



Our Lives
Memories
of Spotted Island

Myrtle Morris

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I was born in Porcupine Bay, fifteen miles from Spotted Island. I was born in 1928. Father was James Holwell. Mother was Mary Ann Turnbull.

I married Justinian Morris, from Seal Islands. That's a place south of here. We all called him Juddy. I met him at a dance one time in Indian Tickle. He was down there fishing with his uncle.

My father was always a fisherman. He used to fish in Spotted Island but we used to move back in Porcupine Bay for the winter season. In the winter season he used to hunt and trap fur and get wood to burn in the summer, outside on the island.

Father fished right out back of the island, jigging, trawling, and using their trap berths. He used to salmon-fish off the island. One of his main berths was Southeast Point, where he put his nets.

He used to have a trap berth up in Herring Cove, just right across from the mouth of Spotted. That was where he put his cod trap. And fish! He used to get some fish.

He would have two or three men with him until the boys, Tom and Hayward and Chris, got big and hardy enough. After I got big enough I used to work in the stage too. I used to cut throats, or head the fish. If the boat was gone to get some more fish we would finish off what was there. When they came back we would have all the fish cleared away.

Come September they would wash the fish out and put it in a pile. This washed fish was called waterhorse fish. It was ready to spread on the bare rocks we called the bawn. Or we spread it on flakes. We took it out on the hand barrow, a few yaffles at a time. We were only youngsters then.

If you got a day like this, expecting a shower, oh how we would scavel. We didn't want the fish to get wet. Everyone had to be down on the bawn then. If there was a baby they used to wrap up the baby and bring it down on the bawn while the mother was helping.

After the fish was dried they used to bring it over to Domino, just right across the run, to ship it. They used to stack it in the store until the schooner would come and get it, for H. B. Dawe, Cupids.

There's something else I should mention to you. My father was a dentist, and he couldn't write his name! On Spotted there was a nursing station and there was a clinic. We used to have a nurse there in the summer but they wouldn't be there in the winter. And father had, I think it was four years with a doctor, from England.

That is how he got his training. The doctor often said to father, "You can do a better job than I can."

And here he was, he couldn't read or write. He used to get his supplies from IGA, the International Grenfell Association, like Novocaine. He had his own instruments. I tell you what, there used to be some people that came to him. On Sundays you couldn't get in our house.



My brothers and a load of fish.
John Howell, Hayward Howell,
Chris Holwell, Spotted Island.

After all the week working the fishing grounds, the schooners used to come down to Spotted. Throughout the week the fishermen would say, "I'll be down Sunday to get my tooth out."

Sometimes a captain would say to Dad, "I got a couple of fellas on board who got bad teeth."

He took a lot of people out of pain.

He used to use an ordinary kitchen chair when he was working home. He got paid twenty-five cents a tooth.

They always ran to Dad with bad teeth, and Dad would always be bawling out to me to help. I was his flunky because I used to do all of the sterilizing.

You would see the odd one then fainting. We used to pick them up off the floor and put them on the bench. We had a wide bench in our kitchen. I would go and get the smelling salts.

He was in the First World War, Dad was. He had a piece of shell in his head over his right eye. Oh, and that was right squabby. Soft. You could feel the piece of shell left in there. Dr. Paddon and other doctors wanted to take it out. Father always said no, that it was his souvenir. It didn't bother him that it was there. He also got hit in the leg.

We had a teacher up to Spotted Island, two winters. He was a J. P., and he was some teacher. He didn't have to pick up a book to know what was in it. If he was putting a fire in the stove when you were reading and you said a wrong word, he knew right where you were. There was no such thing as standing right behind you and following along with you and the book to see if you made a mistake.

There was a boarding school over here, in Cartwright, across the harbour from where we are now. I was eleven years old when I came there to school. It's funny, you know. Today I find with the children, they're always bored. That wasn't even in our vocabulary when we were growing up. We made our own fun and we always seemed to be so happy about everything. I suppose we didn't have anything so we didn't miss it.

We would be at all kinds of games and in the summer the hospital was open. The Grenfell volunteers, WOPS we called them, would have every child on the island playing all sorts of games. They would have a field day with running and games. You would get prizes for it and of course this was something exciting, something new for the people out on the island. A game we had ourselves was down under the stage, chasing sculpins.



My grandmother Lucy Turnbull, in doorway.
Me (Myrtle Holwell Morris), sitting.
Baby is Mary Jane Clark Dalton.

Aunt Minnie Turnbull was a midwife. She was married to my uncle, Mother's brother. I was with her two or three times when she was called to deliver a baby.

The old midwives, they were some particular. Firm, too. You stayed in that bed until they said get out. Of course it made a lot of sense in one way, because your body does go through a terrible ordeal.

I guess Aunt Minnie Turnbull got it from working with the nurses. She used to look after the nurses up to Spotted. She couldn't read or write either. She taught herself how to read.

Actually, I helped with the delivery of a baby who later became my adopted daughter. There were only three families left on the island. All the rest were gone in the bay, so the only one there was Aunt Flossie Elson. We couldn't get off the island ourselves right then. When the baby was born it was normal. I didn't mind it at all.

It was marvellous, the feeling that you get, seeing what was brought into the world. A breathing child.

It is comical to think about. You know the old beaver tobacco, or jumbo tobacco, how it scaled? If somebody cut their finger, they would pick off a scale of tobacco and just wrap it around the finger and tie it up. That's what they used to do. I laugh every time I think about that.

If you happened to take that off before it stopped bleeding and it got infected, they would have a different remedy. They would have to make a bread poultice and put it there to clean it out. That is what they used to do for infections.

For a cough they used different things, but molasses was always used. Sometimes they put kerosene in it, and white liniment. They let it boil and took it off and let it cool down. They used to only give you half a teaspoon. It was good, too! I suppose the molasses was smooth and sweet to your throat. I don't know what it did but I know it was really good.

If you had a chest infection they would always steam you with Friar's Balsam or Vicks. They'd put a towel over your head with the container in front of you. It would almost smother you when you inhaled that but it was good. They still use that today, only they use it in a different manner.

I had an aunt who died with that old Spanish Flu. She was in Open Bay. There was a lot of people who died up around the coast, up the shore. I believe there were four or five that got buried in the one grave.

It was bad. There were quite a few people who died.



Our home at Spotted Island.
My sister, Lillian Holwell Morris,
and me (Myrtle Holwell Morris).

I remember Aunt Charlotte Davis. I think she buried her father and mother. She was the only one left.

In the spring we children lived at the beach. You'd get your mussels and your wrinkles. Of course we used to be able to kill all kinds of seabirds for food.

I tell you, my mother used to do some queer things when it came to the cooking. In the spring of the year the ducks were fat. When she had the ducks on cooking she would drain off the grease and keep that in a jar. That's what she used to use for grease, like most people used butter. In buns and puddings. And she used to make cookies and cakes with it and you never tasted anything so marvellous.

There were nine of us and she used to stretch it. There was nothing wasted, I tell you, in our house.

We never had much. We had flour and molasses, but nothing else. The only thing with mom, she used to have a garden. In the fall of the year we took fresh vegetables up in the bay. She also pickled turnip tops. In the spring when we came back out to Spotted, we would have the pickled ones.

I guess we were a lucky family. We were, compared to some poor beggars.

There was this family in particular who was poor. This little boy came to the house one day when we were having dinner.

Whatever we had, we shared. Mom said to him, "Would you like to have some dinner?"

He said, "Yes, ma'am."

He said to my brother, "Mom and they got nothing for dinner, not even a bit of 'lassy bread."

We couldn't believe it, so Mom asked him if that was true. After all the family was fed and he had his dinner, she put what was left into a container to bring up to them. That was true. They didn't have anything. It was heartbreaking. We couldn't get over it. And here was Mom, with puddings and everything all cooked up for our Sunday dinner.

Of course we always had a wild bird or something like that cooked up. These days you could be starving for a bird and you can't get one. I almost forget what they taste like. It makes me mad, that does.

One thing we never did was kill birds just for the fun of it. If some of the old fellas caught the young boys out with the gun firing at beachy birds, they got after them to quit.

You'd have bread. Mom used to make the hops for making bread. If you made a bread today and you never had any yeast left, you pinched off a ball about so big and you'd leave that one as a leaven. When you make another bread, you put that in soak and put that in the bread that you were going to mix and it would rise up. That's what we used to do when we couldn't get yeast. But they used to have hops, and they used to make bread out of that. We would never be stuck for bread.

We always had hens. Mom used to be some particular over her hens. She would have six or seven hens. The dogs got at them and left us with one! They got out of their pen that they had. The dogs weren't chained up like they are today. Oh my, she was some mad that day.

Mother had a garden. It wasn't a big garden, but it was one of the biggest on the island. All along one side were potatoes. There were two beds in the middle which was cabbage. You dared not touch them. There would be great big heads of cabbage, turned right in, they were that big. Along another way were turnips, turnip tops. Over in another corner were beets, radishes and carrots, but they didn't grow very big.

The first time she ever tried potatoes was really laughable. We got a full sack of potatoes, now, mind you, that included the little small ones. She even kept them. She had them in another bag, but some of them were big enough. We used to have them with fresh vegetables up until Christmas.

When we saw the first spring boat coming around Domino Point, oh boy, that was a happy day. On the boat they would be just as happy, because for trading a bucket of vegetables they got a meal of seal. Oh my good gracious, they used to have some good feeds. In the spring of the year it was really something. It was like you were going to live another year.

It's really funny how you can manage with so little sometimes.