

# Hicks Family in South Beach, Gimli

Written by Lorraine Walton, July 2017



*Hicks Family in 2011 (Marg, Corinne, Heather, Lorraine, Doug)*

Doug and Marg Hicks moved into their new Winnipeg home June 15, 1956. The very first people they met were their neighbours Cecil and Jean (Murphy) French. The two couples became lifelong friends. In July 1956 Jean invited Marg to come to her sister's cottage for a few days. Marg packed up her two daughters, Corinne (Larsen) & Lorraine (Walton) and off they went to South Beach, Gimli.

Jean and Cec had three daughters – Shirley, Patti and Marilyn. Corinne and Shirley were close in age and played. Lorraine and Marilyn were a couple days apart in age and also were young playmates.

The cottage to which Jean invited my Mom belonged to Jean's sister, Grace (Murphy) & George Stephen. This cottage was located on Hansson Avenue and was later relocated (in the early 1980s) to the corner of Benedict and Anna. (More details about this move later.)

Meadowood Cottage now owned by Val & Brian Verity  
Marg and Jean, and their daughters, spent their entire mini holiday on the First Beach and loved it. 'First Beach' was at the end of Benedict Street.\*  
It was on 1st Beach that Lorraine met her lifelong friend – Valerie Verity (nee Sobkowich)



Vic and Betty Sobkowich's cottage, *Meadowood* was (and still is) located on the South West corner of Benedict and Third Avenue, just up from First Beach.

The spring of 1958 Doug and Marg purchased their lot located at 16 Benedict Street. The lot was well treed. Dad cleared the entire lot with an axe, as chain saws were not available at that time or the price to purchase one was not in the budget of the young couple.



*Hick's Ravendale, 16 Benedict Avenue*

Their neighbour directly to the West, by the name of George, took all the wood for firewood. George and his wife were full time residents of South Beach. It as a win win all the way around – Dad got rid of the wood and George got free firewood for the winter.

Once the lot was cleared, Dad would build as time permitted. Dad was a Winnipeg Police Officer thus did not get weekends off nor did he get summer holidays. Dad's vacation time would be in the early spring or late

fall, not conducive to building. But by 1959 our cottage the *Ravendale* was somewhat livable.



While Dad was building the cottage, we rented the 'Veranda' for \$1.00 a day from Mr. & Mrs. **Stephens**. This cottage was on the South corner of Anna and Benedict.



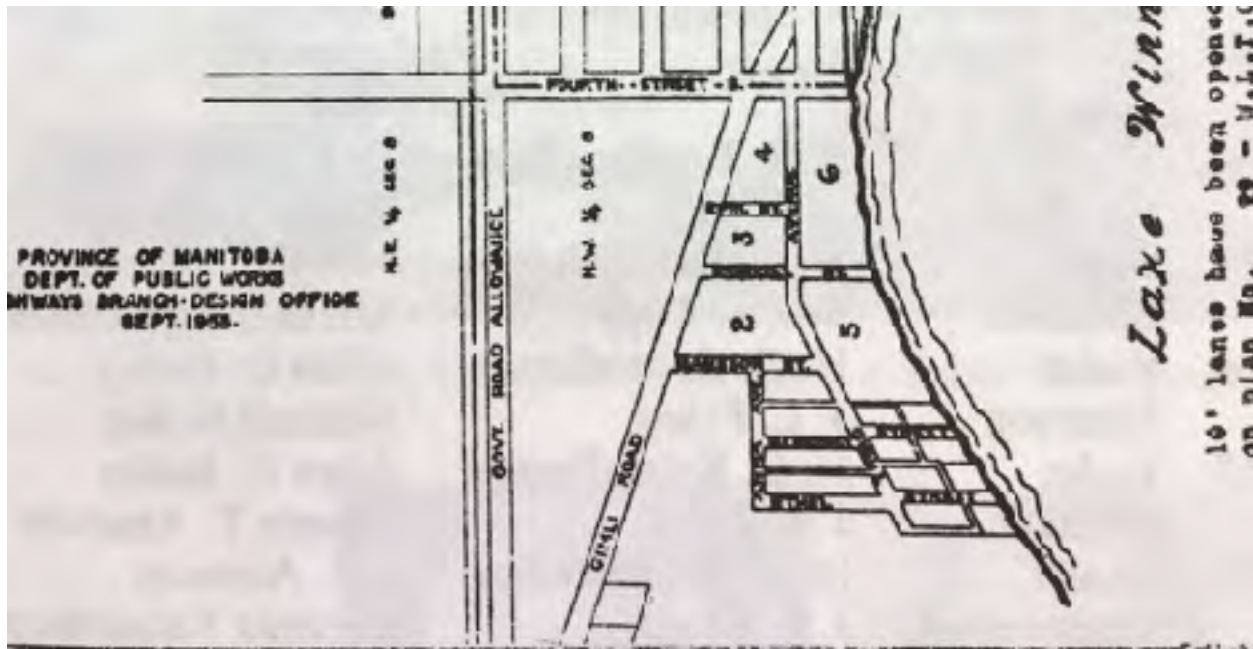
The main cottage was called *Dorrery Lodge*. This cottage was demolished around 1990s for the new cottage that is located there today. The original sign – *Dorrery Lodge* still hangs on the new cottage. Grace and George Stephen owned this cottage and at the time it was built it was intended to be used by family and friends coming to South Beach. This cottage was later passed down to Grace & George's son – Allan and Sheryl's children – Jeff, Craig & Allison.

By 1959 Jean and Cec had purchased their cottage – *Galway Bay* on Benedict Avenue as well.



The 'Veranda' we rented looked directly into Aunty Jean and Uncle Cec's yard. Outside the 'Veranda' was a horseshoe pit. The men played many a game of horseshoes. I can remember being in bed and hearing the clanging of the horseshoes. The men would pull a car into the yard and turn on it's headlights so they could conclude the game.

In those days Benedict Avenue stopped at the intersection of Benedict and Anna.\*\* Dad would have to carry all the lumber, etc. in by foot to build the cottage.



The first summer we lived in the cottage, we had buffalo board for windows and a door. Things were very primitive in the early 60s. The women had no fear of intruders. We did not have electricity for the first couple weeks we stayed in the cottage. Thank goodness for sandwiches and puff wheat cake.

During this time, the women and children would spend the entire summer at the cottage. We arrived July 1st and did not return back to Winnipeg until Monday of the September long weekend. I remember the husbands and fathers leaving Sunday night to go back to Winnipeg and we would wave to them on our walks.

By this time my younger sister, Heather was born (Sept. 1960). I remember my Mom heating a bottle at Auntie Jean's cottage, wrapping it in a towel to keep warm for Heather's night time feeding.

Life was very simple then. We lived on the beach all day, weather permitting. On days when the weather was not that great, we would work on puzzles and do paint-by-number.

By this time Val and I were about 6 years old. We did not require that much supervision and were trusted to stay out of trouble. We had our bikes and

spent hours riding, swimming off the main pier over to the small dock, and fishing for minnows which we would then sell to the fishermen on the pier daily. This money was used to go to the show in the evening.

The Gimli Theatre played one show Monday & Tuesday, another one Wednesday and Thursday and a third show Friday and Saturday. Our selling of minnows paid for our 25 cent admission to every Elvis Presley movie that came to Gimli, and there were lots of them. Thus to this day Val and I continue to be Elvis fans.

The cost of an adult show was 50 cents. We did manage to see our first Adult movie – long before being adults. The movie was called *Shot in the Dark*.

My parents had made many friends in the area. A couple by the name of Rod and Eileen (Murphy) Pennycook purchased a lot and built their summer home on the corner of Anna and Ethel the same summer my parents did. They called it *8 Pennys*. The only difference was they hired a contractor to build their cottage thus it was finished much faster.

When Rod & Eileen Pennycook first arrived in South Beach they had four children – Stirling, David, Kathleen and Margaret. The cottage was named the *Six Pennys*. Later to be changed to the *7 Pennys* with the arrival of Moira and once again to be changed to *8 Pennys* when Christopher arrived.

Eileen Pennycook was the sister of Jean French. Marilyn French and Kathleen Pennycook – played as friends and cousins for many a summer. The ladies golf together now and remain good friends.

Jean and Cec, Eileen and Rod along with my parents, Marg and Doug, played penny poker each and every Friday and Saturday night from the May long weekend until the September long weekend. Many a penny exchanged hands for years.

Doug Hicks was the President of the South Beach Campers (now South Beach Property Owners Assoc.) for a term in the late 60s, early 70s. It was during the high waters. Dad and many other men would spend many

hours sandbagging and pumping out the water in the Moonlight Bay area. Later the dike was erected and the flooding of this land was over.

My parent's had purchased 6 lots in the area over the years.\*\*\* Dad built his 2<sup>nd</sup> cottage on the North corner of Anna and Benedict in the early 70s. A stranger by the name of **Waivve Nisbet** purchased it. Waivve was single and had no family living in the area. We took an instant liking to her and she gave us permission to call her 'Auntie' Waivve. We had no family living in the province so it was great having an 'Aunt' right across the street.

Waivve enjoyed her cottage and her extended 'family' for many years. She sold her cottage in 2002 and took up residence in the Rotary Towers in Gimli. Waivve then suffered a stroke and moved to Betel Home, later passing away in June, 2009. Bob and Barb Letchford purchased the cottage and enjoy South Beach to this day.

South Beach was full of **Stephens and Murphys** ... cousins, Aunts and Uncles everywhere. Luckily for us the clan treated us like we were family and do to this day.

In 1989 George's home (west of ours) was torn down and a new one built. This later became the home of Mr. & Mrs. Hanson.

On the East side of our cottage is the Harman's cottage. This was the cottage I mentioned earlier that was re-located around the mid 1980s onto the property and an addition built on it in 1986 I believe. The cottage was purchased by Grace's sister, Isabel (Murphy) Harman.

Isabel and Bud Harman spent many a summer in South Beach. They had two sons – Ron and Rick Harman. Rick and Patti built their cottage in 1975 on the North East corner of Anna and Benedict. The two lots were originally owed by Jessie (Stephen) and Stan Murphy.

The summer of 1959 my mom, Marg Hicks (Sept.), Jean French (Nov.) and Eileen Pennycook (Jan.) were all expecting. I can remember Mom covering up while walking down the street to get to the beach, as pregnant ladies did not show off their bodies like they do today.

Heather Hicks was born in September 1959, Randy French in November, 1959 and Moira Pennycook was born in January 1960. The summer of 1960 brought another new bunch of babies to South Beach. These three little people played for many years.

Heather, and her husband John Titley now own a cottage at Falcon Beach. Randy French owns a cottage on Ethel Street in South Beach and Moira and Ian Farrer own a cottage in West Hawk Lake. My older sister, Corinne Larsen, owns a home on Willow Island.

Lorraine Hicks married Craig Walton and had their first son, Reid, in May, 1986. Reid spent his entire first summer on 2<sup>nd</sup> Beach sleeping in his pram in the shade. Neil Walton was born in May, 1990 and he too spent his first summer sleeping in the shade of the trees on 2<sup>nd</sup> beach.



*Ethel Beach, AKA 2<sup>nd</sup> Beach*

Kathleen (Pennycook) Coe and her two sons – Scott and Shawn grew up on 2<sup>nd</sup> Beach as well.



### **Harvard Trainer**

While spending my summers in South Beach I can remember the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Base being located in Gimli. Daily you would hear and see the jets flying over. Gimli was where the jet aircraft pilot training took place. (Gimli's association with the R.C.A.F. began in September, 1943, when Number 18 Service Flying Training School opened to train pilots from the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. The school built up to a strength of 1,337 officers, airmen, and civilians, including 240 trainees, and was the largest school in Manitoba. A total of 622 pilots graduated from 18 S.F.T.S. for the war effort. (Ref. [Gimli Saga page 137](#)).

Many of the air force families rented housing in South Beach for many years. Once the base was closed many air force personnel relocated to the base leaving rental property available for others to use. The base closed in 1971 (Ref. [Gimli Saga, page 2](#)) and became known as the [Gimli Industrial Park](#). Part of the park became Aspen Park and the living quarters became condominiums that were sold to the public.

Another sight that was very common in downtown Gimli was to see ladies dressed in white and red uniforms.



*British Columbia Fish Plant workers*

These women worked at the [British Columbia Packers Fish Packing Plant](#), which was located at the dock. Val and I knew at a young age we were not going to work for them when we grew up. The plant closed down in 1969 (see [Gimli Saga](#), page 242.)

Our family lost a dear friend – Cec French in Sept. 1996, followed by his wife [Jean](#) in June 12, 2009. Our other cherished ‘Aunt’ [Waivve Nisbett](#) passed away on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Eileen Pennycook and Rod Pennycook still make a couple trips each summer to see friends and family in South Beach. Kathleen (Pennycook) married Ken Coe and have made the family cottage, the *8 Pennys* into their permanent home.

My Mom will be 90 in November 2017 and Dad turned 92 in March 2016.

Marg and Doug Hicks continue to use their cottage every weekend and enjoy the ‘Piece of Heaven’ they purchased so many years ago.



*16 Benedict Street guest cabin*

I look forward to sharing these stories with our grandchildren.

\*The 'numbering' of beaches was a thing the cottagers did in the 50's and 60's. The first place the public could easily access the water was at the end of Benedict, so it became 1st Beach. Thus 2nd Beach was at the end of Ethel. 3rd was at the end of Howard and 4th eventually became Moonlight Bay. To this day many old-timers still refer to the beaches by numbers and not names.

\*\*Benedict Avenue was named after Benedict Jonasson, father of Ethel Helgason (nee Jonasson), wife of Herbert. Ethel inherited a large part of South Beach from her parents. Ethel Street is named after her. (Ref. [Gimli Saga](#) p. 116)

\*\*\*Two of these undeveloped lots were sold in 2016 and 2107, one on Ethel St. and one on Benedict St. (purchased by Marcel Gervais).

Note: It is due to the good-hearted benevolence of Doug Hicks that our neighbourhood enjoys it's little beach on Ethel. The Ethel beach property, owned by Mr. Hicks, lays mostly in the lake now.

