



Photos courtesy Bill and Shirlee Matheson

FOLLOWING THE ROAD THAT BECKONS: Bill and Shirlee Matheson don't need much when they travel except for their Fun Finder Trailer, their 1956 Mercury M-100 hot rod, their inflatable Zodiac boat and their love for Peace River Country and its residents.

Following their hearts

Bill and Shirlee Matheson are a happily retired couple who have been RVing around B.C. and Alberta for years. With their two dogs—Little Charlie and Lucy—they return to Peace River Country each year to rejuvenate and relax.

by KALI LOVE | Bill and Shirlee Matheson have been heading up north every summer for 28 years. From 1983 to 2007 they travelled in a \$200 camper that they put on the back of their hot rod truck, but in 2008, the couple purchased a Fun Finder Trailer.

One day, the Mathesons read an article in *RVwest* magazine written by columnist Carol Ann Quibell that made them decide to contact *RVwest* and share why they love to RV.

"Carol Ann Quibell provoked me to send (*RVwest*) something because she asked readers, 'What does RVing mean to you?' " said Bill. "That was an easy question to an-

swer, because RVing takes me to the places and people that I love."

Bill and Shirlee met in Lacombe, Alberta, and many years later they got married. However, Bill was a B.C. boy and wanted to show Shirlee the Peace River Country, where he grew up. Once Shirlee saw the land, it didn't take them long to move to

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Hudson's Hope near Fort St. John.

"I fell in love with the country," said Shirlee. "I had never seen anything so beautiful in my life."

Inspiration found

As well as being an avid RVer, Shirlee is an author who has published 16 fiction and non-fiction books. She said she always wanted to be a writer and had experimented with short stories, but nothing had ever come of it until she and Bill were living in Peace River Country. Her first novel was about a priest who worked with the First Nations people of the North; Shirlee had the chance to shadow the priest for one day a week for three years.

Shortly after her first book was completed, Shirlee wrote her second. Entitled *This Was Our Valley* and co-authored by Earl K. Pollon, this book details the economic

► and environmental impacts that the WAC Bennett Dam had on the Peace River region. Interestingly, Shirlee and Bill had both worked on the Bennett Dam as well as on the Peace Canyon Dam. Shirlee's writing won the 1990 Alberta Nonfiction Award and she was also a finalist for the Roderick Haig Brown B.C. Book Prize. She attributes her success to the natural geography and people of Peace River Country.

"The geographic beauty of the region (inspired me)," said Shirlee. "The Peace River is amazing—miles and miles of rolling hills and trees—it is just beautiful. And the people are so alive and are such characters. They welcomed my stories and encouraged me—that is where it really began."

The Mathesons would have been more than happy to spend the rest of their lives living in Peace River Country, but work began to dwindle for them when the National Energy Program was implemented in 1980. They tried to start a western wear and saddle store in an attempt to stay in the area, but decided to move to Calgary, Alberta, in 1983.

Eclectic interests

Currently, the Mathesons are happily retired in Calgary. Shirlee still writes in her spare time, and this year she has published three books.

Bill is a hot rod collector and has a '56 Mercury M-100 and a '40 Ford sedan. They enjoy bluegrass picking, with Bill on guitar and Shirlee on vocals.

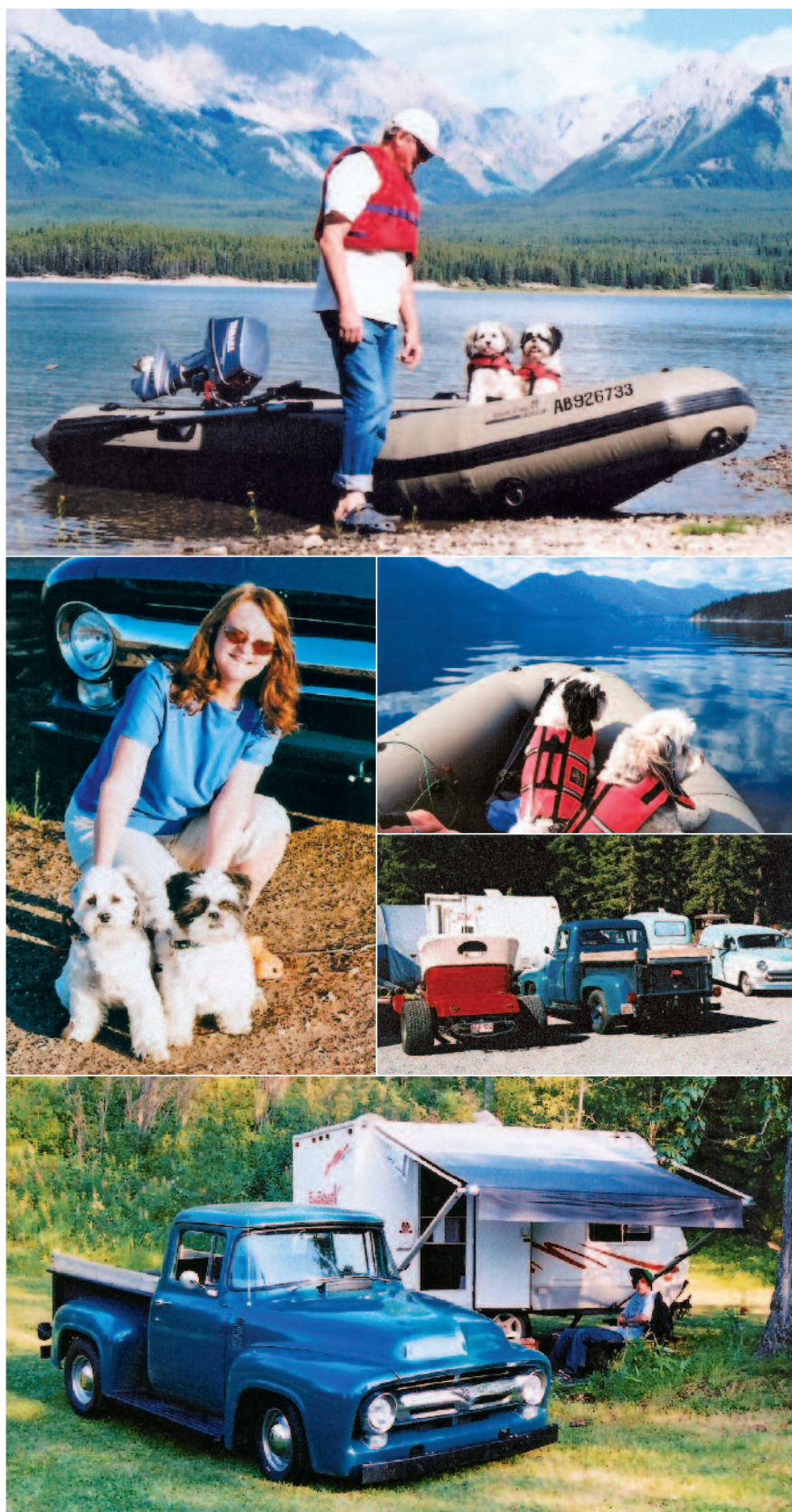
The couple make a trip to Creston, B.C., once a year to visit friends and fool around on their boat on Kootenay Lake. And if they don't feel like driving too far, the Mathesons have found some excellent lakes close to home, including Chain Lakes Provincial Park by Nanton, Alberta, and Sylvan Lake in central Alberta.

Energizing their souls

As happy as the Mathesons are in Calgary, they make a point to return to Peace River Country once a year—and they never go it alone. Their two travelling companions—Little Charlie and Lucy—are always riding in their doggie seats wherever the Mathesons go.

"We have gone up (to Peace River Country) every year since 1983," said Shirlee. "It is our spiritual home. We stay about a week in Hudson's Hope and then we might journey on to Fort Nelson or somewhere else in the region. But who knows where we will end up—wherever the road takes us, I suppose."

RV



ENJOYING THE MOMENT: Now that the Mathesons' children are grown, Lucy and Little Charlie ride shotgun in the Zodiac and accompany the couple when they visit friends in Creston, B.C., attend hot rod conventions and drive north with their RV to Peace River Country.