

TEXADA'S FLYING FINN

One of the more colourful characters from Texada's recent past was Elma Haapanen (1907- 1995) self-christened "the Flying Finn."

Blubber Bay first greeted Elma as she arrived on Texada alone at night via Ben Nicholas' water taxi. Suitcase and birdcage in hand, she traipsed across the bay to join her husband, Kusti, who worked at BC Cement.

Elma was a strong woman, used to working alongside men. In her native Finland she owned a laundry and later toiled as dockworker and miner. During the War she was a bus conductor in Berlin.

Soon after arriving on Texada Elma became famous for her Finnish sauna. Guests would "sweat it out" with Elma suddenly appearing "au naturel" with a bundle of sticks to switch and a bucket of cold water to splash.

For many Texadans Elma was most frequently encountered on the highway. A determined anti-litter campaigner, Elma would patrol the roadside with her small Pomeranians, collecting cans and garbage, her truck parked wherever. Weekend revellers often left beer bottles for her to discover.

In later years Elma might be seen clad in fur coat, fancy hat and rubber boots - thumb out for a ride. She would often entertain the driver with harmonica stylings en route.

It was relief to all when Elma gave up her licence. It was claimed that she "wore the dents in her car like notches in a gunslinger's gun." When Elma bought a new vehicle a hand-written note appeared on the post office bulletin board: "WARNING - Elma is now driving a RED truck."

Locating Elma was usually easy. Follow the birds. The seagulls at Shelter Point were familiar with her truck as she regularly took butcher scraps out to them. As Elma drove home a cloud of birds wheeled and circled above, following her truck all the way back into Gillies Bay townsite.

Elma loved to dance, grabbing anyone nearby as partner. Folks will remember her uninhibited vocal renditions of "You Are My Sunshine" (with her own adapted lyrics) accompanied by harmonica.

Elma Haapanen was a cheerful and generous character whose uniqueness contributed greatly to life on Texada.

