

Reprint **Island Tides**

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Reprint from Volume 27 Number 17

September 3, 2015

Saturna Notes: BC Ferries - Priscilla Ewbank

For the past month, Saturna Island's bulletin boards have displayed 8" x 11" notices with a little ferry sailing in a stripe of blue across the top of the page—'Help Improve Sailing Schedules in the Southern Gulf Islands', with a schedule of meetings on every Island that I commonly interact with. Sounded benign to me—our schedule right now is very workable and I'm in the midst of wonderful family visits, a month of grandchildren and the General Store's busiest time of year to make money to keep it going all year.

Then I became aware of the community rumble: 'Disastrous for Saturna,' said the Southern Gulf Island Ferry Advisory Committee. What had I been thinking? When has our ferry schedule ever been 'improved'? When has BC Ferries ever wanted our real engaged input to our benefit? Usually, when they want us to do something, we, as a community, don't want to do it. Why had I allowed myself to be lulled?

It turns out we aren't being asked to help tweak our functioning schedule—which we've had for 31 years, since the second berth was built at Mayne Island—as one would naturally assume from the poster. We were being asked to help meet the BC Ferries Commission's requirement for public consultation to okay a totally destructive schedule that meets none of the communities' requirements for predictable, timely, capable marine access with our island neighbors and our regional points of commerce.

Saturna Islanders got to work and organized and it wasn't hard. Islanders made suggestions for the meeting, helping out at every turn. So many of us came to the meeting because—through the wonder of technology—we had studied the scheduling proposals and talked among ourselves and with our Southern Gulf Island Ferry Advisory Committee members. We

were aghast at what we saw. Everyone got the magnitude of threat and could see their own lives drastically altered.

So, Saturna Islanders accepted the invitation from BC Ferries for an August 17 meeting—260 Islanders showed up out of a total year-round population of 350.

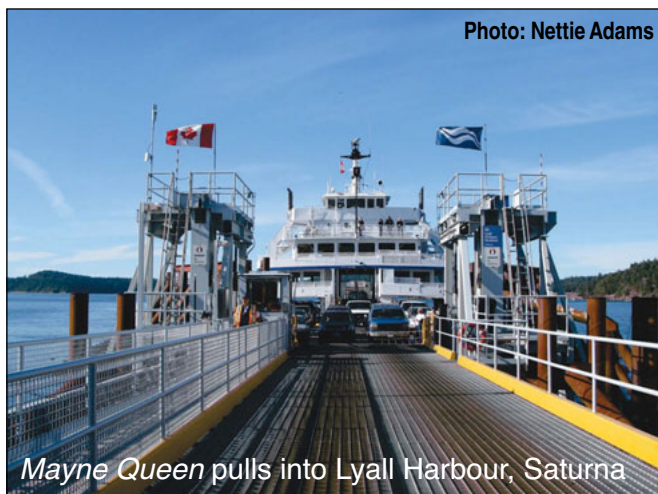
The meeting was moved from the first venue, as it clearly wouldn't hold the discussion, to the Rec Centre. The centre was well set-up to host the event—every chair was in use and standing islanders lined the walls. Our two members of the Southern Gulf Island Advisory Committee kept a flawless stream of presenters coming to the microphone, which was turned to address the Saturna audience rather than speaking directly to the eight BC Ferries personnel.

Ferry Committee member Eva Hage provided a succinct, clear summation of the meeting for BC Ferries. 'Incendiary' was how one Ferry Committee member had respond to BC Ferries. Speakers kept asking, 'What were you thinking?' and meant it.

We kept our own minutes. Melanie Gaines was our recording secretary and had a big easel up at the front where the speakers were presenting

their points and business financials. *Island Tides*, *Driftwood*, *Vancouver Sun* and Gary Holman, our MLA, were present to witness, to record their impressions of the issues, and to report to the public. We had a supportive letter from our School District Superintendent, assurance of the close interest of our MP, Elizabeth May, and a heads up from Superintendent of Gulf Islands National Park Reserve Marcia Morash. BC Ferries personnel had uniforms, twelve story boards, a powerpoint presentation and a spun answer for every islander.

You could have heard a pin drop. The meeting was the most amazing island event I have ever attended. We were bearing



Mayne Queen pulls into Lyall Harbour, Saturna

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'This article was published (September 3, 2015) in 'Island Tides', an independent, regional newspaper distributing on the Canadian Gulf Islands, on Vancouver Island and, via the internet, worldwide.'

Island Tides Publishing Ltd, Box 55, Pender Island, BC V0N 2M0 • 1-250-216-2267 • islandtides@islandtides.com • www.islandtides.com

witness to our neighbour's lives; all the ways that we have conceived to make a living, interact with our other-island neighbours, create the circumstances to keep ourselves economically viable and socially vigorous, and to maybe raise a family.

Islanders said again and again that critical to every circumstance is connection with others through our marine highway. All the different voices, our ways of speaking—clever with words or shy to speak, dressed up or in boots and clean shirts—the kaleidoscope of our day-by-day lives accounted for.

The purpose of our overall presentation was simple: to present to BC Ferries how we make a living and what we need to continue the lives we have built—to document with our voices and presence the facts and financial figures of authentic island lives. No spin, no 'talking points' to hide behind.

We are part of an archipelago of jewels in a coastal crown of breathtaking natural beauty. We are intact, dynamic communities with a long history of creative individuals and we know how vulnerable we are if our islands highway is rendered non-functional.

As much as we confirmed for ourselves at the meeting how reliant we islanders are on our marine connections, it also gave us the chance to see ourselves anew. Obviously we were affirmed—we can count on each other and on the other Gulf Islands.

Mayne Queen Turns 50

Our ferry—our *Mayne Queen*, the ferry that brought me to Saturna Island on May 1, 1970; which brought my husband, Jon,

and his two daughters to Saturna where we found each other and became a family; which carried him for 30 years around the Islands doing business for Saturna General Store and Haggis Farm Bakery; which, for free, brought our youngest daughter back from Saanich Peninsula Hospital when she was one-day-old, and which brought Jon's ashes home last year—our ferry is celebrating her 50th year of service to the Gulf Islands.

That's right! She did her first round September 7, 1965. For years, we had full-on food service at the food bar, and the ferry ladies were hired from Saturna Island. You could set your watch by the *Mayne Queen*, the blast of her horn for every port of call. You can still depend on her ferry crews to be the best, on her to sail in all weathers and if the other ferries are late we can make up the time and get to town on time. Dependable, safe, efficient, a marvelous size and just real pretty, she is our boat, our Queen.

We Saturna Islanders can hear her as she is coming down Navy Channel and even recognize some of the crew's voices—'This is Lyall Harbour: Lyall Harbour, Saturna Island. All passengers, please proceed to the car deck'. Lucky, lucky us to have such a classy boat—truly Queen of the Fleet and our Homecoming Queen!

On September 8, Southern Gulf Islanders can meet her down at the dock on her mid-morning run. There will be cake and speeches to honour her years of magnificent day-in and day-out service to the Gulf Islands. 🍪