

Story #4 Elinor taking care of the Lighthouse

Story #4 in our heritage interview series. David Weale interviewed Elinor Murchison Gillis at her son Gilbert Gillis's home in Point Prim PEI on Dec 14, 2019.

David Weale: So when you said, you made a point of saying that when you had your supper with your father it would be bread and butter and molasses and cold milk. That's a pretty simple supper now isn't it? But it was very common.

Elinor Murchison Gillis: Nourishing.

David: Yep, yep. It got you by.

Elinor: It was lunch, it wasn't a supper.

David: It wasn't your supper then, you would have already had supper at home. Supper then would have been earlier in the day, like at 4:30. That's right.

Elinor: Yeah, yeah.

David: So that was your bed lunch, but there was no stove there, you couldn't make a .

Elinor: Yeah, I should have put that in, there was a nice little wood stove in the main part.

David: Oh, so you could make a, some cup of tea if you wanted.

Elinor: Yeah, yep.

David: What else do you remember of the lighthouse itself. Would you ever spend anytime at the top of the lighthouse, you personally?

Elinor: Oh yeah, running up and down there when I was young, yeah. And we girls had to clean it. Had to polish and clean the light, you know, brass and then the glass. They left supplies for that. So we had to do that once and while.

David: Keep it all shiny and nice.

Elinor: And I remember about them painting the lighthouse that was quite the job. It's a man, going up on the, what do you call that, postman's chair. Painting the lighthouse, right to the top, the red part. Terrific.

David: And you get a pretty good view of Nova Scotia up there wouldn't you?

Elinor: Yeah, yeah, pretty good, and all around beautiful view there.

David: Certain days at least. Can people go to the top of the lighthouse now?

Elinor: Yeah, they do well with that. People going up to the top. They have to pay a little. Great view up there if you want an aerial view.

Story #4 Elinor taking care of the Lighthouse

David: I bet. So what else do you remember at the lighthouse. Inside, there was

Elinor: Steps going up, four flights of steps.

David: Ok, it was four different turns on it eh?

Elinor: Yeah, that was quite a novelty. To be on different sides of each story. That was quite a thing. And then coming down, but everybody does it, they don't seem to be scared.

David: The light, of course, would be on all night. Did it have to be checked during the night to see if it was?

Elinor: No, but I should have told that. The bed was placed where the window was to look up at the light. You can see that in some of the pictures. And my father always said, I had one eye closed and one eye open to watch the light, that it didn't go out.

David: Oh I like that, that's nice, yeah. He slept with one eye open and one eye closed so he could watch the light.

Elinor: Yeah, and I guess it's true, you know you'd be conscious of it.

David: I think if I do a story, that could be the title "One eye open and one eye closed". It kinda sums it up, the watchfulness of it all.

Elinor: Yeah, yeah, you had to have a good watch. He was very conscientious of the lighthouse, keep everything right, keep the log going in the cottage when he would write the log. He'd have to be careful what he put on there.

David: So this was three hundred and sixty five nights of the year, except in the winter time. In the winter the light wasn't on. But in the spring until Christmas or so it would be every night.

Elinor: Yeah, except the war years it wasn't on at night, because there was no navigation here.

David: Right. I know about, there used to be a lot of talk about the German submarines that were in the Strait during the, apparently they were around the Island during the war.

Elinor: Yeah, I guess there were some working around. Yeah. In the winter there was no boats going, see. But during the war they had to keep, (Off camera: Aviation) that was it wasn't it. Yeah, aviation.

David: Could your father ever take a night off and somebody else, was there an assistant?

Elinor: He would go to, something going on? He would get a neighbour to look after the light.

David: So he did have a little bit of a social life.

Elinor: A little, not too often though. Hector, we called him little Hector. He would substitute.

David: Little Hector would take over.