



## ON THE FRONT COVER

WILLIAM CHARLES BICE, Q.C.

*By Lach Morrison*

William Charles (Bill) Bice was born 73 years ago in Winterthur, Switzerland. Bill's father, the eldest son of a Duchy farmer, was born in St. Columb, Cornwall, in 1886. He came to Canada en route to Australia to join his three brothers, but when he saw Victoria and Vancouver Island he knew there could be no better place in all the world.

Bill's mother, who was born in Bulach, Switzerland, wanted to be a midwife in Switzerland, but being a spinster, was not permitted to do so by the staid Swiss. She left Switzerland and took her R.N. training in Providence, Rhode Island, where she became a U.S. citizen.

Bill's father and mother met on a transatlantic liner, and a shipboard romance bloomed. In 1928 they were married in Victoria, and thereafter they resided on northern Vancouver Island, where Bill's father was involved in road construction. They eventually settled in Alert Bay, where his father had contracted to build the road; thereafter he built himself a small hotel.

As noted, Bill, like his mother, was born in Switzerland. Bill's mother, heavy with child and intending to show off the new arrival to her brothers and sisters, arrived in Switzerland, prudently early, in careful Swiss fashion; before Bill's

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arrival, as it were. Passing through Paris on her way back to Canada, Bill's mother had the Swiss foresight to register him with the Canadian embassy, which became, much later, his sole basis of proving his citizenship for the law society.

Alert Bay<sup>1</sup> was a precursor of today's multicultural, multi-ethnic society. The small village boasted a large Aboriginal population, as well as Caucasians and Japanese, employed at the cannery, in boat building and repairs, or otherwise in the fishing industry. There were also some Chinese—permanent residents who were entrepreneurial storekeepers, in particular, the Dong family—as well as numerous Chinese who came up seasonally to work in the cannery.

Alert Bay of the 1930s was a microcosm of coastal B.C. Despite being situated on tiny Cormorant Island,<sup>2</sup> Alert Bay was the thriving commercial centre for the "North Island" and had various government agency offices located there, including fisheries, forestry, customs, police, telegraph services, a hospital and the mission vessel *Columbia*, a hospital boat that was itself complete with its own operating table. Also at Alert Bay was St. Michael's Indian Residential School and a substantial cannery owned by B.C. Packers. The doughty coasters of the Union Steamship Company—*Cardena*, *Venture*, *Camosun* and *Catala* among them—called at Alert Bay almost daily. Those of the Canadian Pacific Steamship, British Columbia Coast Service—*Princess Charlotte*, *Princess Louise*, *Princess Adelaide*, to name a few—did too.

The mid-coast of British Columbia is a beautiful, even spectacular, place to live, and Bill, as a boy, appreciated the natural environment.

Bill's mother continued her nursing career up and down the coastal inlets, and Bill as a young boy would often accompany her. There were always natural events to see during boat rides: grey whales, killer whales breaching, fish jumping, birds swooping and voracious gulls. Bill recalls one memorable day as a coastal tyke, in Fort Rupert, scooping up live herring that had been chased ashore in a large school by hungry seals. He was, however, surprised when his mother's hosts were not too pleased with his fresh catch!

Bill's first brush with Lady Law occurred when he was playing with his toys in the hotel pub and, being in a back area, did not notice that opening time had passed. "Officer Krupke", the village constable, slipping by on patrol, took a dim view of a four year-old toddler making free in the licensed premises.

Alert Bay was blessed with a large number of interesting people in those days.

One of the leading citizens at the time was J.B. "Barney" Williams, who had formerly been the solicitor for the city of Vancouver. Barney left the city following an altercation with the then mayor, Gerry McGeer, who did not like being told by Barney that he had no authority to dismiss a certain senior staff member who happened to be a friend of Barney's. McGeer reportedly told Barney, "You're fired too!" Barney kept a large yacht, the *Tranquilla*, powered by a huge Atlas engine. This vessel took Barney to the outlying areas to carry out his duties as stipendiary magistrate. Bill remembers accompanying him on some of his trips, as honorary deckhand allowed to handle the tie-up lines.

There were many outstanding native people among the Alert Bay population of those times, including Chief Dan Cranmer. At one point the chief was charged with holding a potlatch, a native custom that the Caucasian authorities of the day did not want to get completely out of hand and create discord and serious friction among the native population. Chief Cranmer's large and valuable collection of artefacts was confiscated and sent to Ottawa, not to be returned until many years later. In the meantime, Chief Cranmer became a lecturer in anthropology at Columbia University. His collection of artefacts is now included in the exhibits of the Alert Bay Museum, of which his daughter, Gloria, was the first curator.

In 1953, Chief William Scow of Gilford Island and Alert Bay (Alfie Scow's father) attended the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II as the representative of Canada's native population.

Jonathon Whonnock, one of the wise elders of the village, often told young Bill that he did not congratulate children for being well-behaved, but, rather, congratulated their parents for their perseverance.

Heet-la-maas (Willie Sewid) was a well-regarded native artist who has had numerous private and public showings in the United States and Canada. He used a building behind Bill's father's hotel as his studio. When the hotel was ultimately sold, a 4' x 8' painting by Heet-la-maas was left in the hotel as part of the sale. The painting is now a centrepiece in the Alert Bay Museum, and Bill groans when he sees what he failed, at the time, to recognize as a very valuable work of art.

By age six, Bill had become a somewhat unruly boy and was sent away to school in Victoria. However, he was expelled on the first day. Not to be deterred, his mother, with Swiss persistence, enrolled him in another school (St. Christopher's, in Oak Bay) where he lasted the full year.

September 1939 was a momentous month for Bill. Canada declared war, and Bill turned seven and was sent away to Shawnigan Lake School for the first of 10 years.

The war brought the winds of change to Alert Bay, despite its remote and rural location. Some of Bill's Japanese Canadian friends were sent away, and most of their families' possessions were auctioned off. Now the solitude and stillness of the coastal straits and inlets was shattered by the throaty roar of air force gas-engined crash boats, which could be heard approaching from many miles up the channel, and by the thumping of passing army freighters ferrying goods and troops to Prince Rupert and Alaska as air defences and gun batteries were constructed on the coast.

Shawnigan Lake School proved a difficult place for a seven-year-old. The discipline was excessive, especially by today's standards, and the accommodation unfailingly Spartan. Another student told Bill that the then headmaster's view of life in general could be summed up in two aphorisms. "First, there are no rights, only privileges, and privileges must be earned. Second, everyone has a right to an opinion, but damned few have a right to express it."

During his years at Shawnigan, Bill participated in the usual gross and witless pranks of oafish schoolboys including, on one occasion, the clandestine slaugh-

ter, roasting and eating of the headmaster's champion rooster—a welcome break from the British and wartime stodge provided by the dining hall.

However, a forgiving man, Bill still participates in the school as a member of the school foundation board and says that Shawnigan, whatever its erstwhile perceived faults, is today a school that truly meets its mission of leading young people through the challenges of a well-rounded education in the pursuit of personal excellence. Bill was an enterprising young boy, and at the age of 12 he worked in the Alert Bay cannery in the summer because there was a wartime shortage of workers. (At the end of each day, his mother made him change his clothes on the porch.) However, the rigorous 12-hour shifts, seven days a week (even modified for the child workers), became humdrum and led to disruptive fooling around, until Bill and some of his friends were “terminated”.

One summer in his early teens, Bill worked on the telegraph line boat, which would patrol the copper wire connecting Campbell River with Port Hardy. A line-man would go ashore to repair downed lines while Bill tended the boat. Bill's vessel worked between Robson Bight, which is now a whale watchers' mecca, and Port McNeill, which was then a large logging camp.

Bill later graduated to a fish collecting packer—the *Florentina O*—working in Rivers Inlet and Johnstone Strait. The vessel managed to find the sea bottom on several occasions (but not, says Bill, when he was at the wheel).

Subsequently, Bill worked on a salmon seiner from Fisher Channel to the Gulf of Georgia and the West Coast. Like thousands on the coast in those days, Bill pursued the “silver harvest” of the sea: successive runs of spring, coho, sockeye, pink and, finally, chum—fodder for the many canneries packing it up into small genteel cans for export. Cases of white spring salmon were cunningly labelled, “This salmon guaranteed not to turn red in the can”, for the guidance of the far-away British *hausfrau*.

During his time seining, Bill was on one occasion the only non-native member of the crew. Arriving one day at a coastal cannery and the crew deciding to shower and freshen up before a run “downtown”, Bill was banished by his crewmates to the “whites only” shower. They said they didn't mind, but there was no way the Prince Rupert Indians who crewed other boats in port would put up with showering with a “white guy”, even if he was from Alert Bay.

The Indian residential school was a centre of village life in Alert Bay, as there were soccer fields there and the occasional concert. Bill remembers seeing Alfred Scow (now retired from the Provincial Court) appearing in “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, not as Snow White, but rather one of the dwarfs. Bill will not say which one, but it does leave room for speculation.

While growing up, many of the Alert Bay children had access to rowboats and would regularly row across the Broughton Strait<sup>3</sup> to the Nimpkish<sup>4</sup> River delta on Vancouver Island to fish and camp out and explore the sloughs and channels. When you consider that Broughton Strait was the main shipping lane and could be quite rough, and moreover that no one wore life jackets, you wonder what the parents were doing. In any event, Bill was twice saved from a watery grave by observant locals who plucked him, once from the 'chuck and once from a well.

In the 1950s, Alert Bay was somewhat of a tourist centre and young Bill was sometimes unaware that he was rubbing shoulders with the likes of Bing Crosby, Gary Cooper, Margaret Mead and Emily Carr, to name a few. One summer Bing Crosby had his yacht tied to a dock in Alert Bay and hired a guard to keep watch while he went ashore. Amazingly, however, all Bing's liquor disappeared while the guard was on duty. An enterprising scoundrel had taken a small rowboat to the seaward side of the yacht and cleared out the supplies.

On graduating from Shawnigan, Bill went to UBC, where he graduated in commerce and played rugby under Albert Laithwaite and, briefly, football for the Thunderbirds under Frank Gnupe. An injury in the first quarter of his first football game, playing against McGill, made him realize that he should really be playing the more gentlemanly sport of rugby, for which he later received Big Block athletic awards and enjoyed tours to California and games against touring teams.

Many years later, Bill's son Richard—inheriting his father's prowess on the pitch—was to tread in Bill's muddy footsteps, winning 22 caps on Canada's National Team and thereafter playing professionally in France.

During the late 1950s, Bill spent time in Switzerland hoping to improve his German (which was lamentable, and still is). On the other hand, the diligent Swiss mastered English.

After taking time out to run his ailing father's business, Bill began his studies at UBC law school in 1959. He graduated in 1962 in a class that has since produced large numbers of judges and whose class members have kept up surprisingly close relationships. Bill came to Bull, Housser & Tupper as an articled student and later junior for the delightful and respected Ivan Quinn.

In the early years of his law practice, Bill frequently visited Alert Bay to run the family business, his father having died; the business was later sold, after his mother's death.

In 1959, Bill married the stately and statuesque Patricia. In 1963 they moved to West Vancouver, where they still reside in the same house. On Sundays Patricia still sings in the St. Christopher's Church choir, but now Bill sleeps in. Bill and Patricia have three children—Catherine, Jillian and the aforementioned Richard—who have, over the years, mustered nine grandchildren, all of whom (to Bill's delight) reside in the Lower Mainland. The whole family often gets together in the family home in West Vancouver and at the Bices' summer place on Galiano Island. Thanks to Bill and Patricia's strong sense of family, everyone gets along extremely well.

Throughout his parenting years, Bill also was fully involved in his children's schools and community activities. He served as a director of Athlone School, as a director of North Shore Soccer, as a soccer coach and as a director and ultimately chairman of the board of directors of Crofton House School. Currently, he is a director of Shawnigan Lake School Foundation (as noted above) and an honorary director and honorary solicitor for the Lions Gate Hospital Foundation.

Bill is extremely popular with all at Bull, Housser & Tupper, but he especially is held in the highest esteem by his many clients, with whom he displays his

patient, gentle and caring nature. He is also irrepressibly affable and jovial, except when, on rare occasions, perceiving some injustice or absence of fair play, he can give an impressive impersonation of the Swiss Bear.

Bill has served on various committees of the law society, having developed a well-respected knowledge in the areas of wills and trusts. He has appeared as an expert witness in many cases and has appeared as a witness in various foreign jurisdictions. He once overrode a judge in Geneva who wanted to exclude him from the courtroom because the public were not allowed to attend. Nevertheless, Bill, in his laboured French, insisted on personally presenting the case. Bill's client lost. The appeal, however, was successful, and Bill attributes this to his decision not to appear in court on the appeal.

In his practice, Bill has become quite used to the bizarre, which exists in many people's lives and in some of his client's lives. For over 40 years of practice, his easy and practical manner has dealt with, and overcome, his clients' many problems. Perhaps the oddest problem (or "issue" as people like to say these days) concerned a female client who was charged by the city of Vancouver for maintaining a slaughterhouse within the city limits, contrary to bylaws. This elderly lady's domestic staff, living in a time warp or some demographic or social confusion, did indeed have a penchant for the slaughter of sundry goats and chickens in an on-site outdoor do-it-yourself abattoir. The butchering took place only on rainy days, when the precipitation provided a natural irrigation and drainage system that would wash away at least some of the worst of the gore.

Bill has been senior adviser to the Wills and Trusts Subsection of the CBA, chair of the Estate Planning Council of Vancouver; western Canadian representative of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel; and a member of International Academy of Estate and Trust Law, to which he spoke in New Orleans on Trustee Liability for Environmental Damage (having had first-hand experience of that subject when a property he inherited from his father was flooded with fuel oil when a tanker ship pumped oil in Imperial measurement into the shore facility's metric tanks).

Bill's summer property on the beach at Galiano was next to that of his law partner, Barry Dryvynsyde. In 1973, Barry (being a retired RCAF reserve pilot) and Bill (having taken float plane flying lessons in Alert Bay) bought a Cessna 180, which became the flagship of Red Baron Flight Services Ltd. and provided many happy hours in the wild blue yonder. This heavier-than-air machine allowed missions up and down the coast to visit friends, giving Bill the opportunity to "drop in" for dinner/lunch/refreshments/what have you got? and also provided valuable aerial reconnaissance for the purchase of other coastal properties.

In 1996, on account of his work on various committees of the law society, Bill was awarded a Q.C., becoming "one of Her Majesty's counsel learned in the law".

Otherwise, seemingly indestructible, Bill toils on in the trenches at Bull, Housser & Tupper LLP.


Bill continues to keep fit by engaging in early morning exercises and in the occasional torrid round of golf. As well, he avidly participates in winter sports,

primarily in a basement with his septuagenarian poker group (50 years on and still bluffing); and for aerobic exercise, "Side Pocket" Bill turns to the neighbourhood pool game.

#### ENDNOTES

1. H.M.S. Screw-Frigate *Alert*, 12 guns, on this station from 1864 to 1865.
2. Again, the Royal Navy beat Bill there. H.M.S. Paddle-Sloop *Cormorant*, with six guns, was stationed on Cormorant Island from 1844 to 1850.
3. Named in 1792 by Captain Vancouver after Lieutenant Commander William Broughton, of H.M.S. *Chatham*, on this coast in that year.
4. Nimpkish, from the Kwa-kwala language, "Num Case", a fabulous fish that lies on the bottom of the sea—probably a halibut.






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