

# Trip of a Lifetime

## Sisters kayak to adventure in B.C.

by Elaine Morrison  
Black Press

At first glance, she doesn't look like an adventurer, a risk-taker. But the slight and demure Miv (Muriel) Simister is a modern day explorer with an appetite for discovery.

Miv is a daily walker, hiker, cross-country skier, regular volunteer at Darts Hill Garden and a member of the South Surrey Garden Club. She also loves to travel. In fact, right now, she's packing to head down under via New Zealand.

But perhaps her most meaningful trip took place this summer when she joined her sisters for a six-day kayaking adventure into remote areas off of mainland B.C.'s coast.

The trip came together after Miv flew to Winnipeg for a family Thanksgiving in 2004. Armed with brochures of a trip she'd read about in a magazine, she talked her three sisters into boarding the Columbia III for the Explore the Backwaters Mothership Adventure.

Not an unusual undertaking, until you take into account all four ladies are widows - and seniors.

In July, Jean Gregory, 72, of St. Vital, Man., Lynn Francis, 83, of Winnipeg, Man. and Marg Oliver, 77, of Calgary, Ab., flew to B.C. to meet up with Miv, 82, at her South Surrey home.

"We're pretty old crocks to be doing this," a spunky Jean told a Winnipeg news reporter prior to leaving for B.C.

While they've often traveled together - Jean and Marg visited Peru, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands; Lynn and Miv (with husbands), canoed the Rideau system from Kingston to Ottawa and another time skippered a narrow boat through England's canals; and in 2003 Marg and Miv explored the Arctic - the B.C. trip was the first time all four Hammett sisters were present.

They departed for Port McNeil and met up with the Columbia III, one of four ships of that name which in earlier days had served a higher purpose.

"The ships were originally designed as a hospital ship, and a missionary ship serving the remote villages along B.C.'s



rugged coast," Miv explained.

"Often the doctor was the skipper."

Today, the ship operates with a crew of four - captain, cook and two guides - and acts as a home base for the remote B.C. adventure that winds around the countless islands and inlets of Broughton Archipelago on B.C.'s mainland side of Johnstone Strait.

Stored atop the Columbia III, the kayaks - five yellow two-man for the guests, and two silver one-man vessels for the guides - were lowered to the stern for the daily trip.

Of all the challenges the trip posed, propping for and squeezing into the Kayaks were tops.

"There is no easy and graceful way to get into a kayak," Miv noted.

"After breakfast it took about an hour to get us into the water, and these crazy skirts we had to pull on..."

Spray skirts are worn about the waist and secured to the kayak to seal the cockpit, forming a waterproof barrier.

When ready, the group paddled out passing by (and stopping at), lushly forested islands, home to ancient First Nations village sites, taking in marine and terrestrial wildlife such as Orca killer whales, dolphins, harbour seals, black bear, bald eagles and deer.

On one island, the sisters fought through heavily barbed vegetation to explore a long-abandoned house, lingering just long enough to take in the forgotten, incredible ocean view.

A daily mid-day break brought the kayakers to shore for a "fabulous lunch" presented by their guides.

One morning Miv was so moved by the coastline beauty, she sang out. "As morning kayaking progressed and the daily fog lifted revealing the awesome scenery surrounding us highlighted by sun over all, I was moved to sing Oh, What a Beautiful Morning, and quote Heaven is Made of This," Miv said.

Of course the sisters all joined in echoing the waters with Lynn adding the hymn, My Father's World.

"It was so surreal with the fog on the water. It was like someone was raising a curtain on a great stage," Miv said of the sunrise.

Not all was calm though. One day the women were faced with fast water, or rapid-like conditions. The guides tethered the women's kayaks to theirs as a safety precaution. But as the seniors paddled through the teeming waters, they noticed the line between the vessels was slack.

"I said 'look, we're doing it ourselves,'" Miv proudly recalled.

The group returned to their mother ship around 4 or 5 p.m. each day.

Seven days later, they were home.

"We just heard back from the captain and his wife, and they said our foursome was the highlight of their whole summer.

"They were amazed that four of us at that age would take on something like that," Miv said.

However, when the four women returned home, brother John, 76, was waiting, looking for answers.

"He wondered why we hadn't included him in our kayak escapade."

Four days after they returned from their adventure, the wandering widows were mobile again. Marg was off to the Yukon to hike the Chilcoot Trail, Miv finalized arrangements for New Zealand and Australia and Jean was off to India for three weeks.