

## HAVING IT ALL IN STEHEKIN: Neither Greedy nor Needy

Jane McConnell

Put yourself back to the time of the Second World War, Stehekin as it was. Not many people there. Draft-age men either in the armed forces or working at the mine in Holden, a total of perhaps five. Eight women in the valley as we settled in. In a way these women were having it all, home life and work, and I think all but one really felt that way, sort of contented co-partners with their men, treated as equals and individuals, the work they did (and they did work) important and needed. I joined them.

There was Beryl, the postmaster. She was feisty and very respected. On my first visit I was hoping to find a small piece of property. I had been travelling for the U.S. Public Health Service — one-night visits, battling passage on trains to my next stop, sometimes troop trains. New people every day; very long hours, grim. My husband, confined to his destroyer in the far Pacific, wrote he dreamed of mountain meadows, snowcovered peaks, free flowing streams. We had never had a home, only many rentals, many moves. Could we get a vacation hideaway somewhere, a place to dream about in the confines of his ship?

I came uplake on a managed weekend and there was the postmaster at the dock. Inquiries. Beryl sounded tough — no place to stay at all. Hotel and Rainbow Lodge closed for duration, no place to get food, hoped I had brought some. By this time the boat had dropped the mail and left.

I felt I annoyed Beryl, yet the annoyance was apparently just a cover for helpfulness. She scared me at the time, yet she was asking Mrs. Wilson's son Bob to take me up the valley for a look-see. On that trip I learned something about how one lived in Stehekin on no cash, living off the land. By the end of the lake the pickup stopped a fisherman walking on the road with a nice catch in hand. After some banter, half the catch was in the truck. On to the Lesh place for delivery of mail — Bob came out of the house with a loaf of fresh bread (still hot) Mrs. Lesh wanted me to have. On to the Wilsons where a lot of extra garden produce — home canned and fresh — was put in the truck. On to Rainbow Lodge where Mrs. Rice (or her sister) agreed to let me sleep in a cabin that wasn't for rent.

Next morning after a good sleep on a full stomach I got up very early to walk the river and look at a parcel a man in Wenatchee thought might be for sale (where Bowles and others live, maybe four or five houses there now). Enjoying river and wild country, I walked a distance, then tried to reach the road. Instead I found myself behind the Buckner homestead. Shortly came Harry Buckner, a pail of milk and a bunch of lilacs in hand. He asked, grinning, if I had breakfasted, said if not I had better come up to the house.

The women of Stehekin in that far back time seemed truly to have it all — plenty of work, family strength, affordable homes, neighbors that might not be close but responded always when there was need. (And neighbors could be the key to survival on occasion.)

Olive Buckner truly did have it all. A delightful "homemade" house, added to as family came, or desire dictated, set in an orchard with a full view of McGregor Mountain beyond, charming, lively daughters, doing their share in orchard and house, lots of family fun. That first morning I put cream on my peaches so thick it hardly poured. A mammoth breakfast, almost all home produced. Indeed later I got to see how Olive always enjoyed a

For a glimpse of the early years of Stehekin, read Grant McConnell's book, *A Valley in Time*, The Mountaineers, Seattle, \$14.95.



full table of guests — old friends or just folk who happened by. Raised in the Field Hotel (the "father of Chelan County", was her father) Olive was always welcoming, always radiantly cheerful, and always interested in others. There was no mistaking Harry's feeling for her in that early morning tribute of flowers when I met them both.

Their daughter Hobbie took me up and down the valley roads and showed me what "little" private property there was. She told with humor and insight some of the history of past owners and the adventures of current ones.

And there was Daisy Weaver. Mere males found it hard to be equal whether chopping wood alongside her or breaking new ground for a garden, or rowing a boat in rough weather across the lake. She was an ardent organic gardener, taking and sharing *Organic Gardening* magazine. When the cast of "Lassie Come Home" was in Stehekin she was very popular with the film crew who eventually sent for her to come to Hollywood for the opening. She felt sorry for the child Elizabeth, who, she felt, was closely guarded by a haughty mother, whereas young Roddy was allowed to go fishing and exploring with the crew. Daisy was a fantastic cook (as were all the valley women), and generous like them as well — we had many of her pies, much of her produce and good company, and still use the PROPS bucket from the Lassie film which she gave us.

There were the Wilsons. One partner had been married three times and the other four, but in Stehekin away from the turmoil of cities, they lived many many years together. Mrs. Wilson was a marvelous gardener and many of us received her produce. "We wouldn't charge a neighbor" was the general phrase, though an exchange of some other homemade gift was welcome. Barter was often used, especially when one must ask for something. Trouble was, coming from New York, we hadn't much to offer. However, on occasion I could offer my nursing skills. It was months after that welcome donation of fish on my first trip that I gave Paul's wife a series of shots and still later that I took weekly blood pressures at Rainbow Lodge where a cabin had been opened for me on my first trip. Several times Laurence Courtney appeared at our door to drive me through snow to Buckners to administer penicillin (in those days given every 4 to 6 hours, Laurence's driving made these trips truly *his* contribution. He'd buck the new snow in the command car (Grant's contribution) to get me there — three miles could take several hours. Since I was a nursing mother (with no refrigeration to keep formula and no way to heat it except a woodstove that took over an hour to get going, nursing was mandatory), Grant tended our infant daughter. Lawrence drove me home to nurse, then a return to Buckners. Ultimately I insisted on a family member learning how to give the shots.

Grant did well putting everyone into gales of laughter reading to valley people who skied up to our place E.B. White's *The Parable of the Family Who Lived Apart* and Thurber's *The Day the Dam Broke*. Curt could render all of the long sagas by Robert Service. Great nights. So who was bartering what in all this? Just neighborly exchanges. It took bigger projects to really barter.

Once I talked with Beryl about how she made out running the lunch counter (her pies were famous but she got up at 4 a.m. to make them and to prepare for the boat arrival). "Not so well as you might think." "Well you know why," I answered, "all that wonderful food you give away. Do you realize every time we ski down for the mail in winter you give us free coffee and pie after the boat goes and in summer you . . .?" "Well, yes," said Beryl, "but I like doing that. It gives me a good feeling."

And dear lovely Mamie Courtney, grandmother of the current Jim and Tom and the rest. She taught me how to live in Stehekin. She was much my nearest neighbor and very seldom away from her log cabin. Once she told me, "Having children and bringing them up — that's what life is about, isn't it?"



To get back to Beryl and that first visit. I found NOTHING for sale. Some I talked to had 50 or 60 acres but they did not want to sell even one. "Well, our men are away and we shouldn't sell behind our children's backs. It's their land really," and the like. As I went to go on the boat away from this magical valley, I said to Beryl that I'd lived well there, but hadn't found any property. Beryl responded sort of curtly, "After all we're particular who lives in Stehekin." Chilly. . .

I left an address in case anything turned up. A mail stop in North Carolina brought the letter from Mr. Lesh, "I have to have an operation. If you can send me \$300 quick, I'll sell you the 10 acres in the bend of the river where the big cedars are." I sent it and went on my travels, wondering if we really had a bit of Stehekin.

As it turned out we did, but I swapped it for Curt Courtney's four-plus acres with the small not-quite-finished house beyond the end of the road. Never mind we didn't have a deed for well over a year after moving in. (The 10 acres briefly mine had seemed on a flood plain.) With the exchange I had achieved a real roof to welcome my man. (The day Curt and I agreed to the exchange the destroyer was hit by kamikazes in the East China Sea.) Curt and I had a time agreeing on terms of the sale; I thought he asked too little, he thought I offered too much.

It's nearly fifty years since we moved in after the war and jumped the population to 22. We had come from New York City and fulltime jobs. Each morning we got on the subway in Greenwich Village, one of us uptown, one down. Stehekin was different. We had no electricity, no running water, no inside toilet — I now wince when I read this is substandard housing in today's world. And there was the lack of cash this implied. But to us it was a realm of riches, and of harmony with neighbors and all of nature too.

I admit carrying buckets from the river on skis (1,000 feet — my husband eventually dug it for pipeline) had moments of anguish. But these were brief as was that time in winter on the roof. I was up there shoveling snow. When it was off snow was about to the eaves. Came Curt and Grant. "How should I get down?" I called, the ladder having disappeared. "Just jump," one yelled. I jumped. . . and learned how it feels to be buried by an avalanche, immobilized, not even my head showing, while they — they laughed and laughed.

One stopped to talk with anyone met on the road, valley resident or unknown. One counted on being picked up by anyone going one's way. If one needed help it was given. (Need to jack up a house? A jack at Blankenships, one at Skinny's, two at Guy's — all will arrive.) Lots of tolerance for human differences.

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Yes, living took time with no refrigerator, no automatic washer, no freezer, no. . . Canning on the wood stove, maybe 500 jars, quite a few quarts of morels, lots of apple juice for all winter (culls not perfect to ship downlake, free for the taking), huckleberries for pie, jars of venison, produce from gardens, berry jams and applebutter. Cottage cheese we made every other day, skim milk being free, thanks to butter making by those with cows. We made a big grocery list in the fall, staples to last six months we hoped — coffee, oatmeal, splitpeas, sugar, things like that. (Carrots,



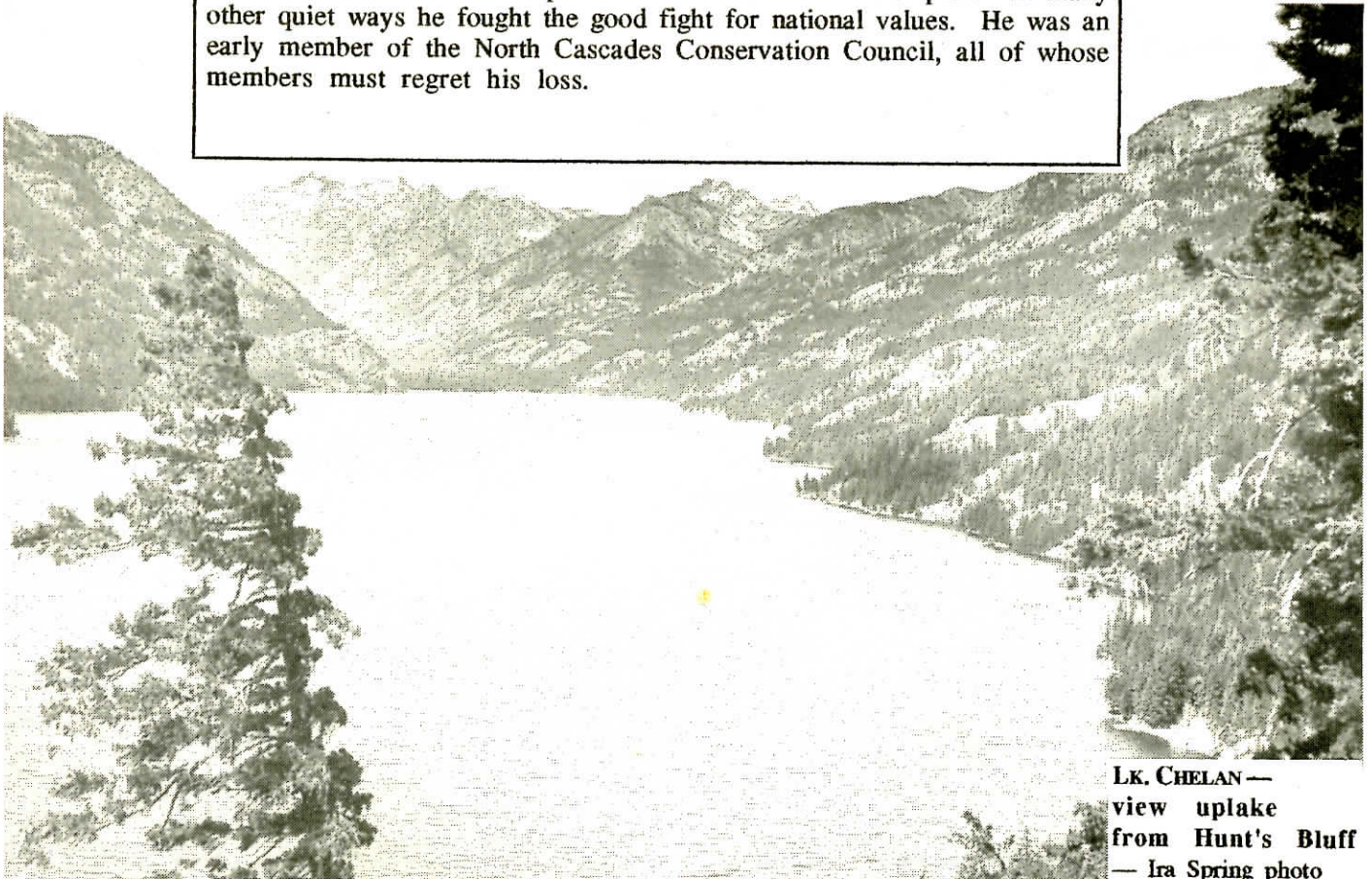
onions, potatoes were in barrels sunk below groundlevel against freezing. We called this cache fresh food, but by March?)

Recycling was usual, if not immediate, put in the stockpile not far from the house. Beryl made colorful dresses for our infant daughter from floral flour sacks. Curt used to say, "Well, if you need something, first try to make it." He, of course, always could and often for us, too.

The women of Stehekin — not forgotten. I haven't even got to all eight who were there when we moved in. Not many people when we came, a slow increase. Not needy. Not greedy. Had it all back then.

## Oliver Webb

Oliver Webb died this spring. He served his country in many ways, first as naval officer in World War II, then as a civilian officer in several overseas embassies, and then in a multitude of kindnesses to other people. Perhaps his greatest contribution was in the field of conservation. An avid outdoorsman, he early perceived the degradation overtaking some of his favorite areas. One of these was the Stehekin Valley, where he acquired a cabin from which he explored most of the surrounding wilds. Seeing severe threats to the Valley, he organized and subsidized the acquisition of nearly a mile of riverfront on both sides to hold until it could become part of the National Park Complex. In many other quiet ways he fought the good fight for national values. He was an early member of the North Cascades Conservation Council, all of whose members must regret his loss.



LK. CHELAN —  
view uplake  
from Hunt's Bluff  
— Ira Spring photo