

What was your Mother doing when she was 8 years old?

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February 19, 2006

Hi Samantha,

These stories are about your mother when she was your age. Since you are now eight years old, these are about your mother in 1977 and 1978, when she was 8. I guess to be accurate, I should be telling you stories about Daegan between August 10th, 1977 and August 9th, 1978 or between September 22nd, 1977 and September 21st, 1978 – but I may vary a little from those dates. I hope you don't mind.

Love,
Bill

Part 1: Parties and Sugaring Off

As you know, Daegan's birthday is in September. In 1977 we were living on Ile Bigras so she was eager to invite all her friends from around the island. You can see her busy looking at a card in the picture below with many of her friends around her. You can see JP at the left hand side of the picture. Jane Jones is sitting next to him. Rachel Yates is sitting on the other side of Daegan. You may remember Rachel – she is Simon and Madeleine's daughter. She is now married and has a child of her own.



Photo 1: Daegan's birthday party – 1977

Martine is sitting next to Rachel and Susan is sitting by the table in front of Martine. The blond-haired girl in the front on the left hand side of the photo is Lorraine Black. She didn't live on Ile Bigras, but Daegan met her at Brownies.

Just over a month after Daegan's birthday is Halloween. Daegan seemed to always want to dress up as a princess for Halloween. In 1977, she looked like a gypsy more than a princess as far as I could tell, however. You can see a picture of her below.



Photo 2: Daegan on Halloween – 1977

I built a treehouse in the trees on our property on Ile Bigras. It wasn't really a house – more like a tree platform, but the kids built all sorts of things on it – including a house-like structure. I have included a picture here of the kids playing on it. I don't think that Daegan is in this photo, but I expect that she was out there playing with the others.

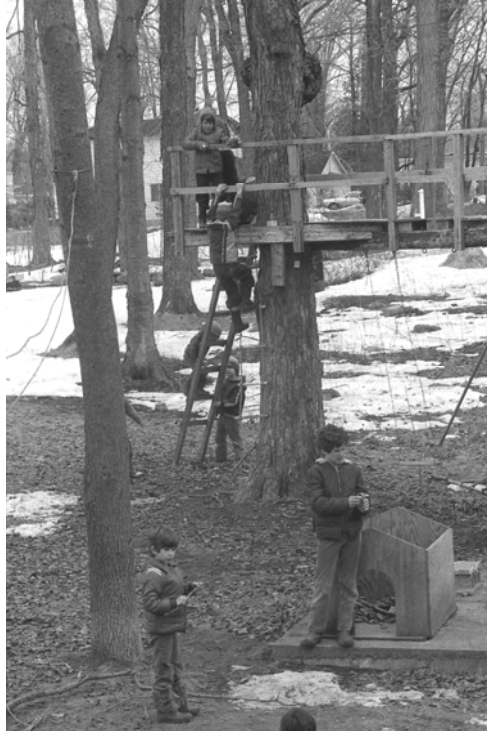


Photo 3: Kids playing on Ile Bigras treehouse

Both Daegan and JP had a good time playing in our yard. There were lots of trees to climb on. Your mother was about as good a tree climber as you are. I have included a picture of her part way up a tree. She looks like she is having a good time.



Photo 4: Daegan climbing a tree

One of the things we did in the spring was to tap our trees to collect the sap and make maple syrup. When we first came to Québec I thought it would be great fun to try and see if we can make our own. They don't have sugar

maple trees in Vancouver so I didn't know much about how to do it, but I had a few ideas so I thought I would try anyway.

I knew that I had to figure out a way to make spigots for catching the sap from the tree so I thought that I could do it using a bit of angle iron. I had some in the garage, so I cut them into short sections and filed a sharp point on one end of each. I drilled some holes in about 3 trees, hammered in the spigots just below the holes, and hung some pails on the spigots.

Later that evening I took a look at the pails and found that there was only a little bit of liquid in the bottom. I figured that if this was only the amount of sap that I would get then I had better tap some more trees. So I made a whole lot of other spigots and went around tapping about 10 more trees – drilling holes, hammering in the spigots, and hanging out more pails.

I then headed in to bed.

The next morning I got up to a lovely spring day. The sun was shining, the sky was blue, and the temperature was warming up nicely as it often does on a nice spring day in Québec. After breakfast I headed out to see how the pails were doing. When I looked in the first one, I was shocked by what I saw!

Not only was it full to the top, but the sap was overflowing the pail and running down the side of the tree. I looked at the other pails and they were in the same situation. Each of them was overflowing and the sap was still dripping steadily from the end of each spigot.

I ran into the house and grabbed a big white plastic pail. I made the rounds of each of the trees and emptied them into the pail as fast as I could. In no time I had the pail full so I rushed back into the house and grabbed another big pail. It took me only a short time to fill that one up too.

I set up the camp stove on the porch and began to boil the sap. You see, the way in which maple syrup is made is by boiling off much of the water from the sap. In fact, it is necessary to boil off almost half of the water before you get the syrup to the point where it is good for pancakes. That is a lot of boiling, though.

We set up the camp stove to boil off most of the liquid, then would put what was left into a pot in the kitchen. We would then use the kitchen stove to boil off the last of the water until it was ready as syrup. This meant that the kitchen was soon full of sweet sticky steam as we waited with our candy thermometer in the pot. Each time the temperature reached the right level, we would pour the syrup into a bottle, fill up the pot again, and start over.

It was a full-time project – picking up the sap, filling up the camp stove, pumping up the gas, transferring it to the kitchen, boiling off the last of the water, and pouring the final syrup into bottles. The problem was, that we couldn't keep up!



Photo 5: JP Filling the pail with maple sap

The sap was coming out of the trees at a rate that was more than we could manage. We were having to fill up all our containers with the sap. We used the sap for making porridge, coffee, tea and other any thing we could think of. We gave it away to our friends and soon had all the containers in our house filled up. I went out to buy a big garbage pail

and we started to use it as a place to save the sap as we tried to boil it all. You can see a photo of JP filling it up.

Our days were full of carrying, boiling, and measuring – and even the big garbage pail was filled to the top. I didn't know what we were going to do – I had drilled holes in all these trees and couldn't keep up with all the sap they were producing.

Then the sap stopped! I woke up in the morning expecting to see the sap running down the tree and all I found were half-filled pails with a few moths floating in the sap at the bottom. I think they must have been enjoying the sweet liquid and just couldn't get out.

I later found out that the sap runs the most when the temperature goes below zero at night then above zero during the day. All winter it rests in the roots waiting for the warm winds of spring to blow by and the soil to warm up. Then it rushes up the trunk and out the branches – ready to nourish the green buds and leaves soon to come. When I first began tapping the trees I must have been just before the sap began to run – and it must have

ended just when we had filled up all our containers. The other years we tapped the trees, I was more careful.



Photo 6: JP's Beavers troop at our sugar party

As we began to learn more about maple trees and syrup we tried out many more of the ways to enjoy maple syrup. We made maple fudge, maple candy, sponge toffee, and even maple butter with the results. We even invited JP's Beaver troop over for a sugar party s you can see from the photo.

We are busy pouring the hot syrup on a bit of snow that we gathered from around our house. You can see both JP and Daegan in this photo. Can you find them? Do you think that Daegan looks as old as you are?