



Convolutud Canadian and Coalmont Coincidences?

Born in **EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND** in 1935 meant that my boyhood coincided with World War 2. I was six years old when war broke out, and eleven when it was over. It also meant that I was old enough to retain fairly clear memories of those trying wartime years.

Not that I recall them as trying at that age, but my mother and father had to contend with all the trauma of these times in wartime Britain.

On a family note – my mother’s only sister (my Aunt Anne or Auntie Annie as we called her) had married and emigrated to Canada during the 1920s and she and her husband had settled in Hamilton, Ontario, subsequently raising four children there.

The oldest child, a boy, was around twenty when the war began, and volunteered to join the Royal Canadian Air Force, where he was trained as a gunner manning the Lancaster bombers which were a huge part of the allies efforts to destroy Nazi war production by means of their bombing raids over Germany.

As part of this operation, he was posted with his squadron to England around 1942.

It was a period in Britain when the country was the base for the armed forces of many of the allied nations, and as a result, the streets were full of young off duty military men with time on their hands in a foreign land.

My mother, like many others, took to inviting some of these young men to our home, where they were happy to be fed a home cooked meal and to spend a little time away from the wartime environment.

It was only natural, of course, that when her nephew arrived in Britain, he began visit and stay with us whenever he had time off from his duties. He would also take the opportunity to bring a friend with him from time to time, and as a kid, I was very impressed with these men in Canadian uniforms who seemed to have an unending supply of gum and candy for us kids.

*One these ‘buddies’ was a blond haired fellow airman named **HAROLD ALLISON** (**AL** – as he was known).*

*Once my mother got to know **AL**, she took to corresponding with his mother in Canada to let her know that her son was safe and how he was faring.*

*As I recall things, the **ALLISON** family were located on **LASQUETI ISLAND, B.C.** at the time, and were cattle ranchers there. Of course, as a young Scottish kid, I had no knowledge of where this island was, or for that matter, where British Columbia was located. But I was intrigued, of course, by the fact that they were “cowboys”.*

This episode in my young life ended tragically, when unfortunately, my cousin was subsequently killed in action, his plane shot down over Germany in 1943. He was 23, and is buried in a small country burial ground in rural France.

*My mother later determined from correspondence with his mother, that **AL** survived the war, returned to Canada, settling in **PRINCETON, B.C.**, and continued a career in cattle ranching there.*

*Fast forward thirty years to the mid Seventies, and I found myself living in **VANCOUVER** after emigrating to Canada in the Sixties and working in various locations around North America, in large part because of my attraction to the continent due to my boyhood memories and family history.*

*I became familiar with the **OKANAGAN VALLEY** like many Vancouverites as a summer vacation spot, and before the Coquihalla Highway was built, drove the Crows' Nest Highway #3 many times on our way there. Passing through **PRINCETON**, I always thought of **HAROLD ALLISON** and wondered if he was still living there, on one occasion even stopping to check the local phone directory to find that, indeed, there was such an individual listed. I called the number, only to discover he was not at home...I did not leave any message.*

*I did subsequently find out that he may have been a member of the **BC CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION**, perhaps even the President at one time.*

*Our visits to the **OKANAGAN** became more frequent with the growth of the wine industry there, my wife and I developing our interest and knowledge of wine there over the years. In fact, after my retiral from engineering, we bought a property in **SUMMERLAND**, and enjoyed a number of happy years there. Our travels back and forth to the Coast no longer featured **PRINCETON**, because after the construction of the **COQUIHALLA HIGHWAY**, we always journeyed by that faster, more relaxing route.*

*As one travels North towards **MERRITT** on that highway, and descends **LARSON HILL**, to the East there is a small winding road below, which is visible, before eventually disappearing into the mountainous terrain.*

*Every time I passed the spot my curiosity was tweaked for some reason, there was somehow an intriguing, romantic aspect to a road disappearing into the vast mountains, apparently leading to nowhere, at least, nowhere with which I was familiar. The **COLDWATER ROAD**.... I determined from the highway signs.*

*It took me a good number of years, but eventually my curiosity caused me to check local maps, to discover there was a town named **COALMONT** tucked away beyond the rugged peaks of the area.*

*Intrigued, sometime later, I convinced my wife that **COALMONT** might be worth a visit, and so when our two grandchildren were due to spend some vacation time with us, we determined to come and explore.*

*Enter the **MOSEY-ON-INN**.....found this intriguing motel.... in intriguing **COALMONT!!***

*We booked one of the only three rooms in this tiny motel for a weekend and drove the Crows' Nest one more time to find out what the **COALMONT** of my imagination had to offer.*

*Only fifty or so inhabitants, apparently, our motel and the **COALMONT HOTEL** seemed to be the only businesses around, but the accommodations were spotlessly clean, quaint in design and the owners more than welcoming.*

*I began to discover that there was quite a history to the little town and the area....an old gold mining centre, a onetime substantial coal industry, all gone now, but vividly recalled in a fascinating book written by **DIANE STERNE**, one of the owners of our motel.*

This background explained the gold panning offer at the motel which, of course, intrigued our grandchildren, my wife and myself.

*The reason for our particular interest stemmed from the fact that my wife's father had been a mining prospector in the Yukon, many years before, and she still had retained some mining claims of his in B.C. after he passed away. It transpired that the owners of the **MOSEY-ON-INN** also owned mining shares around the local area, and their background and interesting advice helped open up a whole new area of exploration around our family interests in prospecting.*

But that is another story, yet to be written.

*Finding that the **DIANE** had expert information regarding the history of the **PRINCETON/COALMONT** area, I asked if she was familiar with anyone by the name of **ALLISON** in the area. "why, yes", she replied, and pointing up to the adjacent mountainside, explained*

“LINDA ALLISON has cattle right up there”. The author of the Coalmont history book then told that the family were amongst the original settlers in the **PRINCETON/COALMONT** area. To find out more, she referred me to the local tourist office where the manager, apparently, was the expert on the history of the area.

The next day, I dropped by there, and was very kindly received by the young assistant. Although the manager was not on duty, this young lady, upon hearing my tale, reiterated the fact about the **ALLISON** connections to the area. She looked up, and gave me two telephone numbers...one for the aforementioned **LINDA ALLISON** and the other for her brother **JOHN**. They had to be the family of ‘my’ **HAROLD** and on our return to Vancouver, I lost no time in phoning them.

LINDA was not in town, but I did have a long conversation with **JOHN** who confirmed that, indeed, He was the son of **HAROLD (AL) ALLISON** who sadly, had passed away a number of years before.

So there it was, over seventy years later I had finally tracked down my cousin’s wartime buddy in **COALMONT, B.C.**

Needless to say, I bought the book on the history of the area and what a fascinating story it proved to be. The **ALLISON** family featured prominently and I was also surprised to find a reference to **EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND**, the place of my birth.

A gentleman by the name of **DAVID BROWN**, born in **EDINBURGH**, bought the **COALMONT HOTEL** in 1930 and it was operated by him and his family for thirty years. His son, also **DAVID BROWN**, born in **COALMONT**, subsequently went on to become a leading citizen of the area, as well as Mayor of **PRINCETON**.

That, then, is the end of my little story highlighting some of life’s little coincidences that come your way over the years.

Oh....just one more little thing....did I mention that my cousin’s father, born in **EDINBURGH** was named **DAVID BROWN** and, of course, my cousin, **HAROLD ALLISON**’s wartime friend was named **DAVID BROWN** after his father.

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*p.s. Was up to the OK on another wine jaunt last weekend, and since wineries in the Similkameen Valley were on our list, we passed through **PRINCETON**.*

*I was determined, on this occasion, to meet up with **JOHN ALLISON**, and I did. I tracked him down at his home on the Old Hedley Road, and enjoyed a nice chat. (I hope he was interested to hear my story at first hand)*