The International Conference held here this weekend is winding down and many topics have been discussed including the cod moratorium, out migration, adaptation to change and planning for the future. One thing is sure there will be change. We hope the economy will grow, otherwise, places like Change Islands and rural Newfoundland will be no more.

First of all, I’d like to say we, the people of Change Islands feel greatly honored to have this international symposium take place here on our little island community. We have talked about it for months and we feel Dr. Maureen Woodrow is to be highly commended for hosting this convention. To be sure much effort and planning was required to make the workshop a reality. I hope all of you enjoyed the weekend and will take away happy memories of your visit. (Maybe some of you will want to return we hope.)

My name is Mildred Morgan. I was born on Change Islands and I’ve lived most of my life here. I am a senior, as you can see and I’d like to take you back in time to the days before Newfoundland became a province of Canada. I grew up during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Times were hard. “Make-do, reuse” was our motto. We thought we were poor but my brother now says, “we were rich.” We were never hungry. We had the basic necessities of food derived from the land and the sea - fish, meats, vegetables, berries, etc. We learned early to do our share of the chores, there was plenty of work. We learned responsibility, sharing, and there was plenty of love in our family.

World War II (1939-1945) brought change to our little community. People went elsewhere to work on construction jobs. Money was more plentiful. Radio was introduced to our homes. Some things like tea, coffee, sugar and footwear were rationed. We had little books of coupons to be used for such items. My problem was footwear. I wore out my shoes so fast I needed someone else’s coupons as well as my own.

One little incident stands out in my memory. On this particular day it was raining. I had no rubbers. My mom said I could wear hers. They weren’t much too large and I couldn’t have wet feet. So off to school I went wearing my mom’s rubbers over my shoes. Later that evening after school, some of us children decided to play a ball game – pidly. If you couldn’t strike the ball with the bat, you could kick the ball to the goal. This is what I did and when I looked, lo and behold, there was a large gaping hole in the toe of my mother’s boot. I can still remember the pain in my stomach. I wasn’t afraid of being punished when I reached home and don’t remember what my parents said but just knowing I had no rubbers and now I had ruined my mother’s was almost unbearable.

When I finished high school I wanted to become a teacher. There weren’t many choices for girls growing up in fishing communities like Change Islands. With a Grade XI diploma I went to old Memorial College on Parade Street in St. John’s, to do a 6 week
teacher training course. Prior to Confederation with Canada, Newfoundland had no university. After completing the course I was assigned to the primary class 1 – 1V, over forty children in a two room school. I will never forget my first day in the classroom, I felt so incompetent but I was the teacher and I was determined to do my job and learn I did.

Apart from the academic courses taught in school, the teacher had the task of serving a hot chocolate drink called cocomalt and a dose of Cod-liver oil daily to the children. This program was introduced by the government of the day and was similar to the breakfast program in our schools today. Many children were suffering malnutrition and it was thought this would help. I think in some schools the cocomalt and cod-liver oil was given to take home but in the one where I taught it was served on the spot.

When the janitor lit the fire in the coal-burning potbelly stove in the morning, the large kettle of water was put on to boil. By recess time the pot was boiling and the cocomalt was mixed in a large earthen container and poured into mugs. (No Styrofoam cups in those days). Two girls from the high school came each day to assist the teacher and clean up afterwards. I have memories of the cod-liver oil too. Some children liked it but others didn’t. It is over fifty years ago but I can still remember some of those children. I completed my first year and the following summer I did another six weeks training course. Then off to another school where I was the only person in charge of beginners to Grade X1 inclusive.

Days were very busy. There was never enough time to do all that needed to be done even though the teacher worked through lunch hour filling the blackboards and always at night trying to have lesson plans in place for the following day. Discipline was very important, as was rapport with your students. Very often older students helped the younger ones. By today’s standards, it would be a nightmare. I spent eight years teaching before I married. (Married women couldn’t continue teaching at that time). My last three years were spent teaching in the United Church School on Change Islands where I was the only one in charge of beginners to Grade X1, inclusive.

Today things have changed greatly in the education system. Integrated schools replaced denominational schools. Modern technology - the computer and the fax machine and all the modern stuff boggles my mind. What opportunities there are today for the student!

I am sure most of you can not visualize the role of the teacher in the on-room school but for me, I have a lot of good memories.