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Everybody Knew Everybody

In a village where people do not lock their doors at night, petty theft is a sign of changing times. “We didn’t have any police here in the old days,” Wayne Homer pointed out.

“The community was the caretaker of law and order. When somebody did something stupid there was no need of legal court, a public meeting was called to discuss the issue. There was no jury, just Mäkelä and someone else. They listened to both sides of the story and then voted to see which statement they wished to accept.”

“And that was it, even for murder cases,” Wayne continued. “I remember one case – the murderer was a mother. She had a baby out of wedlock and she didn’t want it to live so she drowned it. Women were the judges in that court, no men were needed.”

“They listened to her story and decided that she was not responsible for the act, that she was overwrought and nervous and didn’t know what she was doing. She didn’t even have to leave her grown son’s house. She was allowed to live with him for the rest of her life.”



Longtime Sointula resident Granny Jarvis gets to know some of the hippies that moved to Malcolm Island in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Photo by Rick James

Aside from this case and a murder/suicide where two men were killed in a drunken argument over a woman, most trouble on the island was just youthful mischief and pranks.

Once Tauno Salo and Dave Davison rode two of Tynjala’s boars down the main street amid much squealing and shouting. Large, placid milk cows were

frequently switched for small, cantankerous beasts, and one Halloween, some boys managed to get a cow down the school stairs and lock it in a booth in the girls' washroom.

But now people were worried about reckless and drinking drivers, and complained that tools left on the beach sometimes went missing. "Around 1965 the RCMP from Alert Bay began visiting Sointula on weekends," Bonnie Nelson recalled.

"Someone would see the police boat coming and spread the word. This gave the teenagers a chance to get ready for fun and games. The cops rented the postmistress's car to get around in and pretty soon some teenagers would roar through town and get the cops to chase them out onto the logging roads. They played hide and seek out there for hours. I don't think the cops caught many of them."

By the late 1960s, there was little doubt that the character of Malcolm Island was changing, but the residents were still close. Looking back, one resident reflected: "Sointula was the kind of place where everyone felt like family. If anyone needed help, it was given without a person having to ask. Everyone knew each other's business, just like any family, and helped when necessary and offered advice whether it was wanted or not."

As Ole Anderson put it: "You knew everyone in the community. When you saw a man coming down the street, you knew where he was coming from, you knew where he was going, and you knew what he was thinking about. Everybody knew everybody."

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