followed by an interview with a reporter who had come to the college to cover my visit. I then lectured at the Early Childhood Education (ECE) class. The class was interested in our trip and had numerous questions and comments about day care issues in their province and across the country. I always enjoy meeting future leaders in our field. It is hard to find a more altruistic group than ECE people. It's hard to buy into the myth that our young people are materialistic and turn their back on social issues when you actually get to meet these students.

Another reporter covered my time with the students and then requested a picture of me and the now famous "Skooter."

It seems surreal dropping in for a few hectic hours and then right back on the bicycles. Before leaving I took a look at the guest book.

"It was great to have you all here. It's nice to see people dedicated to children & families.  
Good luck. Keep in touch."

Judy & Jim Rafuse  
Springdale N.F.

Tania and I were the first to leave and gone less than 3 km when a lady in a car pulled up beside us and said our son had asked her to tell us to stop as it was important for him to catch us. We stopped and soon saw Barrie flying towards us. He informed us that Jean had been in an accident. She wasn't hurt and as far as he could tell the car was okay but there was too much damage to the trailer for it to be used. The other car suffered considerable damage but no one was injured.

Jean had seen a craft shop and thought she would spend half hour or so before catching up to us. She had been stopped waiting for the oncoming traffic to pass. The other driver with his family was returning from vacation and likely driving a little fast. He didn't notice Jean's signal light until the last moment. He slammed into the back of the trailer driving the tongue hard against the Mazda.

When we got back to the scene the police and a tow truck had been called. The police said that since there were no injuries they wouldn't be sending an officer and requested both parties file a report. A reporter who knew about our trip arrived at the same time the Tow truck arrived. The reporter looked at the damage and said: "I guess this puts a serious kink in your plans." It certainly looked that way to me as well. The tow truck driver looked the situation over and said the trailer tongue was caught under the car. He couldn't see any damage to the car but the bumper hitch had been pushed up and did some

damage to the rear of the Mazda. "It shouldn't effect your driving." He added: "If we could get the tongue unjammed without damaging your undercarriage there may be a chance that a welding shop could heat up the tongue and straighten it out.

Once more Chad's mechanical abilities came to the forefront. He is not a mechanic but many times I have witnessed him finding creative solutions to difficult situations. He climbed under the car and managed to free the tongue and then detach it from the trailer. We had no idea if it could be fixed. Chad took charge. He decided to leave the trailer along the highway and drive Jean with the damaged tongue to a repair shop. Both the trailer tongue and the bumper hitch on the car required repairs. He said Barrie and I should continue biking in order to make Grand Falls in time for tomorrow's meeting. He handed Barrie the bike tool kit from the trailer and suggested we take it in case we ran into bike problems.

We still had 90 km to go to reach tonight's campground outside of Grand Falls. We agreed this seemed a sensible plan. Jean was to phone us at the campground once she knew what was happening with the car and trailer. At that point we would be in a position to plan the next step.

The tow truck driver took the other driver's car. The driver was very apologetic. I told him that accidents happen and I was thankful no one was hurt. We shook hands and then Barrie and I were off. Much of the landscape was a blur. I was simply pedalling, mindless to the surroundings, thinking only about this new development. Surely this was not the end of the trip?

I thought back to our last summer's trip when Jean had fallen down a few feet over a ledge on to a paved driveway below and received lacerations to her head. That incident would easily have ended the trip. That too was midway through the leg of the trip. My mind returned to our present predicament. If repairs could not be made to the trailer and to the hitch on the car it was hard to think of how we could manage. The trailer was full to overflowing.

In 1991 a friend recommended a person who worked out of his home garage who he said made excellent custom made trailers. I am thankful he made ours. It was solidly built. Certainly withstanding the heavy impact from the accident would have been much more serious if we had a lesser built one. I don't even want to think about the tragedy that could have been.

Nevertheless we still had problems. If it could not be repaired what could we do? We would have to jettison much of our gear. We had fortunately schedule an extra day in St. Johns. So perhaps that day could be used for biking from St. Johns to Argentia to catch the ferry. Perhaps Sharon could find storage for our bikes in Sydney. The following summer Jean and I could drive to Sydney to retrieve them. My head was spinning.

Last summer we also had another incident that could have ended the last portion of that trip. Skooter broke down in Charlottetown. Things fell into place to fix Skooter and allowed us to get to Sydney. Hopefully somehow this trip would also be able fulfill its destiny.

The wind continued to be somewhat against us and it was a bit hilly but we didn't find it overly hard cycling. About 15 km down the highway we noticed a number of parked cars and people filling their water jugs from a pipe. It must be a spring. The day was warm so I decided to fill my container. Barrie looked at the pipe with some skepticism and decided not to chance it. Another 50 km down the road we saw the same thing. Since I had drank from my container without suffering any consequences both of us filled our containers.

At 65 km we stopped at a restaurant in the town of Badger. Because of all thing things that occurred we had not had anything to eat since breakfast. It was now 2:45 p.m. At least we were making good time. Arriving at the campground around 4: p.m. I asked if any messages had been left. There were none. I telephoned Shirley Shea who was organizing tomorrow's events in Grand Falls. She had heard twice from Jean. The first time was around 1:20 p.m. and Jean had been told that the garage didn't know if they could fix it. Then Shirley heard from Jean at 3:20 p.m. saying it looked more promising and that the shop was doing a lot of welding. Shirley said if she heard anything further she would phoned the campground and leave a message.

At 5:45 p.m. I checked to see if there were any updates. There weren't. I was getting anxious – I should say even more anxious. I wasn't sure how long the shop stayed open. Shortly after 6 p.m. a park officer came by our site and said a guy in a rental truck passed on a message from Jean. Everything was fixed except for a couple of lights. Ahh! Relief.

At 8 p.m. and no Jean. I hoped everything was okay. I know that somethings that seem fixed can fail on a road test. I was glad that Chad and Tania were with her. At 8:30 p.m. a lady park attendant came to our site. Shirley had called to ask if Jean had arrived. Shirley had called her husband (I didn't note in my diary) but I think he was either on the police force or a reporter. He told Shirley there had been no reports of accidents or breakdowns on the highway. She too was getting worried and said she would give it another 15 minutes and if Jean hadn't arrived she would drive to the campground and take us down the highway to look for them.

Fifteen minutes later Chad drove in. Everything was fine. There was some work to be done on the lights, nothing difficult, but the plan was to get it done in Grand Falls while I attended the child care activities. They were fine but exhausted. I quickly called Shirley so she would not have to make an extra trip.

She was relieved. She had already received a number of phone calls from as far away as Lewisporte inquiring about the accident. News travels fast.

## TUESDAY AUGUST 2

Shirley, with a couple of others, came to the campground shortly after 9 a.m. and we followed them to a service station they thought would be able to repair the lights. Jean, Chad, Barrie and Tania were going to look after the repairs and then do a little sight seeing while I went to a park near the "Y".

I was taken back by the size of the group. There were large numbers of children and adults, including two council people and police. The one decision I will never regret is deciding to make the tour for Child Care a remote and rural trip. The main reason I made this decision was that I wanted to combine the sense of adventure of wilderness travel and seeing remote areas that I hadn't previously visited as part of my work responsibilities.

I was of course aware of unmet needs in child care in rural Canada. The farming communities frequently voiced their concerns. Often the family farm was not generating sufficient income and the wife/mother had to work outside the farm. Child care was a pressing problem. Therefore I wasn't surprised to see some interest in child care in rural Canada. It was the size and the enthusiasm of their response to our trip that amazed me. Some towns and even smaller hamlets made our trip an occasion for celebration. Planning of these festivities often took place months in advance and a large proportion of these small communities were energized by it.

This is not to say the larger cities were not equally receptive. All you have to do is look at Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg and Halifax to name a few. In these places too I was overwhelmed by the reception. It is just when you hear over and over that child care is only an urban problem you wonder if that isn't partially true. What the trip is reaffirming is the importance of child care to Canadians whether you live in Toronto, Faro, YT. or small communities in NF. It was truly a trip of celebration from the Pacific ocean to the Atlantic ocean and from the Arctic to the southern border.

Grand Falls is a pulp and paper town situated on the Exploit River and named after the spectacular falls. One can easily understand why this spot was chosen for the first paper mill to be established. Black Spruce, an excellent tree for paper making, was in abundance. The Exploit River was deep and wide allowing the logs to be floated to the falls where the mill was built. The waterfall was powerful enough to generate all the electricity needed to run the machinery. Since then it has developed into an important regional centre.

The children gathered around me in a large circle and were delighted by Skooter stories. What a wonderful prop Skooter has been. I feel almost like a ventriloquist - Skooter by my side became the focus of their attention. A town councillor presented me with a cap and shirt. Then the police provided an escort for us as we paraded about half a mile to the site of additional festivities.

Before lunch I rode Skooter over to the Service Station and found no sign of the Mazda nor of the rest of the crew. I was about to head back to the "Y" when a man on a bicycle pulled up. He was interested in our trip. He said he had once gone to Toronto to find work but hated it. "People would not even give directions. Once I had a break down on the Queen Elizabeth. My sister and I were in the car but out of the thousands passing by not one stopped to see if they could help." His experience in Toronto got worse. "I had made a few acquaintances who I had met in a nearby bar and one time we got to drinking - and then drank a few more. I had a bit too much and when the bar closed I was invited to go with some of them to this fellow's home where we could drink a little more. They asked me to bring my fiddle and then asked me to play it. Somehow in the partying my \$2000 fiddle got broken."

We chatted for a couple minutes longer and he wished me well on the rest of the trip. Meeting complete strangers who immediately treat you as old friends have enriched the trip.

Chad and the rest drove up as I was parking Skooter at the "Y". We enjoyed the good fellowship over lunch. We had to make hurried goodbyes as we were expected to be in Lewisporte - 60 km away - by late afternoon.

Before leaving Grand Falls we took a minute to look at the fish ladder. It is quite the sight.

It was turning into a very hot day. After 5 km of cycling a severe rain storm descended. The rain came down so hot and heavy that the windshield wipers on the cars couldn't handle it. Tania and I were together and going down a long hill when it hit. Chad was somewhere ahead of us. Every vehicle, as far as we could tell, were pulled over and parked by the side of the highway. Barrie suffering from saddle sores had previously decided to ride with Jean and we saw them parked half-way down the hill. The strange thing was that although the cars had absolutely no ability to see through their windshields we could see fairly well on our bikes. Although just coasting down the hill we were going very fast. I glanced at our car and could see Barrie staring out the back window. He was roaring with laughter as we sped past. The rain decreased slightly but was still a downpour. Because it was a warm day, I actually found the rain to be fun. Another 20 km and the rain stopped and the sun suddenly reappeared. Jean was parked a few km down the road and Chad was there as well taking a short break. As soon as we got back on our bikes it started to rain again. Chad had already pushed his bike onto the highway when he noticed he had a flat tire. He told us to go on and he would fix it and catch up.

It was not raining hard but the ominous dark clouds threatened a greater storm. Tania said she was getting a little worried. There were no paved shoulders on this stretch of highway and another heavy rain would make cycling dangerous. Her fears turned into reality. It started to pour but not as bad as when it had forced all vehicles to the side. I was in the lead going down another steep winding hill. Tania watched in horror as to what was transpiring ahead. One vehicle had gone into a skid and rolled into the ditch. As she watched a transport truck was barreling down behind me with no apparent room to pass. It came by so close I literally could have touched it with my elbow. We stopped at the bottom of the hill, both of us shaken. Tania probably more so as she witnessed the whole thing. I think it is often worse watching something about to happen when you are powerless to do anything about it.

I recall how I felt, in fact I relive it often, an experience on the second leg of the trip on a steep hill in northern Ontario. I was leading the way down the hill and Jeff, a ECE student from Winnipeg, was biking with us and was a few hundred yards behind me. The paved shoulder was running out. Behind me, through the mirror on my bike, I could see a transport behind Jeff and it was almost certain to be passing him about the time the paved shoulder ended. Sure enough, the transport truck blasted his horn, forcing Jeff to stay on the shoulder. He would be hitting gravel at high speed. Jeff lost complete control when the bike hit the gravel and to this day neither of us understand how he regained control and avoided a serious accident. It was likely the high speed that kept the bike upright until Jeff managed to regain control. We both stopped. He was obviously shaken by his brush with disaster. I was as well. There is such a feeling of helplessness as you watch with a sinking feeling in your stomach. I often think back as well to the first leg of the journey when a large transport forced me off into the gravel and my bike went down, The wheels of the transport missed my head by inches.

Tania said she will have to take a ride with Jean as soon as we came across her. "My nerves are too shaken to cycle in these conditions." As we rode down the highway the sun suddenly appeared once more and the rain stopped. We had come about 50 km and arrived at the junction to Lewisporte. There was also a familiar and welcomed sight at the turn-off. Sharon in her bike gear waving us over and clapping her hands all the way. There was a parked Jeep next to her., Sharon introduced us to Coralee Colbourne -Wood. She was our contact person and host for our stay in Lewisporte. Sharon had biked the seven miles to the junction. She had planned to bike a lot further to meet us but the periods of heavy rain made her reconsider.

Lewisporte is a deep-water port in Notre Dame Bay. Originally a fishing community it developed into a shipping port and a saw milling centre and today is a major distribution and supply point for the north east coast of Newfoundland. It is here one can catch the ferry to St. Anthony and to Labrador. It was to Lewisporte that Sharon was heading by ferry when she left us at St. Anthony.

Coralee's husband, Paul, treated us to a wonderful supper highlighted by a salmon he had just caught. Delicious! After supper we had to rush to a 7 p.m. meeting at the Happyland Nursery School where Coralee is the supervisor. Coralee expressed her concerns on the way to the meeting. She had accepted the task of organizing the event but was little concerned about possible turn out. Summer events are very difficult to arrange. I tried to assure her that numbers were not a big issue with me. Otherwise we would have taken the southern route across Canada and have went through Toronto. Sometimes visiting with one or two parents prove as informative and are as rewarding, sometimes more so, than with a larger group.

She was visibly relieved when she saw the numbers that showed up. Councillor Jim Snow officially welcomed us to Lewisporte and presented me with the key to Lewisporte. To me this is always such an honour and as in previous cases I accepted the keys in the name of all child care providers.

Then Skooter and I had circle time with the kids. I have yet to find an occasion when Skooter was not a hit. Part of the Skooter presentation is to talk about the children from all parts of Canada, including Aboriginal and Inuit communities. Children living in isolated communities along the Mackenzie River where visitors come by airplane or boat, as well as children living in larger towns and cities. Each had asked Skooter to say hello to other children Skooter would meet. The children almost always expressed interest in their counterparts across the country and always sent on their good wishes to the next group of children that Skooter would meet.

Following circle time, the children went into a supervised playroom while I chatted with the adults. Perhaps it was because I was being introduced in the context of meeting first with their children, it always seemed to be the case that there are no noticeable getting to know each other or going through a feeling out process as when strangers typically meet. Perhaps it was also because they had pre-trip information about us and our purpose. At any rate I always felt we were being received as family. It is not that they were timid about asking tough questions or in plainly speaking their mind.

I recall one person in a group session asking why I thought the taxpayer should help to pay the child care expenses for other people's children. This is a question that is often asked and if not asked is nevertheless on the minds of many Canadians. I vividly recall an open talk show on television in Winnipeg. A person has to be a little careful in answering questions like this on television or radio or for that matter in media generally. If the comment is misinterpreted the answer cannot be rephrased. I recall this particular event because part of my reply caused me to bite my tongue. Soon as it was out of my mouth I regretted it because it could have been taken as a slight on the person asking the question. However the announcer laughed heartily and those I discussed it with later didn't seem to think it had provided any offence.

It is a Tommy Douglas story that caused me to chuckle when I first heard it. I presented it this way: "There was a premier from another province who was asked by a taxpayer in the southern part of the province why he should help to pay for the education of a child living in the northern part. The premier responded 'look at it this way. Perhaps a boy up north will grow up and move down south and marry your daughter. Isn't having one dunce in the family enough?'

This kind of wisdom was standard fare in Douglas's day but perhaps a bit politically incorrect today. However the underlying point is as true today as it was then. In a blink of an eye two decades will pass and I will face the child for whom I made a decision about supporting his child care needs. He will no longer be a child and he will be making a decision about how I am to be treated or assisted with my old age needs. Newfoundlanders probably more than most know the importance of neighbours and community that have their backs and they theirs. We are all interconnected. We will pay in one form or another for a damaged child just as we will benefit in one form or another by a child that is allowed to grow and flourish.

Following an excellent dialogue with the adults, Shawn Woodford, a reporter for the Pilot, the local Lewisporte newspaper, took a couple of pictures of the event and then interviewed me at some length. The result was a well written two page spread about our trip and child care. I admired the manner in which Shawn summarized a lengthy interview and captured the essence of the trip.

The rest of the evening was spent in relaxing conversation with Paul, Coralee and their family – Megan, Andrew and Daniel. Paul is a marine biologist and our discussion soon turned to conservation. He hunts but only takes what he is going to eat. Like our family, he loves the wilderness and takes pleasure in hiking and canoeing. He was interested in what we planned to do with our wilderness property. He is trying to start a tourism based business relating to hiking and canoeing in this area of Newfoundland.

He and Chad stayed up chatting long after the rest of us retired. Barrie, Chad and Tania had tents in the back yard and Sharon was provided a room upstairs and Jean and I in another.

I updated my diary and then looked at the guest book comments

“Fantastic time! Really enjoyed meeting you and your family.

Good luck on the rest of your journey.”

Shirley Shea, Karen Beresford, Helen Dauton, Betty Ann Rowsell

Exploit Valley, YMVA,

### WEDNESDAY AUGUST 3

Another full day is scheduled. We left at 7:15 a.m. heading to Fogo Island – a place with a long and rich history. Located about 12 km off the North East Newfoundland’s coast it was known to have been the summer home for the Beothuk, the recently extinct aboriginal group. Fogo Island lies on a shallow shelf which attracts salmon and cod.

Coralee took Sharon and myself in her Toyota Jeep while Jean, Chad, Tania and Barrie went in our Mazda. The trailer had been left behind at Lewisporte. It took about an hour to reach Farewell where we caught the ferry. The weather was gorgeous. Jean once again lucked out in terms of ocean conditions for the ferry ride. The ferry stops at Change Island and from there we made our way over to Stag Harbour on Fogo Island.

The vehicles were left at Farewell where we had been met by Christine Dwyer who is with the Fogo Island Library Board. Christine took two trips to transport us and Skooter to the meeting. Mayor Ray Oake opened the meeting with an excellent speech about the importance of child care and the value of our trip. I was surprised and a little flattered when he said he had a copy of my book (which covered the first leg of our journey, 1992) and that he had enjoyed reading every page.

Although I spent a few minutes talking to the adults, the major part of the event was reserved for circle time with the children. Again Skooter was a hit. There were about 25 children gathered in front of me. Near the end of Skooter’s performance I invited the children to blow Skooter’s horn. At first they seemed a little shy about approaching him. I wondered if this would be the first time no child would come forward. Finally, with some coaxing, one child ventured forth and then they all rushed forward.

I won’t soon forget my inappropriate response to one of the children’s question. I guess I was a little tired. The child shyly put up his hand and asked: “What do you eat on the road?” Without thinking I jokingly replied: “Road Kill” I immediately caught myself but not before a puzzled look crossed the child’s face. I emphasized that I was kidding and then took some time to describe what life was like cycling in areas where we would spend a day or more in between settlements – what we ate and how we set up.

Juice, coffee and muffins were served. During conversation time one lady explained to me the origin of the name “Seldom Pass By”. Any time a storm came up, boats in the vicinity rarely went by without taking refuge.

Back to the ferry and to Lewisporte. After supper Paul had a special treat for us. He took us by Jeep into caribou country. He drove the back roads that soon became logging roads. As the road conditions worsened I was glad we were in his Jeep.

“There!” Barrie points to the edge of a clearing. A lone caribou – then another and another. During the next hour our eyes took in numerous small groupings of two, three and four. I had encountered caribou in the Yukon part of the trip but not in these numbers. I recalled Barrie during our family kayak expedition north of Nain, Labrador deciding to sleep without the benefit of a tent. In the middle of the night he was wakened by caribou walking by and around him. However he could barely make them out in the darkness. So this outing was a special experience for all of us.

We arrived back at the house a 9:30 p.m. Shortly thereafter I retired for the night leaving the rest to continue their conversations. I had just fallen asleep when I was suddenly hit with a severe leg cramp. I don’t often get these but when I do the only solution that works for me is to quickly jump out of bed. Standing up seems to relieve the cramp.

In the morning before getting up I told Jean about the leg cramp I had after going to bed. “”Was that what it was about? I certainly wondered what you were up to!” Ouch – I had hoped I hadn’t been heard.

The Lewisporte area is a great place to vacation. Just looking at a map of the area with all the islands within the bay is inviting. Twillingate, not far from here, is touted as one of the finest places you can find for sea-kayaking. To the west are the forests and multitudes of streams and lakes. Our taste of the caribou country makes me wish we had a couple of months to explore.

Before going downstairs I reviewed my dairy and signatures in the guest book.

“Really enjoyed your stories. Thank you for taking the time to visit us at the Fogo Island Public Library. Good luck in your journey.”

Marion Foley

“Howard: It was my pleasure to be your taxi from the Ferry to the Public Library. Your presentation to the children was fantastic. Your message was inspiring to the adults as well. Thank you.”

Christine Dwyer, Tilting B.F.

“Howard & friends: You and your group are to be commended for the work you are doing. It is people like you who will make this world a better place for children to live and for that we, as citizens, owe you our thanks, May God bless you for the rest of your journey.”

Ray Oake (Mayor) Fogo Island

“A pleasure meeting you all. I wish you the greatest success with your present & future journey. Come back for some more wild meat!!!”

Paul Wood

“We really enjoyed your visit. Thank you for your dedication to the children of this country. We are truly blessed to have you among us. If we visit Ontario we’ll get in touch. If you ever decide to visit our fair province again, be sure to let us know! Take care and God bless you all.”

Coralee

THURSDAY AUGUST 4

A relaxing breakfast and enjoying a second cup of coffee. Coralee asked when did we have to be in Gander. "Not until 10. It will be a leisurely cycle for a change." "Leisurely? I wouldn't call 46 km in an hour and a half leisurely!" "46 km? I thought it was 26 km!"

A mad scramble. It was already 8:15 a.m. and it will be well past 8:30 a.m. by the time we are on our bikes. Tania and I started off. Chad discovered he had another flat. He said he would ride with Jean for about 10 km and then fix his flat. "By the time you get to where Jean will be parked I will be ready to bike. Sharon said she would ride with Jean as well so she would have another good head start.

I am going at as fast a pace as I thought I could maintain for the distance. Soon Tania said that she wouldn't keep the pace but knew I had to push it. She said "When you see Chad changing his tire tell Jean to wait for me and I will ride with her." A few km down the road and I could see the Mazda. I found Chad still working on his flat. I passed on Tania's message. I think Chad intended to talk her into biking as it wouldn't matter if they were late as long as Sharon and I got there on time.

I replied that I might be a little late myself. I was already going about as fast as I could maintain. Jean said that Sharon was about ten minutes ahead of me.

As I cycled I thought back to the numerous times I had to push myself to my physical limits. The two times that came most to mind was last summer trying to get to Charlottetown and then the previous year trying to get to Winnipeg in time for the scheduled Mayor's event. I couldn't have gone any faster on either of those two occasions but I was the most exhausted from the Winnipeg sprint. I don't think I have to dig any deeper than I am now doing as I doubt the people in Gander will be on as tight a schedule as was the Mayor of Winnipeg.

At about 26 km I caught sight of Sharon. I don't know who was most surprised she or me. I was surprised because I remembered the difficulty she had biking to Winnipeg and although her pace in Newfoundland showed remarkable improvement, I didn't expect it would take me as long as it did to catch her once I had her in my sight. She had her head down and putting out a first class effort. As I pulled up beside her and said: "How it's going?" she almost lost control of the bike. She hadn't heard me coming and a voice out of nowhere startled her.

She said she couldn't believe I had already caught her. I laughed and said "It's a bird! It's a plane" She interrupted and said "It's Mr. Day Care." We both laughed. She told me to go on and she will get there as soon as she could. "If I see I am going to be late I'll flag Jean down."

I come to an old vintage airplane prominently placed outside of Gander. The airplane is an important reminder of their history. Gander came into existence during World War Two as a refuelling station for combat planes on the way to Europe. Seeing the plane in the distance strangely moved me. I could almost feel this town's commitment and support as their fellow countrymen and allies stopped and refuelled. Surely those who watched must have wondered what horrors were in store for the pilots and crew and wondered how many would never return. Stories of heroism and stories of sorrow as family members received the dreaded telegram. Gander today is the stopping point for air traffic coming and going over the Atlantic.

I could make out a group of people gathered there. It was our reception party. When I apologized for keeping them waiting they said they had just arrived themselves. There were kids, adults, a City Representative and a reporter. I mentioned that the others were not too far behind. They assured me there was no rush. First Sharon arrived followed by Jean. No more than two or three minutes later Chad, Tania and Barrie arrived.

Wow – another police escort. They escorted us to the centre where there were more children eagerly waiting for us. The children's eyes lit up as I wheeled Skooter into the circle time area. Their reaction was similar to the previous ones. Gander Day Care Centre and the Peter Pan Preschool presented a decorated cake which proved popular with children and adults alike. The parents too told us of their experiences trying to find child care and the pressing need for government action. I am always pleased to learn first hand from the parents the tremendous difference good child care had made in their lives.

Too quickly we had to say good bye. We were headed for Terra Nova National Park to be the overnight guests of Tom Lush, the Newfoundland Minister of Social Services. It was going to be a long day of cycling. In addition to the 60 km we had already done, we still had another 75 km to go. At least there was not a specific time by which we had to arrive.

The Trans Canada highway goes right through the Park on its way to St John's. Located on Bonavista Bay, it is a mecca for fishing enthusiasts, hikers and for those who just want to see a place of exceptional beauty. Cliffs, the ocean, abundant wildlife including moose and black bear. What more could one wish for? This most easterly National Park was only recently set aside as a Park (1957) All Canadians should be grateful that it has been.

There is clear evidence of the landscape being carved by glacial action. Just imagine a myriad of islands dotting the bays and canoeing the beautiful deep fjords. A Sanctuary for budding botanists to spend happy hours looking for orchids and pitcher plants which are the residents of the numerous bogs within the Park. It is part of the Boreal forests dominated by black spruce and balsam fir. As with so many places I have to once again say: "Oh for more time for an extended visit."

Chad was not feeling well. At Gander he was feeling chilled and decided to ride with Jean.

Tom Lush's place was 19 km off of the Trans Canada. Because we didn't have the time to take these kinds of detours by bike we got into the car. As it was we had cycled 134 km. It is nice to have a vehicle that allows such detours.

It is very special to have a Minister of Social Services take it upon himself to extend an invitation to open his place for us. This is far beyond what one could hope for from a busy person in his position. Government ministers are under constant pressures and they rightly value the limited time they have to get away and relax. I am sure the child care community in Newfoundland is appreciative, as are we, of the graciousness manifested by their Minister and what a positive impression he is making on us "mainlanders."

He offered us hot chili and then visited for a couple of hours. I thoroughly enjoyed his stories. One story related to his maiden speech following his election. In the speech he remarked that he was the first Lush to be elected. He was interrupted by a member who yelled out: "No! No! Joey Smallwood was first and there have been several Lushes elected afterwards."

He had made arrangements to stay for the night with a nearby friend so that we would have his place to ourselves. Before he left he drove Sharon and I down the road to see if Sharon's cell phone could reach Joanne Morris to finalize or coordinate the remainder of our activities. The signal was weak. Joanne was not at home but Sharon left a message and said she would get in touch tomorrow.

Chad was now feverish and suffering from chills. He went to bed early. We were concerned. We were aware that some of the seafood he ate had not agreed with him.

We all unwound in our own way. I updated my dairy and looked at the comments in the guest book. I originally was not going to include the comments in the guest book because of the awkwardness of what may be taken as parading the flattering remarks. However their comments brings back their involvement and participation in the trip. The trip was as much about honouring all the work that people involved with child care contribute to society as it is about anything else.

“Thank you again for stopping in Gander and spending time with us. Your journey will hopefully promote awareness for all people especially the children. Take care and enjoy your time in our province.”

Jennifer Walsh Clarke, Gander Day Care

“Howard, Jean, family & Friends I think you project is a great thing and wish you the best. Please return again when you have more time to spend.”

Han Larsen, Town of Gander

Howard, Family & Friends, It was a pleasure meeting you all. Wish you much success & admire your cause & concerns.

Brian Clarke

“Howard, family & friends Aug 5/94 It was my pleasure to have met you all and to have housed you for a night at Terra Nova. Best of luck in your effort and cause. You have my full support.”

Tom Lush

## FRIDAY AUGUST 5

When Tom Lush left last night he surprised us by saying he would be back early in the morning to make breakfast. Jean replied that it was wonderful of him to offer but the logistics of him getting up early, driving back from his friend's place, and making breakfast was a way too much trouble. He wouldn't hear of it. Early in the morning he was back and preparing breakfast

Such is Newfoundland's hospitality!

Chad was still not well but he thought that exercise might help him shake off whatever he had. He planned to ride in the car until the first break at about 20 km then bike a ways. Sharon too was going to ride in the car for the same distance so that she would have a head start. Barrie, Tania and myself started off. At the 20 km point we pulled up for a water break. Chad still wasn't up to cycling. I glanced in the back seat and noticed that Sharon was sound asleep. Jean said it was going to be a long day of cycling so let her sleep for now.

The next 20 km was tougher due to the headwinds, lots of hills, and some construction. At the next break Tania decided to call it a day as well. The next 20 km was even worse but then happily the wind, although still strong, was no longer against us. It was a good thing as it was 140 km from Tom Lush's place to the Bellevue Campground. By the time we got to within an hour or so of the campground it was hard to figure out what the wind was doing. It seemed to be swirling one way and then another. It would die down and just as suddenly gust up.

As we approached the turn off to the campground we saw Chad with the car. He had dropped the others off at their tent sites and unhooked the trailer. The reason he came back was the road to the campground went up a long hill and then down a long hill. The gusts of wind were so strong that the wind's buffering of the car and trailer made it difficult to control the car. Consequently he came back for us. It was a good thing as we were tired and the prospect of detouring off the highway and up a long hill with this kind of wind was not appealing.

Barrie complained of leg muscle soreness and I had the beginning of a sore throat which I was trying to fight by sucking on zinc lozenges. Taking into consideration that Tania had not ridden as far as she usually does and that Sharon had slept in the car rather than bike, I wondered if all of us were fighting whatever bug Chad had picked up.

## SATURDAY AUGUST 6

Chad was still not well but wanted to bike. My throat was a bit raw but didn't seem any worse than it was yesterday. I told Jean that Whitbourne was 28 km down the highway and we might as well make that our first break. I would try to phone Joanne Morris from there.

Chad lagged behind but still wanted to continue biking. His stomach was uneasy. Unable to reach Joanne at Whitbourne, I left a message on her machine indicating I would try again when we got to the turn off leading to her community some 40 km this side of St. John's.

Just as we saw the sign to the exit that we were to take, Joanne honked her horn, waved, rolled down her window and asked us to wait until she got turned around. She had no more than done so when a CBC van pulled up. They wanted to interview me riding on Skooter. I didn't know how they planned to pull that off. Here was the plan. Barrie was to drive their van about the speed I would ordinarily be going. I would be hooked up with a microphone. The camera man and the interviewer would sit in the back of the van with the rear door open. So off we went going about 20 km an hour and the interviewer firing questions at me. Barrie was doing his best to keep the speed but occasionally I saw my odometer creeping up. I thought to myself: "Barrie don't embarrass me by making me sound completely out of breath trying to keep up."

He actually did a good job of driving and a few minutes later they seemed satisfied with what they had. I have had many radio and television interviews and even a few shots of cycling. However this was the first – interviewed while cycling. This trip had resulted in many firsts. This may be another one.

We arrived at Joanne's home midday. Her husband, Marvin, is an outdoors person and was very interested in our cycling and hiking experiences. Soon he and I were lost in conversation. Joanne asked if we liked folk music. We all did. "Good there is a Folk Festival going on in St. John's. Would you like to go?" Chad was still not up to par and felt it wise to stay behind. I was ambivalent. I felt my sore throat could go either way. The large child care community event in St. John's was tomorrow. The provincial child care organizers had done a wonderful job in organizing the events across the province and this was to be the grand finale. - MILE ZERO. As much as I wanted to go I finally came down on the side of caution. Marvin was not going either. Everyone else went with Joanne.

Marvin, Chad and I spent the evening in pleasant conversation and watched a little television. At 7:30 p.m. the CBC News provided information about our "On the Road for Quality Child Care and clips of their interview while I was riding Skooter behind their van. It was good coverage.

I was wakened by Jean getting into bed. I looked at my watch – 1:30 a.m. “How was it?” “Great, loads of fun.” I thought to myself wow, 1:30 a.m. I have not been up that late since I started the tour. I am glad I didn’t go. My middle-aged body doesn’t like the burning of the candle at both ends anymore.

## SUNDAY AUGUST 7

Chad’s health is slightly improved. Thankfully my sore throat is gone being replaced by a cold. A cold is easier to deal with.

Can it really be? Is this really the last official day of cycling across Canada for quality child care? Just 45 km to go! Somehow it doesn’t seem so. There is still a full day of child care celebrations. Tomorrow there are events as well but they do not require cycling. I tell myself that I can’t let my mind dwell on this being the last day of cycling. I admit to being pleased as punch to have cycled across the remote parts of Canada and in every province and territory. A goal I can hardly believe I was capable of achieving. However the real goal was to celebrate and promote quality day care and my mind has to focus on this. The goal has not been reached until the next couple of days are complete.

By the time I biked about 20 km I was feeling a little tired. I suppose it is the combination of winding down, my cold, and it being a hot day. After all at this point in the journey 20 km seems such a short distance. The sun went behind the clouds making for cooler cycling and this continued for the next 17 km. I was headed for City Hall to be greeted by the mayor. When the rest of the crew arrives we are to meet with Joanne for ceremonial pictures of us with our bikes at Mile Zero.

The sign is eye catching – can not be missed. It reads as follows

St. John’s

<b>Canada</b>	<b>Begins</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Here</b>
Trans Canada Highway		mile Kilometre	<b>‘0’</b>

A couple of pictures of the Mayor and myself were taken under the sign. Then pictures of Sharon, Tania, Chad, Barrie and myself with our bikes were taken. It felt surreal!

Jean was urged to come forward to be included in this very personal moment. She shies away from being photographed. She had to be in it! She was an essential component to make it all happen.

For this occasion she agreed to our promptings. We hugged each other.

I thought back upon the burden that fell on her shoulders, looking after everything at home while I was on the Western leg of the trip. For four months that summer she carried the load of parenting, household responsibilities and commuting alone over 200 km a day to work. It was so wonderful to see her when she was able to take vacation time and meet us in Arctic Red River and then accompany us from Inuvik to Whitehorse. In 1993 and 1994 she was the anchor that kept the trip together.

Joanne took the pictures. Then someone took a picture of Joanne welcoming me to Newfoundland. She told me that she had found it a very special moment and had to fight back tears.

I too felt moved – it was indeed a special moment. Perhaps this moment for me emotionally was only rivalled by my arrival at City Hall in Winnipeg 1992. This was because I had so many self-doubts about being able to bike so far. In 1992 Winnipeg seemed a world apart when I began the trip from Prince Rupert. With the first leg of the journey under my belt I felt confident I could physically finish the trip providing there were no unforeseen accidents or incidents. Nevertheless I feel like I am pinching myself. We really did make it didn't we?

Close by there was another sign situated near the Mile "0" sign. It was a directional sign showing the mileage to different destinations. One pointed in the direction of Ireland (3200 km). Another towards Victoria (7775 km). My ancestors on my father's side came from Ireland.

I said to Joanne: "Ireland looks like a short distance, doesn't it?" The first leg of the trip in 1992 went from B.C. to Inuit in the Arctic and ending in Winnipeg. (Approximately 6000 km of cycling and 1200 km in inflatable kayaks for a total of 7200 km. Far enough to have gone to Ireland and back with 800 km to spare. Last summer we cycled about 4500 km and this year about 1600 km. The child care journey on bike and kayak totalled well over 13,000 km.

Hey! If there was a land bridge to Ireland, I'd go.

We then biked to a parking lot to wait for the start of the big Finale. I talked for a few minutes with a police officer who was to be part of the escort. He shook his head as he examined Skooter and joked: "You will probably get pulled over by an officer using the excuse that you don't have a licence for this contraption."

What a wonderful way to end the trip. Colourful clowns, balloons, placards, a police escort and most exciting of all – BAG PIPES! This is the first time, any of us, have ever been piped into an event. I am sure it will be the last time too.

It was a deeply stirring moment. Seeing all the children, the day care workers, the parents, and the media was extraordinarily special to me. What a tribute to the child care field. I was handed a microphone. There was really nothing for me to say. The atmosphere said it all. Wisely, I think, I kept my remarks short – a few words about how wonderful the trip had been, how marvellous child workers are all across Canada and how welcome we had been made to feel from large urban areas to the remotest parts of Canada and none more so than in Newfoundland.

I wanted to mingle with the children and their parents but was quickly surrounded by media – radio, television and the Evening Telegram. All gave great coverage to the event.

I especially enjoyed talking to the parents. They had great stories to share about their child care experiences. From the beginning this trip was to celebrate child care. I wanted to be in a listening mode. Of course I knew I would be expected to talk about child care issues and I did. However I think

I stayed largely true to my objectives of listening to what parents, child care workers, and the community members had to say. In the talks I did give I tried to include in my presentations what parents had shared with me on the trip. The perspective of rural and remote communities is something I will treasure.

I was a little amused by the comments of more than a few parents who said this had, weather wise, been one of the nicest summers they have had in years. I thought back to some of the storms, the down pours, the almost gale-force gusts of wind and thought if this was the best summer I would hate to see your worst. At the same time I realized that they were right. With the exception of a little rain in Corner Brook that may have dampened turn out, all of the events or festivities were blessed with good weather. The weather couldn't be better for this grand finale in St. John's

We have been invited to stay the night at Corriene Murphy's home. During the evening several board members of various child care centres dropped in to visit. A very pleasant relaxing way to unwind.

## MONDAY AUGUST 8

Although Chad attended yesterday's events, he still was not feeling well. Corriene called her physician who was able to see him at 9:30 a.m. His office was close to Day Break Day Care Centre so Sharon, Jean, Tania, Barrie and I toured the centre while waiting for Chad. A pleasant visit.

The doctor advised Chad to fast for 36 hours. It's too bad he has ended the trip with whatever is ailing him. At least he had been in good health for the Gros Morne, the Northern Peninsula and the Lewisporte area which was the kind of landscape he would enjoy the most.

We took a walk down the historic Water Street said to be the oldest commercial street in North America. I have been here numerous times but it was a new experience for the rest.. One of my most striking memories, a few years ago, was walking down Water Street with Vivian Randell, Newfoundland Director of Child Care. It was the same time that the Green Peace ship was in dock. We stood looking towards the ship and there was a young boy selling seal flippers on the dock. Vivian stated they were considered a delicacy. They didn't look appealing to me. However I have to admit the first time I looked at lobsters they didn't seem appealing either. Now I consider them a treat.

Vivian struck up a conversation with the boy and mentioned that I was "from away". His attention immediately turned to me and he asked: "Do you eat chicken?" "Yes." He then responded "Why, because they are not cute?" It was obvious where this discussion was headed. Although I had not said anything one way or another on hunting seals he assumed I would be against the seal hunt. I could readily imagine the discussion around his family supper table, He had all the arguments down pat. I admired his spunk. It also made me think how few families actually have these vitally important livelihood issues discussions at the kitchen table. Vivian grinned and said "It's a pretty hot subject around these parts."

The courage of this young boy to take on an adult who he assumed to be on the opposite side of the issues is refreshing. One of the things I admired and thoroughly enjoy in conversations with Newfoundlanders is their frankness – free from the extremes of political correctness that we so often experience in our discussions.

There was one more event that had been scheduled. A meeting with the Deputy Minister at the Confederation Building had been set for the afternoon. Sharon and I arrived for what we had been told was to be mainly a nice photo op. We discussed child care issues for a few minutes waiting for the

photographer . The photographer arrived and listened to the tail end of the discussion with obvious interest. Then he took photos of us with the DM.

Sharon and I shook hands with the DM and was surprised the photographer walked us to the car. He emphasized how pleased he was that we had included Labrador in our journey. “No one else does. Most stop at Halifax and at best push on to St. John’s or occasionally start at St. John’s and head west.”

We then dropped by Cabot College where Joanne and Corriene work. As we were leaving the building Corriene called out to us from a second floor window. She asked if we were going to take a whale watching tour and if so when. I said we hadn’t decided but if we went it would likely be tomorrow morning. She said she thought the last tour of the evening was the best and stated she would go with us to the hotel to make arrangements and perhaps go with us.

The O’Brien brochure listed the last tour as leaving at 5 p.m. We wouldn’t be able to make that in time. Corriene called them and found out there was a 6 p.m. tour which she booked. Arriving at Bull’s Bay we saw a large friendly Newfoundland dog lying in front of O’Brien’s office. We made friends with him as we waited to embark.

A very enjoyable evening. Besides seeing puffins which apparently is to be expected, we also saw terns. Apparently they are usually only out at night because otherwise the seagulls attack them. It was slightly foggy so they felt safe enough to be out. The whales put on an even better show than the ones did at St. Anthony. I enjoyed both tours but they were quite different. O’Brien has the tour down pat and the batter is entertaining and obviously refined by practice. The owner of the St. Anthony tour provided very personal and strong opinions about issues effecting their communities. I enjoyed his frankness and was genuinely interested in his viewpoint. Maybe he wouldn’t have been so forthcoming if it wasn’t for the fact our family was the only one on the tour.

I overheard Corriene tell the captain about our trip. A few minutes later he introduced me and handing over his microphone asked me to say a few words. Of course this is not the setting to give a talk as it would be to a captive audience who were there to watch the whales. So I did my best to summarize the trip and its purposes in a few sentences.

Afterwards a lady came up and said she was with an environmentalist company who organized sea kayak trips and had even organized a dog sled trip in Quebec going to the Hudson's Bay. It turned out she knew a couple of my colleagues at work. A small world.

After the tour we went to Ches’s Fish and Chip Shop which Corriene said was extremely popular. It was good. I felt badly for Chad who could only have tea.

Back at the hotel I updated my diary and read the following comments.

“Dear Howard It was a thrill to meet you and your family. Seeing you at mile zero was an emotional experience and I’m so glad I was able to be part of it. You’ve given us a lot of encouragement and you helped to bring our ECE community together. I am looking forward to reading Volume two and three of your journey. Thanks for sharing your spirit & your vision.”

Christine McClean ACCENI

“Congratulations! Howard & family we’re delighted that you saved the best for the last. It has been a pleasure sharing in your vision and I only hope this road to quality child care continues to be a priority across Canada.”

Darlene Stone

“Howard, Jean & family Best wishes on your travels.”

Darlene Martin, Aug 7, 94

Howard, Jean and Family Thanks for the weather and thanks for the inspiration. It's always nice to have new comers into our fair island and I am sure you'll enjoy your stay as much as we enjoy having you. All the best.”

Lynn Smyth

“Howard, Live/Love/Laugh always. You're the best”

Susan

“Howard, Jean, family & fiends You have brought fresh ideas & inspiration to us all. Take care & blessings to all.”

Judy Rossiter

“We're very honoured that you made it to Daybreak. We will be in touch. We're always here – as are many many people across Canada. Take care and best wishes to you and your family.”

Melba

“Howard, family and friends Well what a summer. I didn't think I had organizational skills but it seems like I do. It has been absolutely wonderful to be part of your trip all be it small. I hope you had a wonderful trip. Your book as far as I am (pg 63) is a real inspiration.

Corriene Murphy NPID Organizer

“Howard. A Stupendous!!! achievement and one that reflects your wonderful dedication to the cause. I have valued and appreciated your friendship and support over the years. Thanks for everything.”

Vivian Randell

“Howard, you have completed an unmatched feat! From the west coast to the east, you have provided an opportunity for early childhood educators to share in a little piece of this experience. You have joined us together in spirit and in cause. I enjoyed meeting your family; those who have supported you and shared with you so many of the miles you rode; Thanks to you a new beginning for child care in this country! Best of luck to Jean, Barrie, Chad & Tania.

Joanne

TUESDAY AUGUST 9

We have nearly a full day left to spend in St. John's before leaving to make our reservations on the Ferry to Sydney.

Jean was up a couple of times during the night and felt she too might be coming down with the same thing Chad had. She opted to spend a couple of hours resting in the hotel. We did have breakfast at the hotel.

Chad and Barrie went downtown - each their separate ways according to what interested them. Barrie went to O'Brien's Music store. He had become a fan of Great Big Sea and asked if they had any of their albums. "Yes we do but would you like to meet one of them? He's right there."

Barrie was thrilled at this chance encounter and spent a few treasured moments in conversation with Alan Doyle. He told Barrie they would be touring with a stop in Ottawa in the near future and gave him the dates. Barrie mentioned our trip as well.

We planned to go together to Signal Hill after lunch. Sharon cancelled as she was having lunch with someone and then she would be taking a bus to Argentia and would meet us there.

It's a great view from Signal Hill overlooking the St. John's Harbour. This is the historic site where Marconi received his first transoceanic wireless message.

Chad and Jean drove back to the hotel while Tania, Barrie and myself hiked down the ocean side trail. There are magnificent views of the ocean, the steep cliffs, and the city itself. At the bottom we passed quaint streets and homes. Before we reached the bottom it started to pour and we were soaking wet as we entered the hotel. It was called "Quality Hotel the Journey's End" How utterly appropriate!

Continuing our sight seeing we drove to Cape Spears but it was too foggy to see much. In the visitor's centre where we were looking at crafts, a lady yelled out; "Oh my God, I know you." I expected her to say she had seen us on TV or a photo in one of the papers but she continued "I sold you some furniture at the Stittsville Flea Market." How she possibly remembered this I will never know. Stittsville is near Ottawa about an hour's drive from our home. A few years ago we had bought pine furniture for our bedroom. A small world indeed.

Sharon was waiting for us as we pulled up to the Ferry Terminal. Chad, Tania and Barrie put up their tents outside the terminal while Sharon, Jean and I put our sleeping bags down in the playroom.

#### WEDNESDAY AUGUST 10

Leaving Newfoundland heading to Sydney on a long Ferry ride. We arrived at 11 p.m. Leaving the trailer at Ron and Sharon's we went back to the Cambridge Suites.

Although the Newfoundland trip is over we still have a busy child care agenda waiting for us tomorrow.

#### THURSDAY AUGUST 11

Sharon drove me to a 9:20 a.m. taping at the radio station. He did a taping and said he was sending it on to National. A half hour later he telephoned asking for a second interview at 10:10 a.m.

Sharon and I, with Skooter, are off to Sydney Mines for a luncheon with the various day care directors. It's a busy place. Ron is here with his friend from CBC who has asked to do some video and tape Skooter stories. Two newspaper reporters are also here to conduct interviews and take photos. All of these went off smoothly. Sometimes when things are hectic and a bit on the chaotic side and there is

less time to gather your thoughts, is the time when things come off well. This was one of those occasions.

Just finished the last interview and I am led over by a day care staff to the luncheon table. Most of the Day Care Directors have finished their lunch. One has to be familiar with the child care field to appreciate how organized they are. I read one article outlining the skills needed and the conclusion was that anyone who combine their skills and temperament is well equipped to fulfill the role of the President of the United States.

How true! I would not have wanted for the world to take on the coordinating functions that the child care field did to make our trip successful. Many of the events were planned weeks in advance. They had to do so within the context of inexperienced cyclists trying to guess their arrival time while still hundreds of miles away and in all weather conditions. I recall on the 1992 trip the Director of Day Care for NWT received a telephone call from my office wanting to know where I was and how they could get in touch with me. She told them that she gets reports from the field of my progress but at the moment "he is somewhere in the wilderness and may be on the Mackenzie River with hundreds of kilometres between villages. When I hear I will let you know."

There were many times when we had to push ourselves to our physical limits to make a scheduled event. I would rather be placed in this position many times over than having the almost impossible task of scheduling events for us. My hat is off to them with humble respect and gratitude.

As lunch wound down, a final touch, which meant so much to me took place. It was a tribute to Jean. Kind words and a presentation of flowers.

Hugs all around and we were heading home. What a trip! It will take some time to put it into some kind of perspective.

The last two messages in my guest book:

"Dear Howard. So nice to meet again. I think it is wonderful what you and your family are doing to honour child care. You really do care. "

Sincerely

Margaret – Town Day Care

Janet Campbell – Play-school Day Care

C. Roach – Jewels & Gems Day Care

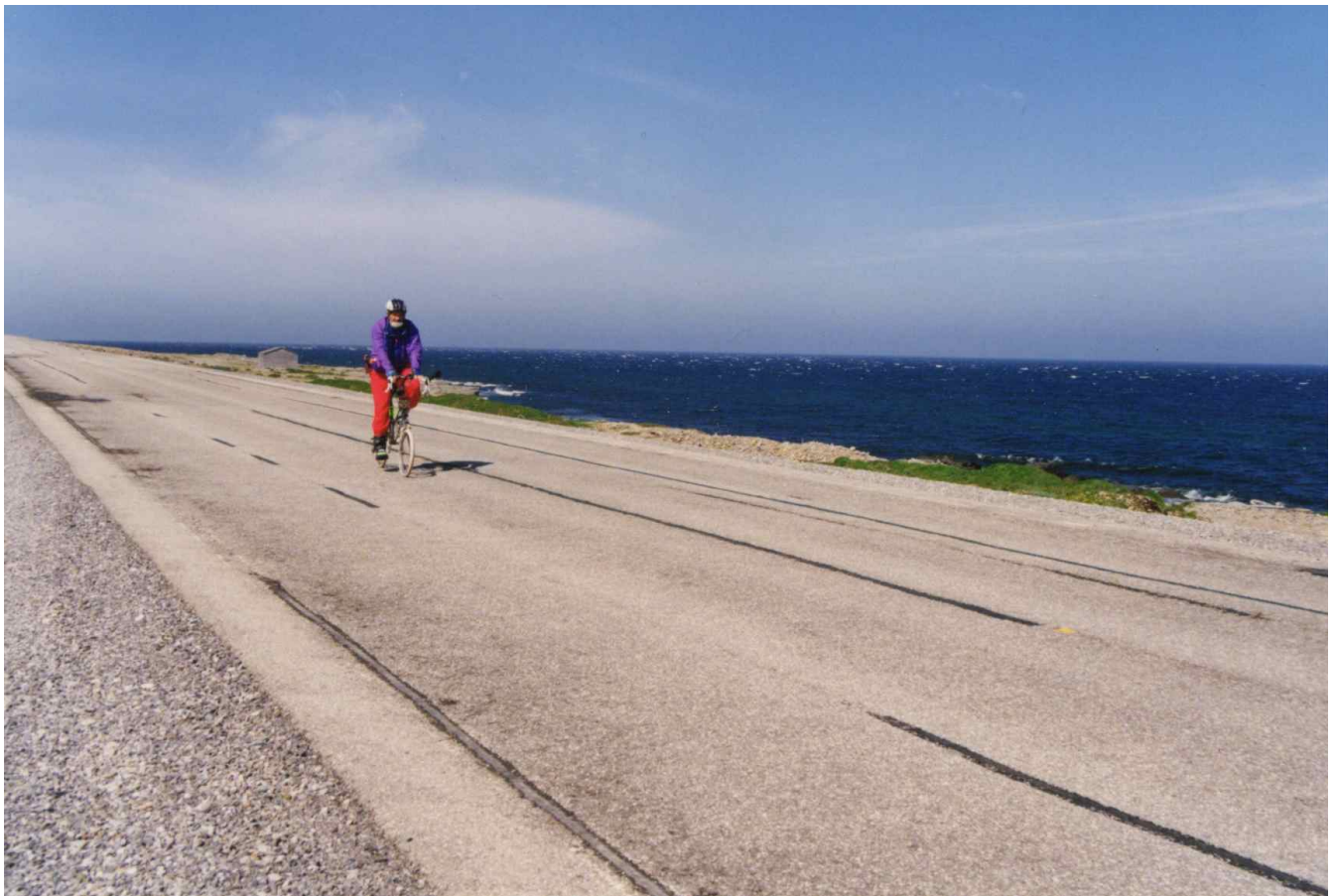
" The Queen of England and Howard visit Cape Breton on the same day – two monarchs indeed. Howard many, many thanks for your endeavours for quality child care. May our paths cross again for the little folks of our world. Take care cause ... Someone cares!"

Lillian Andrews, Director Peter Pan Day Care and C.B. Non-profit Day Care  
Directors Association

























## AFTERWARDS

It is now well into 2020. I can't believe twenty eight years have passed since I embarked on the cross Canada trip for Quality Child Care and twenty six years when it was completed in Newfoundland and Labrador. At the time it seemed "The Impossible Dream". I still pinch myself. It remains a highlight of my life for which I will forever be grateful.

I apologize to Newfoundlanders for my slothfulness. I managed to put together a book during the winter immediately following the 1992 journey. A few years later I completed the description of the 1993 trip from Winnipeg to Sydney. I had good intentions – but like many good intentions - I didn't get around to the task of writing up the 1994 Newfoundland trip. Thankfully my diary was kept and I did from time to time work on a manuscript. Now I am in my 83<sup>rd</sup> year and finally can strike this off "My Must Do List." None of the three books are well written and this perhaps even less so. It was never intended to be good literature but as a recollection of a wonderful time shared with great friends for a great cause.

As you can see it is a pdf file and can be downloaded by anyone from the cliffLAND website. No promises but I intend to put the other two books on pdf too.

The following Spring after the trip (1995) I took advantage of an early retirement package offer by the Government so I could devote my time to promoting protection of "wildness" and using wilderness as a healing backdrop to meet the physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual needs of people. (for those interested you can learn about us at [cliffland.ca](http://cliffland.ca))

In my mind's eye, I look back to my twenty-fives years in the child care field. I can truthfully say I have never witnessed another social service program where children or families experiencing early stages of difficulties respond so quickly to the positive and helpful environment of a quality child care program.

Prior to entering the child care field I was a psychiatric social worker. Mental Health will always be close to my heart. I didn't desert the mental health field when I became involved in Child Care. In fact I found the influence of good child care in the prevention of mental health problems and in fostering mental health is so much more effective because it takes place during the early formative years.

When I retired from my position I knew I could never leave child care. My new direction was never, in my mind, incongruous with child care. If a child's innate curiosity, their sense of wonder, their quickness to identify and bond with their fellow creatures who inhabit our shared earth can be stimulated and nourished, what a contribution is made to their lives. Wonder, awe, and humility come naturally together and enriches our humanity but stand in stark contrast with a wanton spirit of destruction where all of nature is seen solely as a commodity.

How much better for us if children come to value nature first of all as their source of being and refuge and only secondarily as a material resource. Of course a person who finds joy and renewal from nature also appreciates that nature provides for our physical needs including lumber to build and heat our homes. This understanding is subsumed within the framework that the ultimate value of our forests lie in their beauty. Rachel Carson put it nicely when she said that those who contemplate the beauty of the earth will find resources of strength and that natural beauty is essential for spiritual development.

John Muir, a life time advocate for wilderness, said that wilderness is like music or art in that it expresses something and nourishes a part of us for which science cannot account. Great scientists, from diverse fields of endeavour, ranging from Einstein to Darwin, paid tribute to the powerful,

inspirational call of nature. Darwin once said that of all the scenes that had deeply impressed themselves upon his mind, none had exceeded the sublimity of primeval forests non-defaced by man.

Numerous experts warn that one of the greatest existential threats we face is increasing nature amnesia. Many children never experience wilderness, become disconnected from nature in favour of virtual reality experiences. Abundant evidence exists indicating that those who engage in quality nature experiences not only bond with nature but become future advocates for its protection. You never miss that which you never knew. You protect that which you love.

I recall a program for disadvantaged children visiting our wilderness property. The teacher asked “What stood out to you in the nature walk?” One child spoke up: “How uneven the ground is.” Many of these children have never been off paved roads and sidewalks.

I have found it profoundly rewarding to witness children’s unbridled joy chasing butterflies, climbing over fallen trees, engaging in activities that my generation took for granted. I once was strangely moved by a young child with autism mustering up the courage to allow a chickadee to take sunflower seeds from her outstretched hand. There was such awe and wonder in her face.

I recall taking a group of aboriginal elders on a walk shortly after we purchased our wilderness property. Two things stood out. The first was the reverence they felt when a Bald-headed Eagle circled over them. The second was when we strolled into a low area that I hadn’t previously been to. They suddenly stopped – stood silently before a very old white eastern cedar. Finally one softly spoke - “Grandfather.” The tree is estimated to be between 250 and 500 years of age. The aboriginal group returned with a group called “Traditional Keepers” having the goal of welcoming those who had lost or never knew their traditional culture or their connection to nature - to discover their heritage – to come home to nature..

As I look back a quarter of a century ago to the many wonderful child care workers and early childhood educators we met on our bicycle trip, I see so many striking similarities between those in child care and those who love and protect wilderness.

I consider Nature as being the best teacher. There are many instances when humans think they know better than nature and almost as many instances when they have been proven wrong. If one looks closely at the various ways one learns from nature it is easy to see similarities with the understanding and practices of early childhood educators. ECE know that play is essential to children’s development. Children, as true for many adults, become completely absorbed in play (lost or obliviously to everything else) Their joy is complete – they return to play by choice over and over again. They are not even aware of how much they are learning and how many skills are being developed.

Watch children at play in the woods – in their joy they are not ware of what they are experiencing or what they are learning. The thing we know about play is that the best play is unstructured – open-ended. This is why nature has been the source of so many inventions – so much creativity.

Play involves the whole person, - the physical, the emotional, the intellectual and the spiritual. Adults too are only dimly aware of what is happening to them when they venture out into nature. They know they usually leave feeling better. They are unaware of the odours and chemicals being released by trees and plants that calm their minds – the odours that reduce depression or remove brain fog, or stimulate positive emotions, or lead to insightful creative solutions. It is only recently that findings about specific health benefits resulting from nature activities have been documented. The growing field of “forest bathing” is imcreasing world wide.

As early as the 1960's early childhood educators, as well as psychologists, emphasized "the match" when talking about children's learning or developmental experiences. The learning environment should match the child's level of readiness, their level of interest, involve all of the senses, hands on experience. How well nature agrees. Nature as a teacher is non-judgmental, does not require a given level of interest, nor a level of skill, nor a specific degree of commitment. Nature is patient – goes at your own pace. There is no level at which you can't learn something nor any level of achievement from which nature can not reveal more secrets. As ECE knows the best match is activities that are not so much below their level of interest as to bore them or so much above as to frustrate them.. There is no better teacher, in this regard, than Nature.

Yes there are many striking similarities. However there is one similarity that especially stands out to me. Of course I appreciated and felt deeply honoured when mayors, cabinet ministers, and top officials took time out of their busy schedules to meet with us on our "On the Road for Quality Child Care." Likewise I have felt honoured when recognized by various esteemed organizations for what we have been able to achieve in protecting wilderness. But the one thing that stood out to me in both the child care field and the field of protecting nature were those moments when I witnessed the sacrifice and dedication of people working with children, giving themselves to improving the lives of children and families and likewise those moments when I witnessed the same spirit of sacrifice and devotion by those who deeply love nature and want more than anything else to pass on the forever protected, special places of beautiful wilderness - old growth cathedrals - built not by the hands of humans – to be there to be loved and cherished by future generations of children.

Yes it was these moments that I felt I was truly standing in the presence of greatness.