



COMPASS

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Last summer I was fortunate to have the opportunity to get to know QLF Alumnus Doug Eisenhart. Doug had joined QLF's World of Grenfell Tour, a trip to our home region of Newfoundland, Labrador, and the Quebec North Shore (July 2012). At its conclusion, Doug traveled to Chevery, Quebec, where years earlier he had spent three summers as a QLF Volunteer (1966, 1967, 1970). I asked Doug to describe his visit and especially his reunion with his host family and friends during his stay in Chevery (then named Cross River).

Over the years, one of QLF's abiding strengths as a "Come-From-Away" organization is the engagement between Volunteers and the communities in which they serve. That remains as true today as it was when Doug traveled north from Choate School in the 1960s.

*Elizabeth Alling
Executive Vice President*

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Returning to the Coast

In the summer of 1966, at the age of 16, I was dropped by boat one evening on a beach in a small coastal town in remote eastern Canada. The town was a new settlement on the mainland near the islands of Harrington Harbour along the Lower North Shore of Quebec. Two other young students were with me.

We were the first Volunteers from The Quebec-Labrador Mission Foundation (QLMF) in the coastal community of Cross River, Quebec, and we were assigned this coastal community by QLMF Founder The Ven. Robert A. Bryan. I was one of Bob Bryan's recruits from The Choate School (Wallingford, Connecticut) where he served as Chaplain. The three of us would be there for the next seven weeks.

That first evening, as we sat by the light of a kerosene lamp in Ches and Lulabelle Jones' kitchen, we determined who was going to stay where. One stayed with Ches, another nearby, and I wound up a few houses down the line at the home of Ches' sister, Stella, and her husband Gilbert Bobbitt. Stella and Gilb immediately welcomed me into their family, providing me with my own bedroom in a house already jammed with five young children. (Another two children were already grown and had moved away.)

As in other communities along the Coast, the Cross River fathers headed out in their fishing boats in the wee hours of the morning into the Gulf of St. Lawrence in search of cod, while the mothers were left to fend at home. Bob Bryan put us there to start a daily Recreation Program to



Map by Stephen Engle

provide activities for the dozens of children in the community. We played Capture the Flag and baseball on a field hacked out of the surrounding spruce forest by the townsmen. We taught the children swimming on the miles-long strip of sandy beach at the mouth of the Netagamioi River that formed the town's seafont. On rainy or foggy days, we'd head into the newly built one-room schoolhouse



for crafts, projects, and indoor games. Other times we went on hikes or overnights at the falls up the river. At night, we would walk the town and drop in to visit with neighbors. Occasionally, we'd make the trip to Harrington Harbour, taking an hour or more to traverse the seven miles of open water in a small one-lunger (motorized dory).

I returned the following summer with two other QLF Volunteers and then for a third summer while I was in college.* I came to feel part of this isolated place where there were no roads, no cars, no telephones, no electricity, and only a simple dirt footpath parallel to the shore behind the seagrass serving as the main thoroughfare. Over the course of my summers there, the people of Cross River became a new extended family for me.

During the intervening decades, I

often dreamt of returning to Cross River, but not until this past summer did my dream become a reality. I joined QLF's *World of Grenfell Tour* to

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Newfoundland and Labrador (July 2012), and then departed from the tour while in L'Anse au Claire, Labrador, to fly up the Coast to Chevery. (In 1971,

Cross River was renamed Chevery.)

This time my arrival was by an Air Labrador twin prop. I stepped off the plane onto the tarmac and walked into the airport. There was Stella Bobbitt, same as ever, to greet me with a huge hug. The first thing we did was tour the town with Stella's granddaughter, Crystal, in her minivan on the four kilometers of paved roads. Telephone poles and power lines flanked the pavement. We passed a cluster of giant satellite dishes. The new two-story and prominently marked Ecole Netagamiou School had a flat, groomed soccer field next to it—the same field, I was told, originally cleared for us that first summer of 1966.

I returned to Gilb and Stella's house and the very same bedroom I had had before—Stella wouldn't have it any other way. And of course it was a sort of homecoming. After all, Gilb and



QLF Archives

Orientation for QLF Volunteers, Montreal, Quebec, 1967. Doug Eisenhart is in the third row, sixth from left. Bob Bryan is easily identified, far right.



Photograph by Larry Morris

QLF Volunteer Nick Gates (left) chats with Alumnus Doug Eisenhart (1966, 1967, 1970) on the *World of Grenfell Tour*, Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland, July 2012.

Stella had done me the extreme honor, 45 years ago, of naming their seventh son (and eighth and final child) after me. Douglas Martin Bobbitt is now an elementary school principal in New Brunswick. Stella was right—there was no choice.

We picked up where we had left off, spending much of the time surveying the walls lined with family photos while I attempted to graph the burgeoning family tree of 45 across five living generations. I was secretly gratified that the framed formal portrait of my own extended family turned out to be just the right house gift after all these years.

During my four days in Chevery, I walked the town and rode, in son Wayne's pickup, to reconnect with those I knew. Most recognized me, and most remembered me, too, especially my young charges from the day camp, now with homes and children (and grandchildren!) of their own.

Of course, much has changed. The town of a few dozen families has grown to a population of 300. Two wharves have taken the place of boats anchored

off the beach. A new marina houses even more craft. A barge plies freight up and down from Harrington Harbour. I had also planned an entire day to visit in Harrington. Now, it's a short 20-minute ride in the water taxi. In event of emergencies or rough seas, a helicopter stands at the ready at the airport.

Instead of building the "Polly Ann II" as he did my second summer there, at the age of 93, Gilb now carves model boats for his great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren. The neighborly evening visits, Stella confirmed, largely ceased when cable and satellite TV were installed. Her homemade bread from the woodstove has given way to store-bought loaves, purchased from one of Chevery's two stores. Four decades ago, there were no stores in Cross River.

Years ago, I remember asking Bob Bryan why we were there and what our purpose was. After all, we were working for a "mission." I remember Bob Bryan saying that someday the rest of the world would come to this place, and that it would change it, and that they'd need to be prepared. This way of life would need to be preserved and somehow carried forward into a changing world. **

As a young Volunteer many years ago, I may have known that intellectually, but I always felt that I took much more from my time on the Coast than I gave. Now, all these years later, I see the impact of QLF's long-



Photograph by Charley Hildt

Netagamiou River Falls, near the community of Chevery, Quebec -



term and continued presence and commitment to these people and rural communities. I walked into the Chevery Community Center and saw the youth group—now run by local high school students—doing what we did. The torch has been passed, I thought to myself.

I introduced myself to and spent time with Ana Osborne, town resident, who was born and lived in Chevery since I've been gone. Now, as a Community Development Director, she is convening Non-Governmental Organizations, including QLF, and government agencies together to fund culture and heritage projects and other initiatives. She is currently taking the lead in planning Chevery's *Come Home Year* scheduled for the summer of 2014, celebrating 50 years of community since Gilb and Stella and others first moved there in the summer of 1964 from Harrington Harbour and other nearby island communities.

Even while the townspeople have taken the lead in recognizing and preserving their own culture, they are also aware that the future is not without its challenges. Maybe Quebec



Forty-six years after his first summer as a QLF Volunteer in Chevery, Quebec, Doug Eisenhart reunites with his host family, Gilb and Stella Bobbitt (second and third from left), and neighboring Bobbitt cousins.

Route 138 will eventually make it up from Kegaska and down from Old Fort. Maybe not. Maybe some other fish stock will replace turbot and snow crab, the way they replaced cod and later scallops, but maybe not. Maybe more will leave fishing for work out west in Edmonton and the oil industry, or maybe not.

The last night of my stay Gilb, Stella, and I were invited to a farewell dinner next door with more Bobbitts. After dinner, I played the guitar and we sang together. It felt like being home again. And that is exactly what has *not* changed—the warm and welcoming ways of these people. That's what made the Coast what it was in 1966 and what it still is today.

Douglas M. Eisenhart

QLF Volunteer

Cross River/Chevery, Quebec

~ 1966, 1967, 1970 ~

* QLF Alumni who served as Cross River Volunteers along with Doug Eisenhart: Jim Lewis and Vicky Cobb ~ 1966; Georgette Love and Nell McIlhenny ~ 1967; Georgette Love and Rick Moseley ~ 1970

** The Quebec-Labrador Mission Foundation, Inc. was incorporated in 1963, and was amended as The Quebec-Labrador Foundation, Inc. in 1976.



QLF Intern Chessye Moseley with campers, Chevery, Quebec, July 2011. Chessye is the daughter of QLF Director Rick Moseley, who served with Doug Eisenhart as a Volunteer in Chevery, 1970.