

Jacob's Tails . . . (Back-to-the-Land)

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Preface (A little background)

Jacob's Tails are about one family's experiences of going "back-to-the-land".

The sixties - if you weren't there, you've heard about them - a time when a burgeoning population of young people, full of energy and confidence, sought to explore their world and test their vigour. The "Baby Boomers" numbers alone resulted in a substantial influence on the social and economic life.

They were twenty-something: the age you can do anything; you are strong; young; infallible, and capable of doing everything. Even if you had never done it before, you were willing to try and had all the confidence in the world that you would succeed. All you needed was the opportunity and you would figure it out or improvise the rest!!

The sixties were filled with social movements that worked to bring a greater sense of control to the people, especially in the cities. There was the anti-war movement, the women's movement, the movement for a "just society". There were protests, underground newspapers, free stores, free medical clinics, a free university, free concerts (remember Woodstock), free love, experimentation and drugs. While there were those who were convinced they could change society from within, there were others who chose to leave the pressures of that environment and adopt a simpler, more natural way of life - become "back-to-the-landers" as some called it in those days. Other called them "hippies."

Armed with lots of how-to books and little experience, these "back-to-the-landers" sought areas that were relatively undeveloped where they could build a home, raise their own food, generate their own power, and struggle to be self-sufficient. Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, seemed an ideal destination.

Even though it is politically part of the province of Nova Scotia, Cape Breton Island is an entity unto itself and its history is both long and diverse. Discovered by the English explorer, John Cabot in 1497, the land was already occupied by the Mi'kmaq (or Mic Mac) natives. France claimed the island in the early 1700's and it was ceded back to Great Britain in the 1760's. Land grants to Scottish and Irish settlers in the 1700s and 1800s resulted in a strong Gaelic population.

The island is 175 kilometres long and 140 kilometres wide and many have compared the highlands of Cape Breton to the highlands of Scotland. Much of the terrain is rocky and rugged resulting in a spectacular landscape but not highly fertile lands. Many of the Cape Bretoners turned to the forests and oceans to sustain themselves.

Prior to the mid fifties, Cape Breton was isolated. Access to the island was limited to ferries. The construction of a two kilometre raised road - the Canso Causeway - across the Strait of Canso was completed in 1955. While the causeway lessened their isolation, Cape Bretoners struggle to retain their identity. The locks on the Cape Breton side of the causeway help preserve

Cape Breton's island status.

The residents of Cape Breton still retain much of their unique character and culture.

"Jacob's Tails . . ." started out as "Memoirs of a Back-to-the-Lander" and it is a collection of stories based on the memories of seven years spent in the middle of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

Ah-huh!! I always wondered how Jacob, our first dog, might have seen things. I decided that looking at the adventures through his eyes was an interesting perspective. Jacob was real and his stories are real and true. He came to us after he was abandoned by a former house-mate; he fit into our eclectic life-style and just stayed on with us.

There are many stories but I have tried to stick to stories that Jacob would be privy to and include the multitude of animals that were so much a part of our lives.

And so it began.

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