

MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH – SPECIAL EDITION – ATLIN – Dec. 23, 2003

Submitted by Daisy (Callison) Havdale - Welsh and typed in by Sherron Jones
sherronjones@shaw.ca

ATLIN

By Daisy (Callison) Welsh formerly Havdale jehavdale@shaw.ca

Mail Day! In the days before so-called civilization, radio, airmail, T.V., telephones, and cars, we who lived in isolated areas, looked forward to mail day. It was our one connection with the outside world. We read our letters with enthusiasm, and our newspapers from cover to cover. My brother John was running his ranch on the old family homestead at Montney, a fertile valley that lies north of Ft. St. John. My mother and younger sister lived with him. John had left for his trap line in Ft. Nelson and had hired Jim Waite, a 19 year old, to care for the place in his absence. Jim had left quite early that morning to go to Montney Corner for groceries and our mail.

This special day, December 15, 1940, Mollie had ridden her saddle horse, Buddy, to school. I had a few hours to spare and was helping my mother make quilts. She was carding the wool and making the bats. I was doing the sewing. As soon as we heard the sleigh bells ringing we knew Jim was home and everything stopped. My mother built up the fire in the kitchen range and started our lunch. I ran out to get the mail. Jim unhitched the horses and put them in the barn.

In the mail was a letter, which would change my life! It was from my sister Doris Simpson. She and her husband, Bud and baby, were living on Spruce Creek, in Atlin, where Bud was working at the Nolan mine. She asked me if I would come to live with them. Of course I was interested but my life at the moment was so involved!

A catastrophe had occurred at the home ranch. John owned a huge boar pig, the door on his shed had not been closed properly and the weather was cold. He had fought his way out of his shed and gotten into the fenced stockyard, where he attacked the horses with his slashing tusks, seven of them had been badly injured. I understood veterinary work and in no way could I leave my mother under such circumstances. I had been practicing for quite a large part in the drama, which was to follow the Christmas Concert, so I was forced to tell Doris that it was impossible for me to come. She wrote back and asked me to come as soon as it was feasible.

It was mid March before all the horses were out of danger. I had spent the major part of the winter in the barn, working from horse to horse. I will never forget the triumph I felt when I saw the last injured racehorse use her front foot for the first time. The vet, who at first examined her, suggested she be shot but I had begged for the chance to try to save her. She was a beautiful little chestnut mare, who lived to run and win races. Her name was Nancy Hank. Spring had started to break when I decided it would be expedient to leave for Atlin. Jim had promised he could handle the situation from there on. The first leg of the journey was the 25-mile drive to Charlie Lake with horses, which is where the little Yukon Southern Airways made their base. (This airway had been started by a group of young pilots, including Grant McConnachie. It was later to become Canadian Pacific Air Line.)

I left Charlie Lake early one morning on a little Waco plane piloted by Ernie Kubisak. The plane was loaded with perishables for Watson Lake and was carrying one other

passenger for that destination. Ernie serviced his plane in Watson Lake, dropped off the first passenger and picked up a young trapper with his four sleigh dogs and equipment. We dropped them off on a frozen river farther north. When we reached Whitehorse I went to the Whitehorse Inn. There I met a friend of my brother Pat Callison, who was living at Dease Lake. This man was Dick Landry. He also knew my father who had taken supplies in to Niolyn with his packhorses for the old Telegraph Line. Dick had spent years working on that project.

I had one day to lay over in Whitehorse. I decided to make the most of it by acquainting myself with the town. Some friends and I walked up Miles Canyon. It was a lovely day and I enjoyed the tour. I kept meeting people who knew some of my family. The next day I flew on to Atlin. The pilot this time was Les Cook. I was the only passenger and I decided early on that he was planning to give me a scare. Once I realized he was up to mischief, then, for the life of me, I would not let him know that I was frightened. I had flown quite a lot in these little planes and knew of the danger of some of his stunts! Needless to say I was relieved when the beautiful little village of Atlin came into view.

Les Sands met the plane in his taxi with which he served Spruce Creek. He had other passengers and stops to make. In time I was taken right to the Simpson's door. I had not seen Doris for over three years. She had married in the meantime. We had met Bud in Telegraph Creek in 1935. He traveled down the Stikine River aboard the Hazel B. to Wrangle, Alaska, the same day we did. The Simpson's little son, Dale, was less than two years old. I was sorry to find that Doris was not feeling too well. Said she had not told me before, as she did not wish to worry our mother.



Mrs. Roxborough & niece Shirley along with John & Vena Nolan & their ball team 1939.
Photo courtesy Daisy (Callison) Havdale - Welsh

The Nolan Mine where Bud was working was doing very well and they had quite a large staff. (Large enough that they had their own ball team.) Fairly new cook and

bunkhouses had been constructed. Clyde Wann was the cook. He had a bull cook, Ernie, but seemed to be doing most of the work himself. Clyde was not alone in the cookhouse however. He had four big dogs and several cats. I wondered, but no one seemed to mind too much when the dogs' tails dug in the plates as they ran by! In fact they made a joke of it.

The "Columbia Development" had been dealing with Nolan for his "Top Spruce" property and they were in the process of making changes. Jim Eastman was the manager of the company. He had a few new houses built further up the creek, above where the cookhouse was situated. He and his wife Maureen and their 13-year-old son Jimmy lived there. Jeff and Lil Dunn moved into one of the houses. I believe Jeff was a bookkeeper. The assistant manager was Tyre. He and his wife Muriel lived there as well. The company also constructed a new bunkhouse in the same area.



Klee, Havdale, Vick Mine
Photo taken by Daisy (Callison) Havdale – 1942

Nolan's log home was across the Creek from the Simpson's and also their main mining buildings, such as their shaft house, dry house, engine rooms, etc. Below the Simpson's frame house, quite close by in a log home lived two bachelors, Ryder Havdale and Alfred Vick. Within a few yards of them but on a hillside is where Bruno Allegetto had built a very nice little log home. It was really quite impressive. This constituted the area referred to as "Top Spruce". The mine owned by John Klee, Ryder Havdale and Alfred Vick was established over half a mile farther down the canyon. This is where Johnny Klee and the Nymans lived.

At the foot of the canyon was the Cope Mine, managed by Jack Wheeling. There were several independent mines below them, all the way down the creek in fact, namely some of them were Angus Beaton, the Millers, the Grahams and Jack Brown. For the most part and to my amusement, the outfits were referred to as the Scotchmen, the Italians, the Ukrainians, etc.

Within a short time the Columbia Development took over the cookhouse and really got started with their diggings. Clyde Wann quit and a new cook took over, his name was George Landers. George had his training aboard ship and was meticulous. For starters he was spotlessly clean. I have never seen anyone accomplish so much in such a short time. He and Ernie cleaned that cookhouse from top to the last board in the floor with lye water. For a couple of days water and soapsuds were flying. He attacked that dirty bit stove, the gutters full of grease, with a vengeance! Of the half a dozen cats George kept one. To keep the mice down he said. One day that cat brought a mouse into the cookhouse, where she was teasing it. David Matson was standing watching. All was fine until he decided to tease the cat by placing his foot over the mouse. To his astonishment the mouse ran up his pant leg. He grabbed it in the seat of his pants and made a dash for the door. Everyone had a good laugh except poor Dave!

Bernard Longpre, a 16 year old, was the dishwasher. He was a big blonde handsome boy, always a smile on his face and a great little worker. He could wade through a pile of dishes and pots and pans and have them scalded in nothing flat. I had been offered the job of waiting on the tables. It was up to the four of us to run the cookhouse.

I do not recall the complete number of workers but we had four long tables from one end of the cookhouse to the other. In all they held two hundred plates, which I kept set at all times. The sugar bowls, cream cans, jam containers and milk pitchers, etc. were kept clean and full. We were never sure how many we had to feed, especially in the fall when prospectors came in from the creeks. George was strict but fair and had a good sense of humour. There was a cheerful, friendly atmosphere at all times.

One Sunday George was pushed a little too far. Not only did we have several extra prospectors who had been cooking for themselves all summer and who were enjoying a well cooked meal, but also the Eastmans and Tyres arrived unannounced with a total of over 20 mouths to be fed. Every seat in the cookhouse was filled. The main meat course was roasted chicken. Bernie was helping me with the serving, knowing that I in turn would give him a hand with the dishes later. We saw to it that everyone had been served and all was going well until Pettigrew, who was a drinker and a troublemaker at the best of times, asked for more chicken.

George emptied the last of the chicken from the kitchen onto a big platter but by the time it had gone all the way around that table it was some short. Pettigrew in a loud angry voice accused me of holding back on the servings. Nothing could have been farther from the truth and his attitude was unbearable. George had been watching from the serving table and was between us before I knew what was going on. Bernie, too, rushed to my side. George ordered Pettigrew out of the cookhouse immediately, saying that any kind of a man who had a complaint would have come to him instead of attacking "the kids".

Eastman intervened on Pettigrew's behalf. His mistake! George threw off his apron and quit on the spot. Bernie and I followed suit. Eastman was begging George to at least see the meal through but he refused until "that lying, trouble making, stool pigeon, left the cook house". This was very embarrassing for Eastman since he was not only in front of his whole staff, but the host of the entire extra crowd. Pettigrew left so we donned our aprons and finished the meal. Eastman told George they would meet tomorrow but George said "No dice". If he didn't hear what pleased him this very night he would not be on call in the morning. George told us later that he had found over the years to never

back down. Otherwise he would be taken advantage of for all time. I'm satisfied he was never challenged again!

Landers and his pregnant wife moved into the apartment above the cookhouse. In time Martha went outside to have her baby. When George heard he had a son he decided this to be a good excuse to celebrate. He went overboard! When Bernie and I arrived for work the next morning there was no George, no fire and no pancake batter! We realized what had happened. Bernie quickly lit the fire and having decided we could handle the situation, set to work! All was going well and when the men started filtering in we just told them we'd be a bit late. They understood so were visiting, joking and waiting patiently. One boy threw off his coat and took over the sink. But then Cyril James came in. He too, had been drinking and was now feeling his authority. When he started harassing us about being slow and telling us to "Hurry Up!" a big miner named Dan told him quietly to leave us alone. They were fortunate "these kids" had taken over so just back off. Cyril didn't take the hint. Before he knew it he was being tippy toed out the back door and told to go back to bed and sleep until he could behave himself. The door was locked against him. George showed up mid morning holding his aching head. He was not able to accomplish much but gave us a few much needed instructions. He kept saying in his English accent "Don't tell Mawtha!"

I stayed with that job for several months. No time off. Many interesting and some not so interesting things happened in the meantime! It was an education in itself. More changes were being made at the mine. For one thing, they were starting night shift, which meant keeping the cook house open twenty-four hours a day. George quit and went to Ft. Nelson. I was tired so I quit at the same time. Doris was not all that well again and could use some help and care. Her son Glenn was soon to be born.



Daisy Callison, Vena Nolan & Dale Simpson 1940
Photo courtesy Daisy (Callison) Havdale - Welsh

Ryder Havdale and I were now engaged to marry. Bud Simpson finished their upstairs rooms and put in an outside door. It made a cozy but small apartment. We sent to Eaton's for our furniture, which arrived on the last boat. To our surprise, Eaton's not only sent all our freight, cost on delivery, but also presented us with a lovely set of dishes and silverware, as a wedding gift. I had ordered a wedding dress at the same time so they realized someone was getting married. December fourth was our date and the ceremony was held in the Simpson's small front room. A Rev. Graham from Atlin officiated. Doris and Bud were our witnesses. There were only a few guests but that little room was crowded! We held our reception at the cookhouse.

I had been putting in such long hours on the job that I had done very little socializing and not too many to socialize with anyway! However, I now had the time to get to know the other women on the Creek and in town. With the changing of shifts new people moved in. Frank Steele, who was the new head cook and his wife Evelyn. Rita McDevitt and Ann Bayer came from Dease Lake where they had been working for my brother Pat. Alex McKenzie and Mae came before too long. Fred Graham brought his new wife Jessie. Art Lord had gone away but returned along with his bride, Ruth Colter, whom he had met some time ago in telegraph Creek.



Billy Knutsen

Photo courtesy Daisy (Callison) Havdale - Welsh

George and Pearl Knutsen, (Bill and Nan McKecknie's daughter) and their little son Billy, returned from Mayo. George was a blacksmith and he had taken a job at the mine. Pearl and I became fast friends and where ever we went we took Billy. He was such a wonderful little boy. Pearl in turn was a great little mother. I never heard Pearl speak a cross word to Billy, but in calling on his common sense she would reason with him. As small as he was he would converse like a young adult and could reason things out for himself.



John & Vena Nolan with one of their "cleanups" 1942
Photo taken by Daisy (Callison) Havdale - Welsh

Vena Nolan and I had already become good friends. One day I walked up the Creek to see her and found her sorting gold nuggets. She said, "I am so glad to see you. I need your help badly, I always dreamed of such a cleanup but I am bored to tears. I just get one session of sorting done when I have to start the next one." I told her to ask me to do anything else but I didn't want to touch her gold. She won out though and we sorted nuggets for the rest of the afternoon. I had my camera with me so took a picture of her cleanup and one of her along with it. John Nolan, Jeff Dunn and Carl Modean came by so I got some pictures of all of them with the nuggets. A few days ago I was reading a book from the library named "Atlin". If I didn't come across the very picture I had taken that day, So long ago, of the cleanup with the Nolan's log house in the background. I dug out my old picture albums and sure enough, it was the very picture! I helped Vena with many cleanups after that.

In late summer I had to go to Vancouver. I had flown out to Carcross and taken a room at the Caribou Hotel. Almost immediately George Simmons showed up saying, "What the Hell are you doing here? Don't you know Ma is expecting you?" I told him I had thought of Ma but did not want to impose. Mrs. McMurphy handed me back the money for my room. Mrs. Simmons said she would really have been hurt if I had not come there. Well, I liked and respected her too! It is good to have a friend!

I had to lay over for a day. Ma was having a tea party and had invited all the elite from both Carcross and Whitehorse. All was going well when something set the parrot off. He started cursing, the longer he went on the worse he got. I think he knew every dirty word in the book! Ma had to throw a cover over him to finally shut him up. It was plain that some of those dames were offended and that amused me all the more. After

they all left at last we could laugh and we did. I wondered if they thought the parrot had learned those dirty words from Ma? We kidded her about it and she laughed!

That parrot had an interesting history. I believe it was after the steamship, the Sophia went down, off the Alaska coast, and many Northerners lost their lives that this parrot was found perched on some floating debris. Thirty some years after Ma's party, my twin brother and I were at a hotel in Carcross for lunch. Dennis had his little grandson along. The two-year-old boy was so intrigued with the old parrot. By now he had lost many of his feathers, was grumpy, and would not be bothered talking to anyone. Darren was standing by the cage just watching him. He put his head down close to the child and in a raspy old voice said "Hello Boy!" That gave Darren a thrill he never forgot! When the parrot died he was given a funeral, which many attended. He was indeed a famous old bird!

When Boy Nyman, who used to work at our mine, and his wife moved to town it left an old cabin empty near our shaft house. Ryder and Fritz Wickstrom built a long kitchen on one end of it and a covered porch. They erected a tent over a floor and frame and set up a heater in there for a laundry room. We moved down to this cabin, as it was more spacious than our upstairs apartment and closer to work.



The Lords, Billy Knutsen & Havdales, Atlin picnic 1942
Photo courtesy Daisy (Callison) Havdale – Welsh

During the winter in Atlin we spent our spare time skiing, ptarmigan hunting and playing cards. We also had dinner parties. There was the odd dance in town but we were happy when spring came with warmer weather and longer days. Some of the young men resurrected old dilapidated cars and trucks. We bought a motorcycle with a sidecar. With the coming of spring we went to the different creeks and the Hot Springs. It was great fishing at the Fourth of July Creek. One was sure of a fish every time he threw a hook in! Of course we went as groups at times and had picnics. We got to know the whole area that way. It was a carefree life and we made the most of it. There was soon to be a cloud on the horizon. The Second World War! We would sit around our radio and listen to the news. It seemed that every plane which left Atlin carried away more of our young miners.



Ryder Havdale on Motorcycle, Billy Knutsen and Wanda Havdale in sidecar 1943
Photo courtesy Daisy (Callison) Havdale - Welsh

I believe it was New Years Eve, the Columbia Development staff decided to hold an open house. The party was held at the cookhouse and most of the miners from the creek were invited. It was very successful event. At midnight Jim Eastman said good night and Happy New Year to everyone and closed the party down. We all started for home. A group of us were walking down the Creek. As we were passing Alfred Vick's cabin several of the group decided to continue the party there. Most of the married couples, including ourselves, went on home. An older man by the name of Joe Cassidy, was showing one of the young girls extra attention. Johnny Klee, who was a natural joker, started teasing him. Was he under the illusion that he could turn a pretty young girls head? Joe left in a huff, walked the half-mile to the bunkhouse, came back with a rifle and shot Johnny who died almost instantly.

We were unaware of what had happened until George Knutsen and Billy came down to our cabin the next morning. George told Ryder he was being criticized for not being at the scene of the "accident"? We were devastated! Ryder went back with George and took over from there. Joe of course was arrested. His trial was held in Prince George. He was given a seven-year sentence but served only two years. The judge said that since Joe had been taught to kill Germans at such a young age, and was the only survivor of the Battle of Jutland, he felt the need to be lenient. After all we were again fighting a war against Germans! Sad!

Johnny was sorely missed. He was the king pin in our partnership. He ran the hoist, did the mechanic and bookwork, as well as any negotiating which had to be done. To have his cabin standing empty was a constant reminder. Ryder took over those responsibilities, but nothing was ever quite the same again.

The Alaska Highway was constructed in 1942. With it came what we called "The American Invasion." The White Pass Railway was confiscated by them and even the Whitehorse Hospital! The Canadian civilians had to fly to Edmonton for medical care. We all depended on that hospital! In 1943 I was expecting my first baby. My mother had moved to Dawson Creek to where my young sister could attend high school. I decided to stop there with her. The biggest mistake I could have made! I would have been better off to stay at home in Atlin, care or no care!

I flew to Dawson Creek early in February. The streets were crowded with soldiers. Most of them were very fine people but sad to say there was an arrogant, lawless, element among them. On the tenth of the month a group of neighbors from Montney called on my mother. Among them was her dear friend, Gladys Tucker. The women had appointments to have their hair done at "The Collins Girls Beauty Salon", which was in the heart of town. They had left the house for but a short time when two of the policemen, who were rooming with my mother, ran in to pick up some of their equipment. They said there was a fire in the barn where the army had stored sixty-five cases of dynamite. This was bad enough but if they hadn't stored the glycerin caps there as well! A couple hundred people were watching the fire and had crowded into a back alley. The police were going to try to move them immediately. This was enough for my mother. She knew several of her young roomers were likely there and she just ran screaming for them to get out of that alley, as there was about to be an explosion. She did manage to empty the alley just in time. The police told me later; if she had not done what she did, there would have been a terrific slaughter.

Little Gwen Tucker and I were watching the fire from the upper story window. When I saw the lightning streaks in the sky, even before the blast, I knew an explosion had occurred. I screamed for Gwen to get under the bed. (I was too pregnant to do so!) She did, but looked at me as if I had lost my mind. I was sure the windows would shatter. Fortunately someone had left the downstairs doors open so the windows were spared. Most of the houses on the street had not only lost their windows but their chimneys were warped. Some houses were quite badly damaged!

Gladys Tucker, who was a registered nurse, stayed to help with the wounded. Her friend had been having a perm. In those days when having a perm each curler was fastened to a machine. At the time of the explosion the beauty operator had cut the wires so Mrs. Ketly could run. When I saw her coming with all these wires sticking out from her head and the blood dripping from the end of her nose, she was sobbing and deploring saying, in her English accent, "I lost me aut and me shoes". Not seeming to realize there was no coat on her back!

That explosion wiped out a whole city block. When the army finally got to the scene of the disaster they took over completely, even forcing the police away. When the news of the incident was printed there were supposed to be only five Dawson Creek residents who were killed and two soldiers. The police said they could not agree with the figures.

My baby was born on the twenty-third of the month. I can only think of my stay in that dirty hospital with horror. When I finally insisted on being discharged it was the sixteenth day. I left because I could hear my baby crying constantly. I was certain it was her even though the staff denied it. Neither was I getting better. All the nurses except one had quit and gone to work on the Alaska Highway. The nuns admitted they were not trained nurses and were not capable of giving the patients proper care. When I left I was still ill with milk fever. I was never able to nurse my baby. I had contracted an infection, which took me months to get under control.

The baby kept crying after I reached home. At last my mother asked if she had passed a stool. A neighbour, Mrs. Aspol, who was a nurse, was called in. She gave the baby an enema only to find that the dark mucus, which she should have passed within the first three days of her life, was still in the bowel. In other words, she was sixteen days old and

had never had a movement. No wonder she was in pain. I would likely have lost her if I had not insisted on leaving that hospital!

When the time came I thought I was well enough to go home to Atlin, I went to Ft. St. John where there was not an airstrip. Fortunately my sister-in-law lived at Charlie Lake and my brother John, who had a car, was visiting there. He took me the seven miles to the airport for three days in a row, morning and afternoon, before I finally managed to get a seat. Every time I tried to get on the plane I had been elbowed out of the way by an army officer, even though they had to know I was a young mother and a new baby trying to get home!

When we reached Watson Lake we were given a certain length of time for a rest stop. By that time I was aware of the fact that the stewardess had been drinking. She was even staggering. The rest of the crew should certainly have noticed. I was changing my baby when she came and was harassing me to come right now as the plane was leaving. She was grabbing at the babies clothes, thinking she was helping me I guess, but only getting in the way.

When we reached Whitehorse there was not a room to be had at the hotel and the taxi driver had taken off with my luggage. This meant I had no formula for my baby. A very kind American lady said her husband had gone to Fairbanks and offered to share her room. My baby appeared to be sleeping and the lady offered to care for her. We decided I should go to the café to get some milk for formula. The kitchen in the hotel was locked.

When I went into the café it was crowded with soldiers and I could not get up to the counter. I was wondering what I should do when a Chinese man motioned me into the kitchen from the far end of the room. When I got there he quickly locked the door behind me, handed me a couple of cans of Eagle Brand milk and rushed me to the back door. He said he had heard the soldiers talking. Don't go out the front door. They are waiting for you. Run down the dark back alley and cut across the corner to the hotel. Big dogs came out barking but the huskies were the lesser of the two evils!

By the time I got back to the hotel, the lady who was caring for her, had decided my baby was not sleeping but unconscious, the stewardess had failed to put her under an oxygen tent in that un-pressurized plane. I called Dr. Roth, who used to be in Atlin. He got out of a sick bed and rushed right down. By the time he got there we managed to get the baby breathing. He was appalled when I told him what all had happened to me that day. He asked me if I was going to complain. I told him I was headed for the creek, where I would have no contact with the outside world and never intended to leave Spruce Creek again! He told me he was going to make an issue of it, which was fine with me.

I don't know how he managed to get attention so fast but in a short time a Mounted Policeman and an Army Officer were in my room questioning me. The officer was dragging his feet but the doctor asked him if he wanted another crime committed before he did anything. He was the one who was responsible for his men. It was up to him to find out who the soldiers were who were in that café and what they had been planning, also to make sure no one had retaliated against the Chinese man. Dr. Roth said he intended to contact the Airline as soon as possible.

The next morning I was thinking I would have to take the White Pass Railway to Carcross. I was surprised to see George Simmons, the owner of Northern Airways, his sister Gladys, and my brother Pat, who was now flying for George, in the lobby of the Hotel. They had come to Whitehorse to pick up a load of perishables and to meet their

new mechanic who had come to town on the same plane I did. Pat had heard through the Moccasin telegraph that I was in Whitehorse. Their vehicle was loaded but they had decided to squeeze me in. I do not know the make of car George owned but it was a big ex-taxi cab with bulletproof glass between the driver and passenger seats. George was driving. The mechanic sat in the center seat and Pat on the right side of the car. Gladys sat on Pat's knee. I squeezed into the back seat, along with all those cases of eggs, etc., holding my baby. The roads were very icy.

As we were going down quite a steep grade we met a truck, which took more than its share of the road. George said he might just have touched the brakes but was not sure. Our car went into a skid and turned directly around. We were heading back to Whitehorse, teetering on the very edge of a steep bank. The men in the back of the truck saw what had happened and ran back to help by putting their weight on the upper side of our vehicle. The road was so icy they could scarcely stand. The Passengers sitting in the front seat got out the door. I couldn't get out over the front seat because of the glass but managed to get the window open and rolling my baby tightly in her blanket, handed her out to Pat. The space was so small I had to remove my coat in order to squeeze out myself. The truckers had a chain in their truck with which they managed to get our car pulled away from the edge of the cliff far enough to turn it around. On we drove, Carcross bound!

Pat and Ethel were now living in Carcross with their two little daughters. Joan was nine and Fay a young baby. I stayed with them for a few days while waiting for the mail plane. I had a very nice visit with Ethel, the children and Ma Simmons in the meantime. When mail day arrived, Pat flew me to Atlin. Les Sands met the plane and once again took me up the Creek. The log cabin looked like a palace! I vowed never to leave again!



Ruth Lord holding Wanda Havdale along with Bill Knutsen 1943
Photo courtesy Daisy (Callison) Havdale – Welsh

Of course the McKechnies had let me know when Pearl had died but somehow it had not seemed so final until after I reached home. It took some time before I quit listening for her step and little Billy's call. It gave me a vacant feeling. I forget when he came, but George did finally show up and along with him came Billy. We soon bonded closer than ever. He just wanted to stay with me and I wanted him also. We needed each other. He would often just sit and hold Wanda's little hand.

George left for Yellowknife shortly after. I was soon to realize just how much Billy was mourning his mother. He was such an intelligent little boy and just how do you answer his questions when you are thinking just as he did? I relayed the myths, which had been told to me, but I doubted them myself. He would often ask, "Why did God take my mommy away from me?" I could not give a truthful answer. What disturbed me most was when he would state, "God must be a mean man to take my mommy away". I tried to assure him that God was love, but had to admit, I wondered too!

Fourteen months later my son was born. This time, thankfully, the hospital had been turned back to the Canadian owners! Dr. Roth would come to Atlin periodically. He made arrangements for me to come to the hospital about twenty days ahead of my time, which I did and stayed in the hospital. The matron was Mrs. Jowett. She was a very considerate, friendly lady. My sister, Doris was now living across the Yukon River from Whitehorse. But worked with a crew who were cutting firewood for the sternwheelers, which plied the river to Dawson City. I never got to see her family but Doris came to the hospital where her baby daughter, Hilda, was born. Just nine days before my son.

I was about to walk to town one day just to get some exercise when the doctor warned me not to do so. He would drive me if necessary. I found it hard to believe the same situation still existed after all this time. He said too many native girls had been victims and he had one in hospital right now. She had been wearing a tampon, which had been forced up inside of her. It had been almost impossible to remove. Her mental condition was even worse. She simply refused to talk. I asked if it would be all right for me to try and reach her. He said he would be happy if I would try.

The girl, whose name I have forgotten, was in a private ward. She would lay with her face to the wall and never respond. I had gone to school in Dawson Creek with Indian children and one had been my best friend so I had a little understanding. This girl was about seventeen. Her parents had sent her down from the Arctic to finish her high school. She had taken an evening job, as a waitress, thinking it would make it easier on her parents. It was as she was going home from work when this terrible thing had happened to her.

She would not talk to me either, but I went in to see her often and just talked to her. I thought I might be able to reach her on common ground. I told her that my father and brothers were trappers and hunters and that I had lived a very isolated childhood. When I finally told her my brother, Lynch Callison, used to take freight by sleighs up the Fort Nelson Trail to the Sikini and from there on barges down the waterways to Great Bear Lake. She finally looked at me and said, "I know him. He bought my father's furs!"

Her parents had warned her to be careful whom she associated with and she had been blaming herself for her problem. She did not want her parents to know what had happened to her. I assured her this had not been her fault. I knew she had been raised in complete isolation and I thought she had done wonderfully well. I took courage from her to take an evening job. It should have worked out for her, and would have, under normal

circumstances. I also said the doctor did not blame her either. He referred to those soldiers who had attacked her as a pack of wolves! She finally started crying and could not stop. The tears seemed to be a balm for her soul. From that time on she started to converse some and to recover which delighted both the doctor and myself. Before long she was moved into a public ward. After my baby was born I took him in to see here. She smiled and held him for a while.

My son was born on the twenty seventh of April 1944. I went home on the ninth day. The doctor thought it to be too soon, but we were afraid the ice, which was now honeycombed on Atlin Lake, would be going out soon. There was a direct flight, piloted by Shell Gunn, which I took home to Atlin. Pillman's horses had been out on the flat where we had to land. They had roughed up the snow and it had frozen in peaks. The plane hit some of those bumps as we landed and the tip of one wing had dipped into the snow. It spun us around a few times. Another unexpected thrill!

We went up the Creek only to find my door locked. A good thing Les had checked, not leaving us out there in the cold! He took us up the hill to where the Lords lived. Ruth had cared for our daughter in my absence. It took Wanda some time before she realized who I was. I guess she had just given up on me and she loved Ruth, which was great. While I was away Ryder had closed our mine and started working as a partner to Jack Brown. He had cleaned up a bigger and more spacious cabin father down the Creek and was not expecting us home as yet. Alex McKenzie and Art Lord took Alex's dog team and went to find Ryder. He was working on the cabin to which he had moved. They helped him straighten a few things around and all of them came back to Ruth's after a couple of hours. In the meantime Ruth had put Wanda to bed and she was asleep so we left her there for the night. Alex took my baby and I home later that evening by dog team.

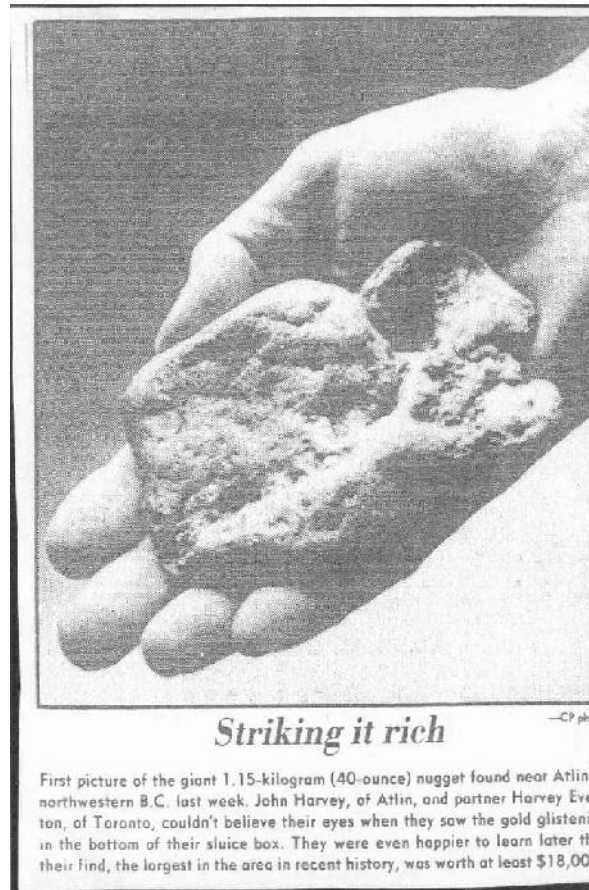
So many changes had taken place that I felt confused myself. Ryder and Jack did okay financially. They quit when the gold seam had been worked out. It was sometime in February when we left Atlin. I felt very sad to leave Billy Knutsen behind. I knew his grandmother loved him as much as I did. He was with me only on the weekends now. Nan sent him to school during the week. He would be well cared for. I felt as if I was leaving my own child behind.



Wanda & Bill Havdale in sleigh. Ellen Graham pushing sled – now Ellen Menzies living in Castelgar. Photo courtesy Daisy (Callison) Havdale - Welsh

Herman Peterson flew us to Carcross where we spent a few days with Pat and his family before taking the White Pass Railway to Skagway. From there we took the Princess Nora to our destination. Our family settled in Prince Rupert where Ryder went to work for the Ocean Dock. All employment was war oriented in those days. We started anew life, which was strange to me. I was to miss my Atlin home and friends.

Daisy (Callison) Havdale-Welsh
December 2003



Coincidentally – I met the man who found this nugget when we stopped at my sister, Doris Simpson's café at Rancheria Hotel Mile 710 Y.T. He said he had been placer mining in Atlin. He showed me a picture of the old cabin he stayed in on Spruce Dreek. Our old Cabin! He then brought in this huge nugget to show me. He had washed it out of our old tailing pile. The one Ryder had not bothered to wash.

When he asked if I felt badly about it I could only say "no". I was only glad it still was not lying out in that pile of gravel.

Daisy (Callison) Havdale-Welsh