

## *A Couple of Nature's Jewels*

*ABRAM WALTER ELKINS (1890-1977)*

*&*

*MARY JANE ROBERTS (1894-1980)*

*Written by their grand-daughter, Linda Elkins-Schmitt*

*Abram Walter Elkins was born in Safe Harbour, Bonavista North, in June of 1890, the fifth child of Robert and Rebecca Elkins. His grandfather, William Elkins, had come to Bonavista North from Salisbury, England, and married Rebecca Granter in Greenspond in 1849. In the 1850s they were living in Cold Harbor and by 1869 William and Rebecca were recorded as one of the first families living in Shambler's Cove. Abram's father, Robert William Elkins, was born in 1856. He married Rebecca, the daughter of William and Leonora (Gill) Parsons of Pinchard's Island, in 1880. Hubert Rogers of Pool's Island told me that Abe's parents lived on Big Pool's Island before moving to Safe Harbour.*

*Robert and Rebecca's first son, Frederick Parsons Elkins, was baptised at Pool's Island in 1881 (he died at Safe Harbour, aged 18 years). Uncle Bob and Aunt Becky, as they were now known, had settled in Safe Harbour by 1883. In 1886 Robert Elkins and Robert Atwood obtained a joint Crown Land Grant in Safe Harbour for the sum of three dollars. According to this grant, they acquired about 10 acres of land at what was recorded as "Little Safe Harbor". It was referred to locally as "The Gut" and this was where eight of the Elkins children were born between 1883 and 1902:*

*Lenora who married Allan Carter  
Annie Barbara who married Benjamin White  
William Garfield who died as a young child  
Abram Walter who married Mary Jane Roberts  
Edith Melvina (never married)  
Irene who married William Vincent  
Rosanna Pelly who married Herbert Sturge  
Frederick Garfield who married Bride Skinner*

*As a young man, and now the eldest living son, Abe fished in the summer and worked as a cook in the woods camps in Millertown in winter. Each fall, he would walk the forty or fifty miles from Safe Harbour to Gambo, with four dollars in his pocket to pay for the five-hour train journey to Millertown. Along the way, Abe would usually overnight at his Uncle Jerry and Aunt Lizzy (nee Elizabeth Ann Collins) Elkins' house in Hare Bay. It was during one of these stays that he met his aunt's niece, Mary Jane, the eldest daughter of Alphaeus and Charlotte (Collins)*

*Roberts. This was the beginning of a relationship that blossomed between two young people and would last for over sixty-five years.*

*In the summer of 1913, Abe fished on the Labrador with Skipper Bill Attwood. When they came home in the fall of the year, Abe sailed to Hare Bay in Skipper Bill's schooner, the Mohawk, to ask Jane to be his wife. Wilfred Osmond remembered seeing the Mohawk sail back into Safe Harbour "lined off with flags" and when he asked someone what was going on, they replied: "Abe Elkins is bringing his bride down from Hare Bay". That December, Rev. Ezra Broughton performed the marriage ceremony for Abe and Jane at the Methodist Church. John Gill Davis and his wife, Emma (Atwood), were their witnesses.*

*The following year, 1914, marked the beginning of World War I. Because he could not pass the physical exam, Abe could not enlist. As a young child he had had trouble with his legs. He often retold the story that his mother used to bathe them in salt water and the first boots she made for him went up to his knees for support. Abe did not walk until he was seven years old, but this late start certainly did not slow him down any!*

*While many young men left Newfoundland's shores to fight for England, my grandfather sailed to Labrador for the summer fishery. Wilfred Osmond told me this story about Abe and his father-in-law: "Alphaeus Roberts had a small schooner and went on the Labrador trap fishing. He lived in Hare Bay and after your grandparents were married, Abe went with him to Labrador. One time they came in to Braha Harbour on the way to Labrador and we came in at the same time. They stayed there overnight and the next day they were still there. I visited Abe on his boat 'cause I knew him. I did not know Alphaeus. That was about 1914."*

*Abe and Jane lived in Safe Harbour for another eight or nine years. In 1919, they buried their two-year old daughter, Emma. The following month, their first son, Robert Clarence, was born. In 1922, a second daughter was born, and as was often the custom, they named her Emma in memory of her sister who had died.*

*In the early 1920's when construction of the International Pulp and Paper Company's Mill began on the west coast, Abe secured a job as cook in the Staff House there and was the first of his family to move from Safe Harbour to Corner Brook. Abe and Jane lived in Summerside until they could move into a "Fisher Shack" on Seal Head, located near the Corner Brook Railway Station. Shortly thereafter, other members of the family, including both Abe and Jane's parents, also moved to Corner Brook. Over the next ten years, Abe and Jane had eight more children, including two sets of twins.*



*Abram and Jane with their son, Robert. This photograph was taken in Corner Brook in the 1920s, shortly after the family moved there from Safe Harbour, Bonavista North.*

*Abe worked in the Corner Brook mill for about thirty years; first as cook during the construction phase, then as a painter (a 1929 edition of the Bowline has a picture of Abe working in a Bos'un's chair painting the outside of the acid tower), and finally as a machinist. He retired in June 1955.*

*He was a good provider, a great cook, and although he only had a few years of formal education, he had taught himself to read. He was adept with his hands and could knit fishing nets and sew shoes for his children. Proudly, he would show me his long woollen underwear, which he had "reinforced" by weaving in an extra row of wool between each of the ridges with such precision that one could hardly distinguish the difference.*

*Abe and Jane spent sixty-three years of married life together. Abe died in 1977, Jane died three years later. They, as well as their parents, are all buried in Corner Brook.*



*50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary*

*Tom Cahill, a Newfoundland playwright, who boarded with Abe and Jane for many years, wrote these comments about them: "They were the nicest people one could meet, inseparable and totally devoted to each other. All in all, a couple of nature's jewels, and the salt of the earth. "*

