

The Parkland Review Profile Wednesday December 1, 2010

On my annual jaunt up to my old home town of Carrot River, pop 1200, in northeastern Saskatchewan in October to do some bird hunting...an excuse to visit old friends and haunts...I serendipitously ran into the local reporter who wished do a profile on me. This, and an article I offered them gratis on a fascinating local mystery, just came out. I've had several profiles done over the years but this is the best and certainly the most comprehensive. the only complaint I have is the pictures of some old guy they substituted for me:



**PARKLANDS
REVIEW**
Canada

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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2010

24 HOUR MOVIE HOTLINE - PHONE 873-2141

"Due Date"
From the Director of "THE HANGOVER"
Comes This Comedy
Starring: Robert Downey Jr. & Zach Galifianakis - Rated PG

Nov.	Sun.	Mon.	Dec.
Fri. 26	Sat. 27	Sun. 28	Fri. 3
SORRY CLOSED THIS SUNDAY FOR GREY CUP			Sat. 4
SHOWING 8:00 PM			

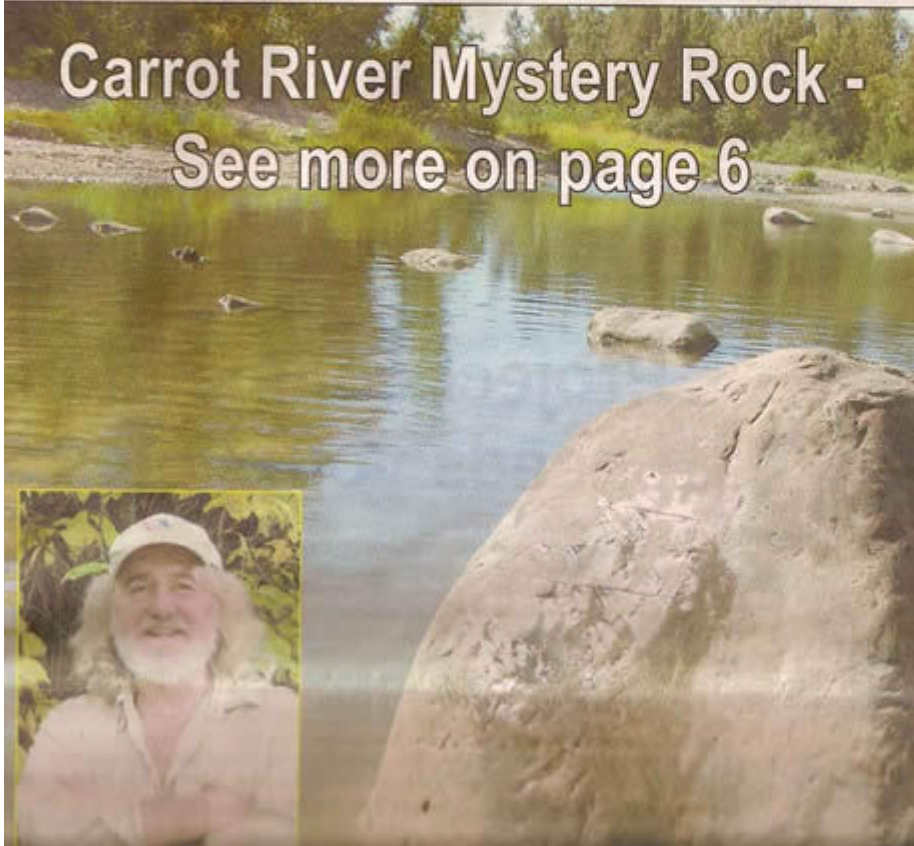
"Harry Potter & The Deathly Hallows 1"

Fri. 3	Sat. 4	Sun. 5	Mon. 6
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Free Christmas Matinees "Shrek: The Final Chapter"

Sat. Dec. 4 at 10:00 + 2:00 Sun. Dec. 5 at 2:00

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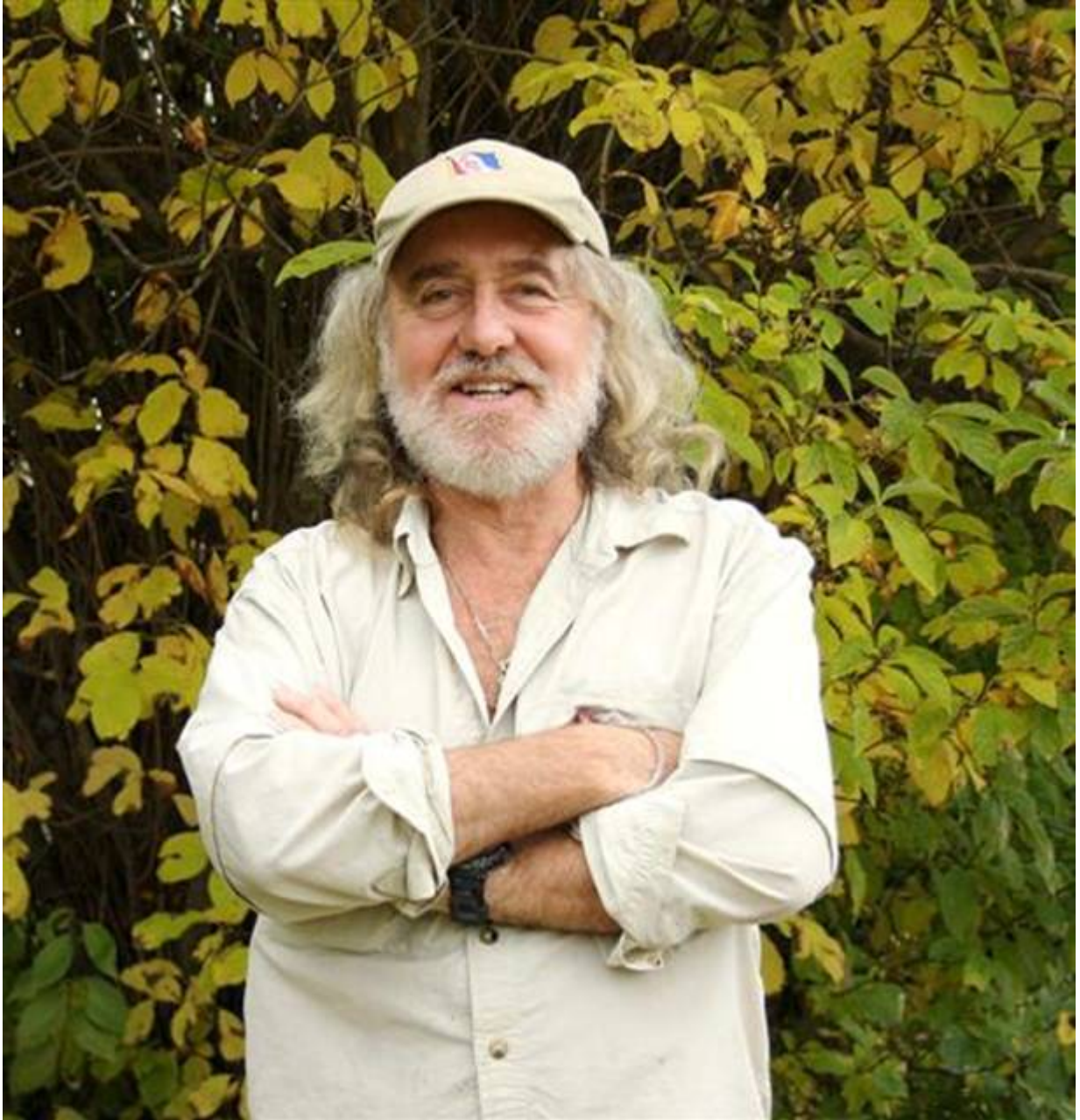
AGENCIES

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Carrot River adventurer lives life to the fullest

By Denise Bokinac



Although people often grow up dreaming of a life filled with adventure, one of travelling the globe to learn about different cultures and people while exploring untamed lands and discovering new and exciting worlds, the sad fact is that few ever actually succeed in living such a lifestyle, instead growing up to become mainstream adults who go off to work their mundane jobs each day in order to support their families.

Jason Schoonover, a self described adventurer, writer, ethnologist and real estate investor with Carrot River roots, is anything but normal. He is one of the few who managed to make his dream a reality, travelling around the world to explore exotic countries, surviving more than a few close calls, meeting and becoming friends with

many of the most well-known adventurers of our time such as Buzz Aldrin and Les Stroud, and being elected as a fellow in the exclusive Explorers Club.

Growing up in Carrot River in the 1950's, Schoonover was a typical boy whose imagination allowed him to become the characters from his favourite movies. In the nearby bush he built huts and snared rabbits while pretending, thanks to his ingenuity and love of National Geographic magazines, that he was in some of the most far-flung, remote places in the world.

Then one day he read an article about the Explorers Club in Reader's Digest that made him realize that he could do more than just dream about seeing these places for himself.

"I remember it was the summer of 1958, when I was 12 years-old, and I can still feel the breeze on my cheek," he described. "I had two epiphanies after I had read that article, which absolutely galvanized me because suddenly I realized that you can live a real life of adventure, it wasn't just something on the screen that was fiction and make believe – you could actually live the adventure."

He made two vows to himself on that warm summer day. First he promised to live the most adventurous life that he could, which has led him on some amazing journeys, and second he vowed that one day he would become a member of the Explorers Club, which only has about 3,000 members worldwide.

In 1986 Schoonover was elected as fellow in the prestigious club. "All of the explorers and adventurers of the last century are members of this exclusive club - that is why it is so important to me."

His goals, and eventual achievements, didn't stop there. Although he hated school with a passion, Schoonover realized when he was 12 that he loved writing and decided that one day he would become a novelist. He credits his Grade 7 teacher for discovering and encouraging the talent that allowed him to put his imagination to use and eventually led him to study English Literature and History at Simon Fraser University outside Vancouver.

"These are the roots, the education I got at the public high school was first rate," he noted. "This town taught me a lot, especially the outdoors. Living two blocks away from the bush, I spent my whole youth outdoors."

After university Schoonover took a job in radio, starting in 1970 as a disc jockey at CKOM in Saskatoon. Two years later he moved to CFQC where, as music director, he worked on the Sunday morning show 'Best by Request' with Wal and Den (famous morning show co-hosts Wally Stambuck and Denny Carr) until he left radio in 1977. The show was huge hit and soon became the biggest radio show in Saskatchewan, commanding 82 per cent of the available listening audience.

"It was the best job I ever had," he remembers. "It was my university of the media, once I came out of there I had my PHD."

Those were busy years for Schoonover. Along with the radio job he freelanced for newspapers, magazines, TV and other radio stations, honing his skills in all areas of journalism. He also produced a number of beauty pageants, something he was surprised to find he enjoyed.

In 1975, he was given the amazing opportunity to write, produce and direct John Diefenbaker's 80th birthday party gala at the Centennial Auditorium in Saskatoon, an extravaganza that involved over 300 performers and personnel.

Throughout this period Schoonover was always looking ahead towards his ultimate goal of travelling the world in search of adventures. He scrimped and saved every penny, investing his earnings into Saskatoon real estate with the idea of eventually being free of the conventional working world to live out his dream.

In November of 1977 the dream became a reality when he quit his job to become what he describes as “gainfully unemployed ever since.”

During his first solo trek around the world in 1978, Schoonover discovered that he could easily pay his way by sending travel articles to major newspapers in both Canada and the United States.

“I was continually gaining my experience as a writer, continually expanding my bounds and skills and developing what gifts I have,” he explained.

In 1982, Schoonover moved to Thailand where he fulfilled his dream of writing a book, an adventure thriller called the *Bangkok Collection* which was released in hardbound under that name in Canada, then internationally as *Thai Gold*, and finally out of India and Nepal as *Nepal Gold*.

“That book now has had three different titles,” he noted with a chuckle.

Since then, he has written two other adventure thrillers and two non-fiction books including the inspirational *Adventurous Dreams*, *Adventurous Lives*, in which 120 living explorers, such as Buzz Aldrin, Les Stroud and Don Walsh recall the ‘aha’ turning point that led to their exciting lives.

Schoonover fell in love with Thailand and continues to reside there during the winter months, explaining that he hates the cold Saskatchewan winters with a passion.

“I’ve lived in Thailand for 30 years. I love that country; it is so exotic you can do anything you want as long as you don’t hurt anybody else. People are smiling and the food is fantastic,”

Summer is a different story. That is when he and his partner, Su Hattori, come home to Saskatoon, where he continues the adventures on a more local front by leading two to three canoe brigades in Northern Saskatchewan each year.

“We’ve got the best canoeing on the planet, 100,000 lakes and rivers up there. It’s pristine, you can drink right out of most of the rivers and the fishing is fantastic,” he remarked.

It was during his first trip around the world that Schoonover discovered and became fascinated with the Devil Dancers of Sri Lanka. After being allowed to observe one of the all-night ceremonies, Schoonover realized that museums would love to have an exhibit about such things. He put together a 97-piece ethnological collection complete with documentation and sound recordings and quickly sold it to the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology.

That was the start of yet another career and in the years since, using Bangkok as a home base, he has spent his winters travelling throughout south east Asia collecting anthropological objects of different culture groups and selling them to museums all over the world including the Smithsonian Institution, the Sankokan in Tenri Nara Japan, Canada’s Museum of Civilization and of course, the UBC’s Museum of Anthropology.

Last January, after telling Survivor’s Les Stroud about the Devil Dancers, he agreed to assist him in filming a production about the cult for his new show *Les Stroud Beyond Survival*.

“My job was to fix the whole shoot” he describes. “I organized everything – the Devil Dancer’s, the helicopters, the hotels, the transportation, the visas, I set up the whole shoot. Another word for it is field producer.”

He and Hattori, who worked on the segment as the production assistant, flew in about a week before the rest of the eight-man crew to ensure everything was set up. They spent two and a half weeks of what he describes as “very intense shooting” that turned out to be full of last minute changes as various problems arose.

“There’s things always going wrong and you have to solve the problems, you just can’t try to solve the problems, you have to solve them,” he remembers.

The most serious problem they had was losing the use of the house he had arranged to have the ceremony at just a few hours before the shoot when the owner’s grandmother died. But, after a few reassurances from Stroud and a bit of searching they found an even better place.

The segment, entitled *The Devil Dancers of Sri Lanka*, was chosen as the first episode in the new series and aired this past September 5 on Outdoor Life Network. It can also be seen online at www.lesstroud.ca/beyondsurvival.

“It covered all the bases, it had all the elements in it in spades and I knew that,” said Schoonover with a note of excitement in his voice.

The beauty he has discovered during his various treks through over 60 countries will remain in Schoonover’s mind forever. Places such as Sri Lanka, Turkey, Afghanistan and Nepal, where he has made the hike to the Mount Everest base camp twice.

“It’s just a mind-blowing country,” he said, describing Nepal. “You’re trekking in the biggest landscape on the planet; it’s just awesome, gorgeous, overwhelming in its magnitude. And the people, the culture there, the Nepalese/Tibetan culture is just so attractive. They are such an intelligent people, such a good people. Everybody impresses you to an individual, which I wouldn’t say I would find here in my own country.”

Of course his adventures have included more than a few close calls, such as the time he was charged by a bull elephant while on a trek through a national park in Thailand.

Telling the story in a way that makes the listener feel as if they were there, Schoonover explained that he was travelling on a trail surrounded by huge banyan trees, about eight to 12 feet in diameter, and as he came around a curve he could see the top of an elephant washing itself in a stream that was about 15 feet from the trail. At that point the jungle was so thick it would have been difficult to find another route, so Schoonover decided to continue on the trail. As he came closer the elephant - not a small cow as he originally had thought but a huge bull with two large, dangerous tusks - came out of the stream bed towards him.

“Man I turned and was outta there so fast,” he laughed, describing the run through the twisting, turning trail. It didn’t take him long to get away, but the curiosity that feeds his adventurous soul made him decide to go back for another look.

“I snuck back quietly, came to that last big tree, peeked around and he was standing right there about 20 feet away. Right away his truck came up and bam, I was outta there and that was the end of that trek,” he described.

Another experience he remembers was the time when he was scuba diving in the Philippines and his tank regulator gave out when he was about 90 feet underwater. Faced with the choice of going down another eight feet to his buddy, a local Pilipino, or heading

to the surface, he chose the latter, making his way slowly while letting the air out of his lungs so they did not expand and burst.

“That was an interesting experiment,” he chuckles. “I learned a lot about saving yourself diving. That was a close call.”

Schoonover said that another close call made him realize how happy he is with the life he has lived.

He recalled a recent plane trip that was full of turbulence. While everybody on the plane was terrified, thinking that it was going to crash, he realized that he wasn't worried at all.

“I was thinking, ‘well, if this is it I've lived a really good life. I've done everything I wanted to and I'm fine with it. It'll be quick,’” he noted in a quiet voice. “I was at peace with the whole thing because I have lived an interesting life. We all have to go sometime and I don't have any regrets.”

Jason Schoonover has lived a life that most of us can only dream about. The adventurer was raised in Carrot River and still manages to come back for a visit on a regular basis.