



June Gillrie hard at work on the finishing touches to the Swiss Inn at Hollyburn Mountain in the 1940s. photo supplied



June Gillrie goes through some of her medals, photo albums and other memorabilia. photo supplied Jane Henderson

MEMORY LANE: Golden age remembered

by Laura Anderson, North Shore News, September 10, 2016

A visit to Hollyburn Lodge will be a highlight at the annual Pioneer Skiers' Reunion on Wednesday, September 21 on Cypress Mountain. The lodge restoration is close to completion and oh, if those walls could talk.

Fortunately, they don't have to. Newly minted centenarian June Gillrie – born Lorna-June Patricia Leslie on June 23, 1916, in one of Vancouver's oldest houses, the Leslie house (no relation) at 1380 Hornby Street – will be there with her fellow Pioneer Skiers to tell us how it was during the lodge's heyday in the '30s and '40s.

I remember leafing through June's albums at previous reunions. Photograph after black and white photograph of people recreating, winter and summer, on the mountains stacked up in Vancouver's backyard. Every one mesmerizing, and every one described in detail by June, blessed with an impeccable memory and the skills of a natural storyteller.

June's albums put faces on the familiar names: Sue and Clare Morrison, George and Janet Hale, Thelma and Jack Hutchinson, Brian Creer, and Chuck Gillrie.

Don Grant, Hollyburn Heritage Society archivist, notes, "The days when June was on Hollyburn, that was the golden age, the dawn of skiing, both recreational and competitive, in Vancouver."

It's true. June has the memories, and the medals, that confirm it.

Catching up with June to talk about Hollyburn took some doing. Her square dance club, Ocean Waves, was hosting their annual Corn Roast and Dance in Courtenay and June was on hand for the full program, including pacing off a step or two.

"I shouldn't have danced," she said, having broken her pelvis last year and a femur this year, both events purely by accident, "but I did. Me, I do things anyhow."

Yes, June is a woman who dances to her own tune, always has. She is also gracious and considerate, making time to reminisce before the big event of the weekend, the potluck dinner and dance. June's contribution, mixed vegetables, was already prepared.

Annual Pioneer Skiers' reunion set for September 21 at Cypress

June was 10 years old and specializing in roller and ice-skating when Hollyburn Lodge opened in 1927. A few years later, as a teenager, June would leave her home near South Granville, board the streetcar and then the ferry to cross Burrard Inlet and finally, putting one foot in front of the other, hike all the way up the mountain to the ski camp at First Lake.



Thelma Hutchinson and June Gillrie rest on the roof of the Swish Inn cabin at Hollyburn Mountain in the 1940s. These photos are from Gillrie's vast photo collection. photo supplied

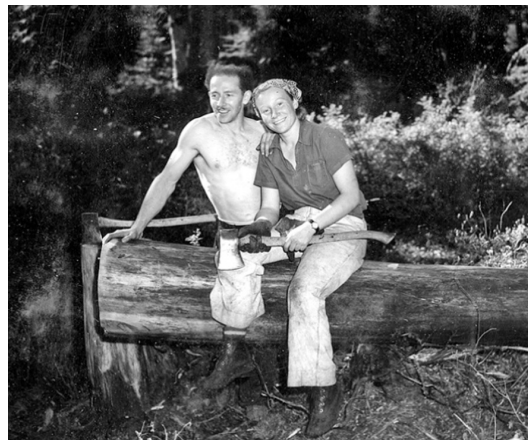
"For \$20 a season, you rented a bunk – put down your sleeping bag. You could rent skis too but I bought mine from Hamish Davidson. I was always moving up – trading up – on skis."



June Gillrie rests on Black Mountain with the Lions in the background. photo supplied

June met Chuck Gillrie on the mountain and they married in 1942. Chuck was a welder working in the Vancouver shipyards turning out freighters for the war effort. He and Brian Muir had already built one cabin, Stonehaven, the only cabin on Hollyburn with a stone foundation. The newlyweds built a second cabin, June working alongside Chuck. "In that picture of me with the axe," she says, "I used it for peeling logs." They named the cabin Swish Inn for the sound made by a pair of skis swishing over the snow.

"We were always up the mountain. Summers it was swimming at First Lake, hiking, working on the cabin. I'm a golfer and a sailor, too, charter member of the Kitsilano Yacht Club." (June says "Kitsilana" – few Vancouverites are left who pronounce the word in that way).



June and Chuck Gillrie take a break while building their cabin, Swish Inn, on Hollyburn Mountain in the 1940s. Photo supplied

"Winters we skied, of course, and I was a skater, having started out roller skating. We ski club members bowled and skated together. I skated at First Lake and at Lost Lagoon in Stanley Park. In those days it iced over solid. From the time I was born, I was always active and I still am.

"Oh, these memories," says June, "my mind is full of so much."

June Gillrie and her fellow Hollyburners will be recreating and sharing memories at the 24th annual Pioneer Skiers' Reunion. Hosted by Hollyburn Heritage Society and Mount Seymour History Project, this year's reunion will be Wednesday, September 21, from noon to 4 p.m. at Cypress Creek Lodge and all are welcome.

For more information, visit hollyburnheritage.ca.