

Columbia III Family - Nutured by the Coast

by Rob Morris

A large part of the story of this coast is how the lives of families and individuals have been inextricably entwined with the boats with which they have been able to carve out their livelihoods. Frequently two, sometimes three, generations have worked aboard the same vessels which themselves become cherished as members of the family.

Ross Campbell and Fern Kornelsen started out working together on Dennis Mattson's salmon troller **B.C. Pioneer** over 30 years ago. They put together a grubstake to start their homestead on Sonora Island then, Ross recollects, a couple of good roe herring seasons in 1979-80 on the **B.C. Pioneer** earned them enough money to buy the tug **Ella McKenzie**. With the **Ella** they were able to work close to home and start a family. Then, with the sale of the tug, Ross invested in training as a helicopter pilot and spent the next 17 years heli-logging all over the coast. Meanwhile the Campbell/Kornelsen children were growing up and following Fern and Ross onto the water. Oldest daughter Miray was a certified kayak guide by 17 and her younger siblings, the twins Tavish and Farlyn, became teenage troller deck hands on the **B.C. Pioneer**, 30 years after their parents.

A workboat didn't figure directly into Ross Campbell's and Fern Kornelsen's everyday eking out of an existence on the coast for quite a while after the **Ella MacKenzie**. The helicopter logging was steady and Fern was busy "project managing" around the Sonora homestead. But that all changed in 2001 when Miray told them about the **Columbia III** and Mothership Adventures being for sale. The perfect, on-the-water family business, she enthused, and Fern and Ross agreed.

"We tried to pull the financing together," Ross relates, "but fell short and the **Columbia III** was sold in 2003. We were sad about the missed opportunity with such a wonderful boat. I kept on heli-logging but, 18 months later, I wrote to the Seattle owner, letting him know how it was the perfect business for our family, and if he ever wanted to sell **Columbia III** and Mothership Adventures, please call us."



Four members of the Campbell/Kornelsen family with Columbia III: Miray, Tavish, Ross and Fern. Miray and Luke Hyatt live on Sonora Island and help run Mothership Adventures. Fern is chief cook on Columbia III and keeps the family organized, most recently with acquisition of wilderness first aid and limited master tickets.



Ross Campbell on Dennis Mattson's 52' West Coast troller **B.C. Pioneer**, 1976 (right photo). In the upper left photo Fern Kornelsen swings an Albacore tuna aboard the **B.C. Pioneer** while trolling 120 miles off the BC coast, 1976. Ross started salmon trolling with Dennis in 1972 on the 42' troller **Cydrik J**. He met Fern the following year and together, in 1976, they helped Mattson build **B.C. Pioneer** in Jack Gourd's boatshed on Tsehum Harbour near Sidney (lower left photo). Campbell and Mattson had hand-logged yellow cedar crooks for knees near Bella Bella. For the 1976 and 1977 seasons the three fished the North Coast on the new troller.

The rest, as they say, is history. "Just as salmon and herring money was there to start our homestead and buy the **Ella McKenzie**," Ross reflects, "then selling the **Ella** provided me with a helicopter license. Now heli-logging income has helped us to take up a new family livelihood on the water with **Columbia III**."

The intertwining of boats with the threads of lives has evolved into an extended family on Sonora Island. When up in the Queen Charlottes buying the **Ella McKenzie**, Ross and Fern met Gail and Jeremy Hyatt. Twenty or so years later their son, Luke, would join Miray guiding from the kayak township **Songhee** with Spirit of the West Adventures. Now they are the kayaking guides for Mothership Adventures. Miray is chief administrator for the company, Luke has his 60-ton ticket and helps Ross run the **Columbia III**, and they are building a home on the island next to her parents.

Before he was born Dennis Mattson's father was hand logging on the coast including in the Hole-in-the-Wall, that legendary current-strewn passage between Sonora and Maurelle Islands. Now Dennis, at age 72 and for so long a friend and mentor, uncle and grandpa figure for Ross and Fern and their children, has a home for himself with the **B.C. Pioneer** on Sonora next to his extended family and just a couple of miles from where his father logged in the Hole.

Strong are the ties that link boats and people in family, strengthening their bonds with the coast they work and love.



Tavish started salmon fishing when he was 12 on Steve Bergh's **New Dawn** and now has three seasons with Dennis Mattson on **B.C. Pioneer** (right photo). His sister, Farlyn, got wind of the dollars he was making and joined them for the 2005 and 2006 trolling seasons off the Queen Charlottes (left photo). Last winter, at the age of 16, the twins passed their 60-ton Limited Master exams and orals. Transport Canada requested that they wait one to two years for those tickets and has issued them limited First Mate tickets on the **Columbia III**. In the photo (centre) Farlyn is aloft on S.A.L.T.S.' **Pacific Grace** applying grease to the fore main mast so the hardwood mast hoops will slide easily. She started deckhanding on the S.A.L.T.S. sailing ships and accumulated 200 days at sea. Now Tavish has joined her deckhanding with S.A.L.T.S. in the salmon trolling off-season.



Ross Campbell and Fern Kornelsen found the **Ella McKenzie**, a 35' wood tug built in 1951 by McKenzie Barge and Derrick, in North Vancouver, in the Queen Charlottes. Named the **Guardian**, it had taken a beating with handlogging owners but Lee Roberts, who was working around Sonora Island with his tug, **Joe Drinkwater**, helped Ross to rebuild the tug. Campbell worked with Lee and his piledriver, did some carpentry work and assisted with log tows around Sonora, mainly through the Hole-in-the-Wall with skipper Johnny Charlton on Pacific Towing's **Victory V**. After selling the tug, Campbell logged 12,500 hours heli-logging over the next 17 years, including 10,000 hrs flying Helifor's Labradorers on the coast. In the inset photo his two-year-old daughter, Miray, gets an early start on navigating the BC coast on the **Ella McKenzie**, 1983.



Dennis Mattson (left) with Ross Campbell and his children in 1992, left to right: Miray, Tavish and Farlyn. Ross started deckhanding for Dennis in 1972 but little did they realize when this photo was taken 20 years later that the twins would also become deckhands on **B.C. Pioneer**. Ross, of course, would have no inkling that about 30 years later Miray would find **Columbia III** and Mothership Adventures for a family business.