

100 years of being in the know

Gloria Morrisette, a former reporter for *The News, Province* and *Vancouver Sun* celebrates a century on Sunday

By **Monisha Martins**
Staff Reporter

Surrounded by paintings that depict the ocean, snow-capped faraway mountains, woodland creatures and big fir trees, Gloria Morrisette holds court with her son and two daughters.

The figures in her paintings are delicate. In the deep blue expanse of an ocean, the water's surface breaks with a tiny, detailed orca fin.

"I painted the last one this summer," said Gloria, who turns 100 on Sunday.

Each painting is dated on the back and signed in perfect cursive with her name.

Born Gloria Godkin on Aug. 31, 1908, she spent her early years in Tacoma, down south in Washington State.

Her pioneering father Norman and mother Excene immigrated to Canada in 1915 and settled on a small parcel of land on Hornby Island, purchased for \$25.

By 1918, the family moved further away from civilization to isolated Shushartie Bay at the northern-most end of Vancouver Island.

It was an enclave with one store and a couple of houses on a hill – that she remembers well. A place she's immortalized in two self-illustrated books.

There were eight classes at the one room Cape Scott School and 10 students, Gloria says.

"Probably one kid in each class."

The family's only contact with the outside world came with the arrival of the weekly steamer or occasional fishing boat.

Gloria recalls rowing three miles, just



Simone Ponne/THE NEWS

Gloria Morrisette turns 100 on Sunday.

across the bay to Hope Island, the home of the Nawhitti Indians, with her dad.

Often as she lay in bed at night, she could hear the sound of their drums floating over the water.

She's painted a long house with a fire burning inside, women dressed in shawls and salmon drying on its eaves from memory.

The 1918, flu decimated the Nawhitti, she said.

In 1927, at 19, Gloria met her husband Murray Morrisette. A returning soldier from the First World War, he had bought a fish boat and started following salmon up the coast.

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Secret is a good, clean life

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Murray has heard stories about three beautiful blonde girls who lived with their parents at the northern end of Vancouver Island.

He steered his ship *Nodu* to the bay, concocted a reason to visit Shushartie's general store and met Gloria Godkin halfway up the trail.

The couple were married on April 5, 1928, under garlands of evergreen boughs and home-made paper bells.

Gloria's bouquet was made of wildflowers from the island and music for the wedding dance came from a hand-cranked phonograph.

**"I don't smoke or drink.
Exercise as much as I can."**

Gloria Morrisette,
Maple Ridge

For the next five years, the pair lived in small cabins or floathomes in isolated bays as Murray turned from fisherman to logger.

By 1933, the Morrisettes and two children had moved to Cortez Island, near Campbell River where they remained for 10 years.

Gloria and Murray would have six children in total and eventually accumulated a large family with 12 grandkids and 19 great-grandchildren.

The family moved to Maple Ridge in 1944 so the children could go to high school.

Gloria says it wasn't much different from the isolated coast. Their 30-acre Albion property had a home with no electricity. It was lit with gas lamps and kept warm with a wood stove.

"We could go for a movie once in a while here, while you couldn't up there," she says with a shrug.

Gloria always had a penchant for news and began a freelance reporting career up north

as a writer tuned into B.C.'s coast.

"There were things happening that people had to know about," she says.

When the family moved to Maple Ridge, Gloria met an editor from *The Province*. Eager to continue her trade, she told him there was lots going on in her town that didn't make his paper.

The editor told her to send him news. Gloria kept her word and was published in *The Province* for several years, only to jump ship to the broadsheet *Vancouver Sun* for more money.

"I went investigating and found [*The Sun*] paid more," she says.

Gloria attended every Maple Ridge council meeting and covered everything from club get-togethers and wedding to fires, court and accidents for more than two decades.

With no telephone or fax, she would put her stories on a bus to be delivered to the newsroom. Later, she'd post them from Ritchie's General Store in downtown Haney.

She also wrote a historical column for *The News* in later years that chronicled local pioneers. Her husband Murray passed away in 1993 – they were married for 65 years.

At 100, Gloria is a sprightly woman who lives alone in the tucked-away home she moved into more than 60 years ago. Her grandkids take turns sleeping over and keep her company every night of the week.

Save for a few creaky joints and a little hearing loss, Gloria's never spent a day in a hospital or nursing home.

She devours news and newspapers and keeps her family up to date on the latest medical breakthroughs and headlines.

She still walks to a mailbox at the end of her gravel driveway on sunny days.

The secret to longevity, Gloria says, is a good, clean life.

"I don't smoke or drink. Exercise as much as I can."

– with files from Gloria Morrisette's
son-in-law, Edward Villiers