

MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH SPECIAL EDITION - CAMP TAKHINI

April 15, 2003

Hi All

Here is a small collection of recollections of life centered around the Army and Airforce. Anyone else who may have something to share on this subject is asked to forward it to Donna Clayson at ytdogteam@telus.net

If you happen to know the whereabouts of those folks Donna Salter is looking for, please contact her direct at dmsalter@telus.net

Thanks to all of you for sharing your stories.

Sherron

I lived in Whitehorse for 1956-1959 at 11 Normandy Road, Camp Takhini, Army child and attended Whitehorse High School grades 10-12.

My dad was a **Staff Sergeant Robertson** at that time and was the Senior NCO for the Military Police on the NWHS. (North-West Highway System) In 1959 our family was transferred from Whitehorse to Vancouver.

I am very much enjoying this journey back through history and getting re-acquainted with many friends from the past.

An Army Teen In Camp Takhini

by: **Mike Robertson**
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Camp Takhini, an operational Canadian Army Camp and HQ for the northwest Highway Maintenance System (HME) governed the operation and maintenance of the Alaska Highway from Mile 0 at Dawson Creek, BC to Mile 1202 at Beaver Creek, Alaska. This is where I lived for a part of my teen years (14-17) from August 1956 to August 1959.

In July 1956 our family transferred in from Shilo, Manitoba. Essentially all of our possessions other than clothing and a few treasures had been placed into storage for the next three years while we were "inside". Our family of five all piled into the 1955 Chevy and headed for the lands of the midnight sun via Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Dawson Creek and all of the 918 mileposts along the Alaska Highway into Whitehorse.

We must have arrived on a rainy weekend as my Dad had to check in downtown at the hospital orderly room as the DND offices in Camp Takhini were closed. I remember Main Street in Whitehorse as being a pretty muddy road. It wasn't a great first impression and dirt of any type was definitely not my mom's best friend.

After spending the weekend in a motel, Tourist Services I think, we settled into a furnished duplex August 1st at 11 Normandy Road and awaited the arrival of our stuff



Main Street Whitehorse Spring 1959 (Similar to when we arrived in August 1956)



11 Normandy Road – Camp Takhini (Left Side)

Whitehorse was different from the “outside”. Fresh dairy products, fruit and vegetables were very expensive if and when available. Gasoline was 50 and 55 cents per gallon. Cokes were 25 cents apiece. (On the outside cokes had just risen to 10 cents and 12 for the large bottles) There was no TV and only CBC local radio. At that time Whitehorse had an abundance of cocktail lounges, dogs, military, RCMP and natives. It did not have Rover Scouts, pavement, sidewalks, traffic lights, parking meters or much else. It was not a haven for high school age people.

Yet as fate would have it, these were to be my high school years. Grades 10, 11 and 12 at Whitehorse High School (WHS) on 4th Avenue. This, by the way, would be the longest time that I had ever attend any one school in my whole life's history. WHS was to be the 12th school I attended.



WHS - Whitehorse High School

Going to school here was different than on the “outside”. In the winter you would be well into your first class which began at 9:00 AM (about ½ hour before the sun came up) and it was before your last class ended at 4:00 PM, that the sun had set. The summery months were quite the opposite. It never got dark, only dusky.

Getting to and from school was quite convenient as the army provided a bus service directly between Takhini and WHS. The disadvantage that if you wanted to go downtown for a coke or any kind of shopping after school you had to rely on the regular army bus service. That service frowned on kids riding on it as they had already provided you with school bus transport. Needless to say the bus service was not designed for the convenience of young people.

In the mid fifties fads were Rock & Roll, crew cut tops and long sides combed back, side burns, open shirts, rolled up collars and Jimmy Dean jackets. Guys like Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper, Pat Boone, Chuck Berry, Sonny James, The Everly Brothers, Johnny Cash, Bill Haley and the Comets and of course the King, Elvis Presley were the musicians of the day. These and many others were rocking the jukeboxes, record stores and movie theaters. Most all the kids of the high school persuasion all attended YPA on Friday nights where we all danced to these performers' music. We danced the jive, hand jive, bop, and of course the slow smooth waltzes.

Life in Camp Takhini held a very small number of activities that were attractive to teens of the time. There was no real teen or youth center so the choice of places to hang out were limited.

The **canteen**, which was really a services coffee shop, was a place where teens could gather, get a coke and listen to the latest rock and roll hits on the jukebox. With the costs being three tunes for a \$.25 and \$.25 for a coke we didn't stay for many drinks nor hear many tunes at any given time.

The **bowling alley** that I believe had four lanes of five-pin was another minor attraction but for teens it was mostly a spot where a few could get a part-time job pin-setting.

The **camp movie theatre**, was less than a theatre and more like a darkened room with an old projector. There were the odd good old films and sometimes relatively new ones. The advantage it had over downtown was the low price and films on Sunday evenings.

The **library** was another location in which teens could participate. It was small, however, it did provide a pretty good service and was a way to ward off boredom and meet with friends.

For other teen activities like movies, record shops, restaurants and dances one would have to go to downtown Whitehorse. To get there you really had to keep adult regular hours because the army bus system ran essentially on the hour. However, as I recall the last bus up the hill was about 10 PM. This made it tough to go to dances and get home unless you either walked up the two-mile hill, hitchhiked or knew someone with a car. The lack of transportation was a deterrent to regular dating.

The one other area that we could also access was the movie and similar facilities at the Airbase. It was about four miles southerly along the highway and directly adjacent to the airport. It too required transportation co-ordination, so was out of reach most of the time.

Most socialization for the kids took place at school. Activities included intramural sports such as basketball and volleyball and the occasional sock-hop. These were all very heavily chaperoned so for the most part not a lot of fun.

Organized activities for me included 551 Squadron Air Cadets and hockey.

I raised some income through baby sitting, pin-setting and the occasional but very sparse part-time jobs at the local camp grocery store during the school year.

Summer jobs were more plentiful but were only available to those 16 and over. Some of mine included landscaping, the Coke bottling plant, construction at the new Riverdale Hospital and fire cleanup through a friend's dad, the Fire Chief. My best job was working for the DND Survey Department at the end of grade eleven.

In summary, living in Takhini wasn't too bad. All of us "Army Brats", as we were referred to, were all in the same boat and did develop a bond among ourselves. We biked or walked to and from everything in the camp. Of all the kids in the camp that I can remember, only two had cars and fuel was very expensive so rides were limited.

Life in Camp Takhini was a new and different experience for me. It was one that I certainly look back on with much fondness as it made me aware of the value of friends and has left me with an understanding of the meaning of "The Call of the YUKON."



Mike Robertson 44 years after Takhini

Camp Takhini

By Donna Salter
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As my family only lived in Whitehorse for a short time (1956-1958) we do not have as many memories as some folks - but those we have are very special.

We were actually based there with the air force and lived on the hilltop in PMQ's. My brother Allan is three years older than I and we rode the military bus to school each day - leaving in the dark and coming home in the dark on those long winter days. (Great for cuddling in the back seat with your latest boy or girlfriend!).

We attended almost every CYC Dance in Whitehorse on Friday nights and learned the new dance steps courtesy of dance lessons we took part in at the Taylor family home throughout the winter one year. We learned to square dance, tango, samba, waltz, foxtrot, etc ---- we still use some of those cool moves to this day!

We kept pretty active in our teen years there (I was 13-15 and Allan was 16-18). My brother Allan was president of the student council, president of the Junior Red Cross and in the Air Cadets. I was a class rep, cheerleader for the basketball teams, played softball and our entire family curled - as many did!

We loved the occasional group bus trip to Takhini Hotsprings on cold winter nights, hikes to Miles Canyon, and walking past Robert Service's cabin in Whitehorse, imagining what wonderful stories were left untold in that tiny little abode.

We had the absolute best teachers - many I will never forget. I learned art techniques from Lillias Farley that I did not appreciate until many years later as a mother and Girl Guide leader and found I was able to pass along skills learned oh so many years before! I still remember every single word of songs learned in music class and the glee club under the able tutelage of Miss Rounce!

Many of the friendships made in those special years remain - and we are so pleased that we have made connection with many through the Vancouver Yukoner's Group, the Classmates internet site and now through this! I still would love to find some who have not yet surfaced - Rocky Haines, John Plamondon, and Sandra Kolle to name a few.

We left Whitehorse in the summer of 1958 after the horrific forest fire and a strong earthquake. At the time of the earthquake, I was sitting in the Taku Hotel cafe having a coke and french fries with the gang when the windows and glassware on the shelves started to rattle and then the cars outside started to waltz back and forth as the tremors passed through! What an eerie feeling!

I think the fact that we had no TV and only 50Watts of Friendliness on CFWH, we had to make our own fun and that made us all more social, self-sufficient and savvy!

We have not had the opportunity to go back to Whitehorse since we left 45 years ago - but hope to change that in the not too distant future!

I look forward to hearing more through the Moccasin Telegraph - keep up the good work!

Donna (Garneau) Salter

I have one short story about the shenanigans we used to pull on the poor bus driver. All the 'army brats' had a pass but, of course, I wasn't part of the base so had to borrow a pass to get back and forth to Takhini. Never realized it at the time that we didn't pull anything over on the bus driver but at the time thought we were pretty smart. My friend would board the bus, run to the back and open a window. A second friend would board, show their pass then rush to the back of the bus and throw their pass out the window. I would retrieve it then board the bus. One time in the winter it was windy and the wind caught the pass. Never did find it and when I tried to board without it I wasn't allowed on and my friend was without their pass.

Donna (Storing) Clayson