

Joy Algie – Pioneer & Matriarch

Born 26.09.1912 – Died 05.06.2010

The last of her generation among the old families on the Mahurangi Peninsula, Joy Algie, 96, remembers well the most exciting day in her life – when electricity services came to the Mullet Point settlement. Joy, who still drives and takes her turn with the reading in the Presbyterian Church, shares her memories and her thoughts on the different world in which she now finds herself.



I was born on a farm in Saskatchewan, Canada, and my family (descended from the Branscombes from Devon, England) came to New Zealand in 1920, when I was eight years old. My mother didn't have very good health and found the cold weather in northern Saskatchewan very trying. But she had a sister in Takapuna who encouraged her to move here. My father was in the insurance business. We sold up everything, visited Vancouver where what money we had soon disappeared and came to New Zealand. We were refugees! We were almost penniless. My sister and I went to school in Takapuna and I remember that the other children couldn't understand us because of our accents.

The family moved to Mt Albert and we joined a big church there. I left school and got a job in an office. We had friends who came up to Algies Bay by boat to a boarding house. They recommended it and my mother and I made the trip north by Gubbs bus in 1925. There I met the Algie family – Athol, whom I later married, and his cousins, who ran a farm in the bay. I became a friend of the family and visited the boarding house over a number of years, helping Athol bring in the cows. He wasn't interested in me – he thought I wore too much lipstick!

I learned some of the history of the Algie family. Alexander Algie, who lived in Pukekohe at the time, bought the property at Mullet Point, as it was then known, on a whim. He was in Queen St in Auckland when properties were being auctioned and so decided to join in. Not having the foggiest idea of the location of the land, he put in a bid. The only bidder, he quickly found himself to be the owner of some land at Mullet Point and Whangateau. He decided to take a boat ride north to find out what he'd bought, disembarking at Mullet Point. There were a few Maoris living there but the bay was covered in bush. In 1860, he brought his sweetheart to the bay and the Maoris made a whare for him to sleep in. Gradually he built a flax hut to live in and finally a wooden home. Alexander had two sons, Will and Jack, and four daughters. The family initially made a living by selling kauri gum picked up off the beach.

Will married and his son was Athol, my future husband. People will be familiar with all these names as they are street names in Algies Bay. Athol's mother Annie taught part-time at both the little Mullet Point School and Mahurangi Heads School. She had to get there on foot as there were only tracks – no roads. A boarding house was built for people travelling to the bay. The small settlement developed, it was known as Mullet Point and had a post office, with Queen Victoria's insignia on it, on the current site of the Bethshan Motel.

Athol started study at the Bible College of New Zealand in 1939. At the time I was working in Hamilton. Then the Second World War broke out and in 1941 the 60-year-old boarding house was closed. Athol returned to work on the farm and in July, 1941, we got married. It was wartime so we couldn't have a big wedding, but I had a white dress. We moved into a house Athol had built at the top of Algies Bay near Mahurangi East Rd. The farm was divided and Athol ended up owning about 100 acres of property at the southern end of Algies Bay, while Jack's family (Athol's cousins) owned the land at Algies Point.

I was a town girl and I didn't appreciate the niceties of rural life. I wasn't impressed with having to walk through a paddock with two bulls in it to get to the post office to post a letter. The mail was collected twice a week. I didn't ride a horse and didn't have a car, so during the war years it was either walk or cadge a lift with the mail van if I wanted to get to the shops, which were all in Warkworth. Petrol was rationed, in any case, to four gallons a month. There was no electricity at that stage in Algies Bay. We used candles and kerosene lamps. Petrol engines ran the milking plant for our 40 cows. Eventually Athol found dairy farming too much so he sold the herd and bought sheep.

In the early 1950s we finally got electric power. The day that electricity came to Algies Bay was the greatest day in the lives of the ladies of Algies Bay. It was immensely exciting. We had to sell the old wood stove to make way for an electric stove. Retailers from Warkworth came out to Algies Bay with their vans piled full with electrical equipment. We bought a jug and boiled water! We bought an iron and threw the sooty Mrs Potts iron away. It was the most wonderful day of our lives.

By this stage we were connected to the telephone exchange. Clothes props held the lines up above the ground but cows would rub on the props and we'd lose connection. Our first line was a party line with eight or nine people connected to it. In 1959 Athol built a house for us down by the beach and I have lived there ever since. He died in 1984.

Election day was a big day in the little settlement. I remember all the Scandretts, the Martins, Kemps, the three Algie families and the folk farming at the northern end of Algies Bay trooping off to the Mullet Point School, where Uncle Jack was the electoral officer. On one occasion, the votes were counted at the end of the day and it was found that every single person in the bay had voted for the National Party. You could call it a block vote! Then one year someone voted Labour – it was a matter of great concern to find out who had done that!

Both Athol's and my family had a strong faith in God. Sundays were a day of rest – no fishing, no swimming, and no gardening. We attended church services at the Mullet Point School or Mahurangi Heads (now Scotts Landing) Church. A Methodist, Presbyterian or Anglican minister would come from Warkworth to take the services. Mahurangi Heads Church survived until Cyclone Bola struck in 1988. I still have one of the kauri pews in my garden.

Times were tough in the early years in Algies Bay. When Athol first worked for his cousins on the farm he was earning 30 shillings a week. We could get a roast of beef from Mr Stubbs (butchery) for two shilling and sixpence, which lasted us the best part of the week. But it's a different world now. I have my phone and TV – I like watching garden shows. I enjoy reading and I'm going to write a book one day. I'm a keen rugby follower – I barrack for the Crusaders and my favourite All Black is Daniel Carter. I've done a lot of travel over the years. I reckon I got the travel bug when I was eight years old. I have many mementos of my trips in my living room. I used to show my embroidery and handwork at the A&P shows and won a few prizes, but my pride and joy are my tomatoes. I still get out and hoe the garden. I grow tomatoes from seed and plant the seeds every July 26, my wedding anniversary. I juice them and they last me all winter. I reckon that is what has kept me going.

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