

## **A Sentimental Journey - June 23 - July 11, 2013**



In the summer of my 66th year I went on a sentimental journey.



Firing up the new Riceburner, I punched up the sixties on SiriusXM, the pedal to the metal, and drove to Vancouver and the Left, uh, Wet, er, West Coast to see if any of my roots were showing. In search of earlier versions of myself. It was to the Lower Mainland where I initially took a train in 1964 after wrapping up Grade Twelve in June of that year in Carrot River. There's nothing in my life I hated more than school. The subjects - like algebra and chemistry - were totally irrelevant to me and utterly boring. In Grade Eleven, I squeaked through with five or six Ds. In Twelve, on Easter exams I had flunked three of the eight subjects. Changing schools, I had to rewrite the damned things - and I flunked a *different* three! Facing June finals, I knew I couldn't bear another year making up classes, so I hung up my pool cue - I was a high school pool shark when I wasn't roaring around wheat fields in my '48 Chev full of friends drinking beer (Bohemian) - and hunkered down and crammed the entire month of June.



First stop was for coffee with Aeneas and Shanghai Jane just 40 miles out of Toontown. He and I went to Simon Fraser University together and met there when teens, and now we're Old Age Pensioners, geezers. Shanghai Jane's parents were with China's security agency as telegraph operators cum translators and the Ping Pong Diplomacy communications between Mao and Nixon clicked-clacked through them. Her curiosity and intelligence is such that her English is superior to most Canadians - as is her deep understanding of our culture on all levels. She's one of the most extraordinary people I know.





I returned to Vancouver via Edmonton and Jasper, since Calgary was flooded and the Trans Canada Highway cut off. And eschewed the modern Coquihalla short cut in favor of the picturesque Fraser River Canyon Route I used to take in my old '59 VW Krautcan bug. Man, that thing would sputter and fart for up to two minutes after turning the key off the valves were so bad. It was hilarious.





I love it that my old university - Simon Fraser - is named after the fur trade explorer and adventurer who first, as a white guy, traversed this dangerous river to what is now Vancouver. Here is depicted a scene at Hell's Gate from his journals. And I like it that the city is named after a fellow Dutchman (though I'm actually a dog's dinner of eight nationalities).



A week after high school finished, I landed here on Fleet Street in Coquitlam, a Vancouver suburb, then under construction. My job was painting the brand new Engineered Homes on the street for my Uncle Don, a long time contractor for legendary builder Jack Poole, at \$1.10 an hour. Jack, a Saskatchewan lad, later launched the 2010 Winter Olympics.





I was the "fireplace specialist" - standing, in swim trunks, on the top rung of a fully extended aluminum ladder and reaching up as high as I could to paint the tops of the concrete blocks, such as the one I did on the old Roper house here, while having to look down on a juicy Mrs. Roper in her bikini lounging with a drink. It was while painting one day in August that Don hurried up waving a letter from the Saskatchewan Education Board. With enormous trepidation I stared at it, afraid to open it. My future hung in the balance. I shakily tore it open, spread open the letter, and my eyes bugged. I not only had passed them all! But I had marks high enough to get into university!



Don jubilantly called work for us off for the day and we roared down to the Leon pub in Port Moody. It ain't there no more, this likker store is in its place. They'd let me into the old style beer hall, despite being only 17 (and looking like 15), because I was always with older men, a Friday after-work ritual. We celebrated! Don kept the beer flowing the rest of the afternoon!



When we staggered home for dinner I spent an hour propitiating the Great Earth Goddess with liquid offerings. I was still ecstatic! That stifling period in my life was OVER! It was like I was barfing out all those years of school ugliness. To this day I celebrate June 28th as my favorite holiday - the traditional day we were set free for the summer.



While working that summer on Fleet Street, I helped Don and Dot move into their brand new Fleet Street home - which provided a turning point revelation. They had paid \$15,800 for it. Two years later in 1966 when I returned to live with them when I started SFU, the price had doubled to \$34,500!



A lightbulb flashed over my head! I soon learned that more millionaires are made in real estate than anywhere else. Now, only Judy next door remains of the Old Guard from the early '60s - and it was a major party street then, because Don and Dot were such social cheerleaders. Judy says the house is worth over a million bucks today.



But it wasn't until after I'd finished university and was established in radio in Saskatoon with a half decent salary that I launched Schoonover Properties in 1975. To raise the investment loot, I worked and saved like a Scrooge. Besides my Promotion/Producer management job at CFQC Radio 600 in Toontown, I pioneered taped music dances in Saskatoon under Rolling Thunder Sound, wrote a column for *Westworld Magazine* and freelanced for CBC radio (docs and

editorials).

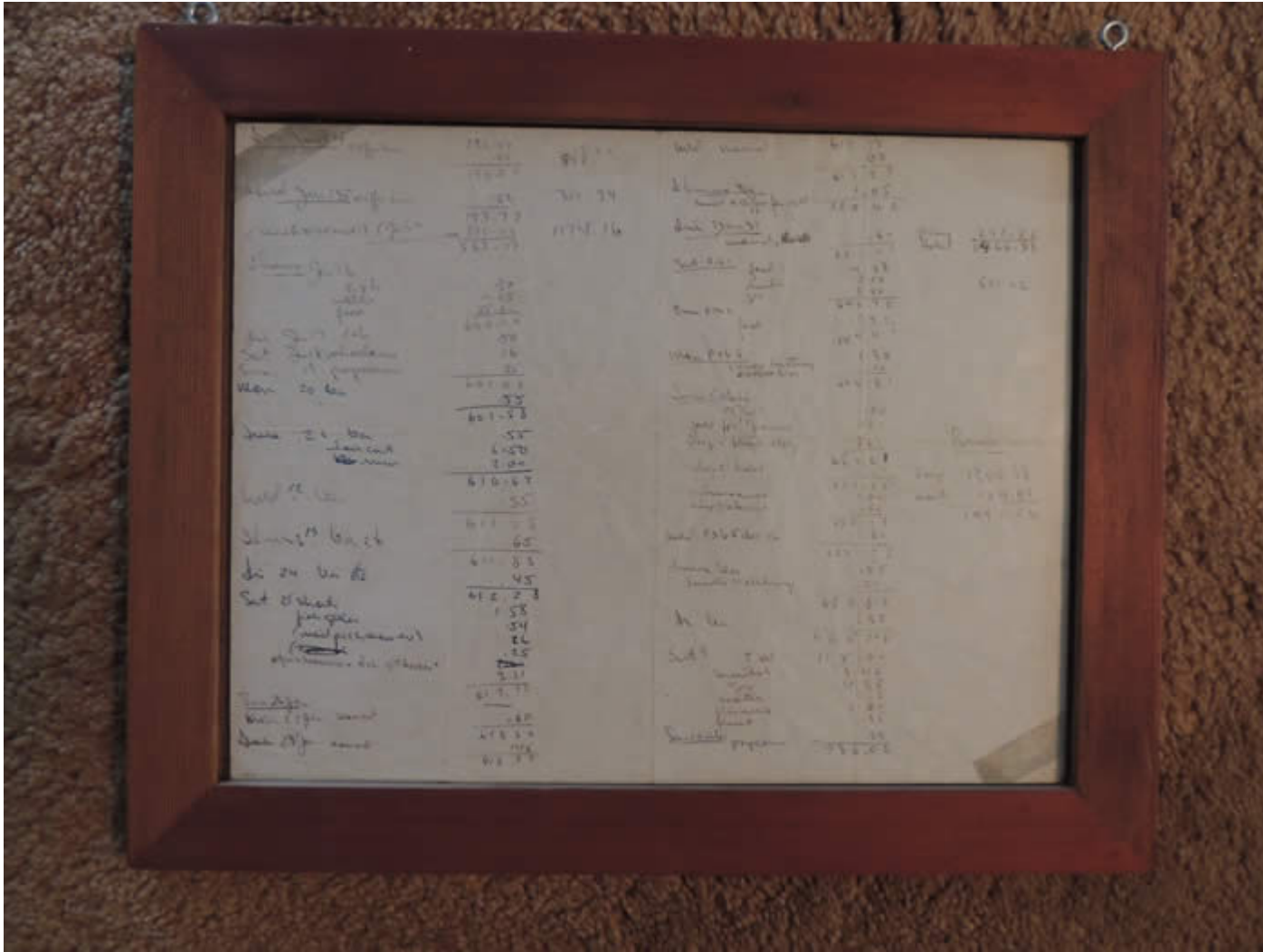


I also freelanced as a stage producer and in '75 wrote, directed and produced ex-Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's 80th birthday party gala.



I got to play with this great toy - Toontown's Centennial Auditorium. The show involved over 300 performers and personnel. It took five months to put together, but gave my investment coffers a healthy boost. To this day, John Diefenbaker had the clearest mind of anyone I've ever met.





I kept a ledger documenting my saving regime that I framed. My old man was a drunken loser at everything and my mother was a Grade Two teacher who didn't finish her own degree (with distinction grades) until she had put her two brats through college. I had no family money. Every single cent I invested I had to earn and save myself. That's fine. There's a special pride that comes from achieving success oneself. I know a lot of self-satisfied "inheritors" - too many of whom claim they did it themselves, which makes me roll my eyes.

(unsubscribed) (7) m	193.77
	<u>570.25</u>
	563.77
Thurs Jan 16	
cyl	.30
utht	.15
feed	.25
	<u>600.12</u>
Fri Jan 17	.50
Sat Jan 18 shoelaces	.16
Sun Jan 19 popcorn	.25
Mon Jan 20 tea	<u>601.03</u>
	.55
	<u>601.58</u>
Tues Jan 21 tea	.55
hair cut	6.50
new	2.00
	<u>610.63</u>
Wed Jan 22	.55
	<u>611.18</u>
Thurs Jan 23	.65

So motivated was I that in one Saturday and Sunday on January 18 and 19, 1975, while everyone else was partying at the lake, I spent only .41 cents, for shoelaces and popcorn - and I got into the movie free because of my radio position. Everything I invested in real estate. Despite how great my radio job and boss and mentor in Dennis Fisher were, after 3 years, 3 months and 3 weeks I couldn't take the 9-5 anymore and yearned to travel and burst out onto the world. By November 1977 I had enough revenue producing properties to cast off and since then I've been gainfully unemployed.



CFQC-radio was my university of the media and I graduated with a PhD thanks to Dennis who gave me the opportunity to stretch in all directions creatively as a multi-media writer/producer. We at CFQC were a remarkably talented team, in one rating commanding 82% of the Available Listening Audience, making us one of the top rated stations in Canada. Hell, anywhere.



But back to Vancouver. Empire Stadium stood here next to the PNE rollercoaster on August 22, 1964 when I saw the Beatles.



Since the \$6.00 ticket gouged most of a day's wages, I opted to, literally, hang outside. There the fence off to the side was about eight feet high and by jumping up and grabbing the lip I could chin myself and peer into the stadium. Being skinny and fit, I could hold on for most of a song. It was a cold, dark evening and the seating was on chairs set up on the ground. These were filled with the mandatory screaming girls. Red Robinson MCed. The Beatles didn't come on until about 9:30pm, played less than a half hour then unexpectedly, right after *Long Tall Sally*, disappeared backstage, with nay a wave nor word. A moment later a line of limos with cop cars fore and aft sped up Capital Hill behind, then disappeared. The Dragon Lady and I are seeing Paul play in Regina in August and the Limey bugger better not do that again. This time I'm paying.... Two years later in '66 with Luney-bin and the Phenix clan I saw the Regina Roughriders trounce the Ottawa Roughies here. Or what was here....



Uncle Don no longer lives on Fleet Street and, very sadly, my aunt and wonderful godmother Dot is gone. Don and new and lovely wife Laurie live in a grand place overlooking the pier (left) at White Rock with this incredible view from their huge deck.

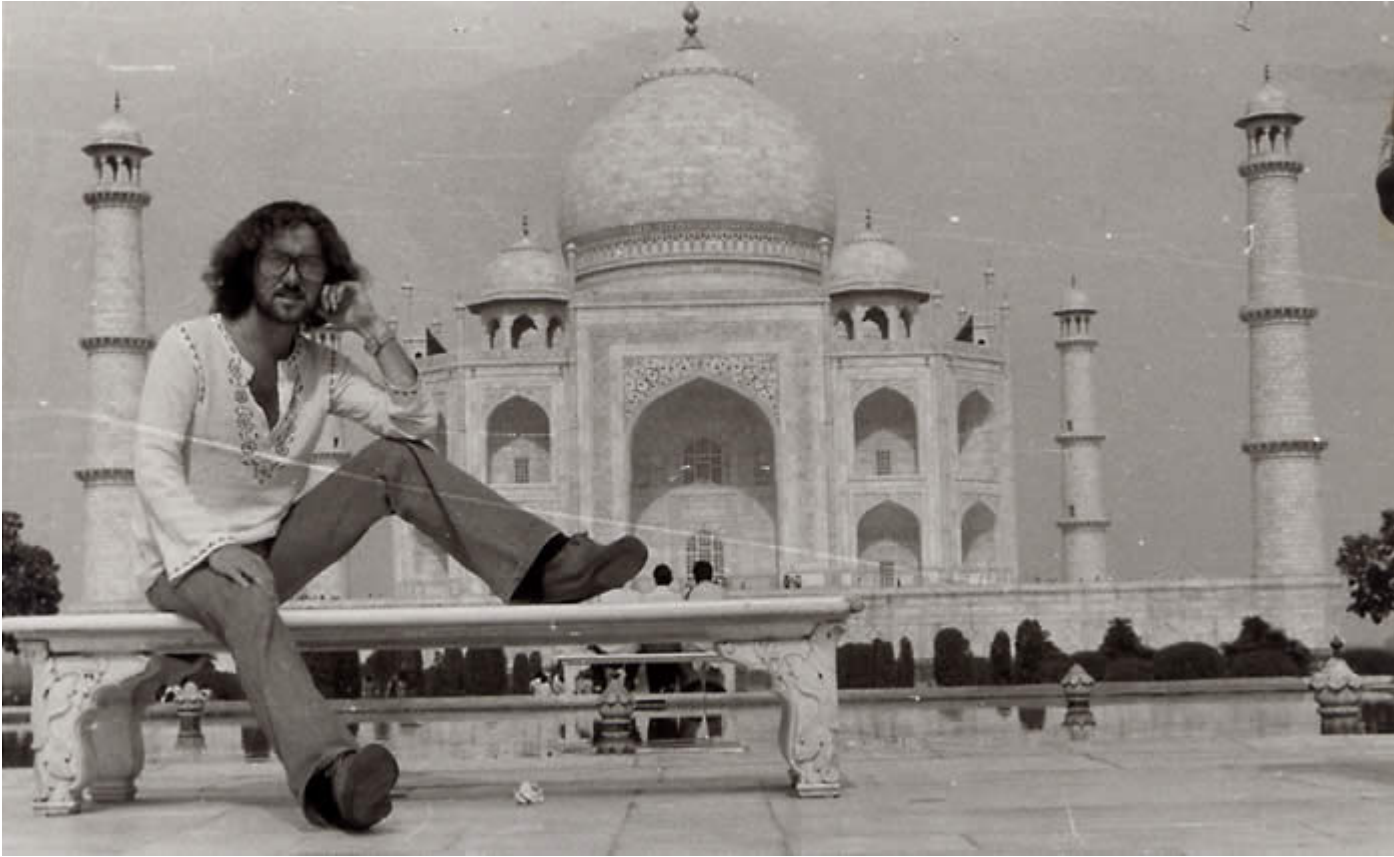


For someone raised hardscrabble in Edmonton with no father, his paternal instincts and related talents are incredible. He and Dot were amongst the first very few adults I knew without their generation's narrow, restrictive outlook and did a lot to set me on the rails. Helped by his incredible sense of humour that often had me in stitches.



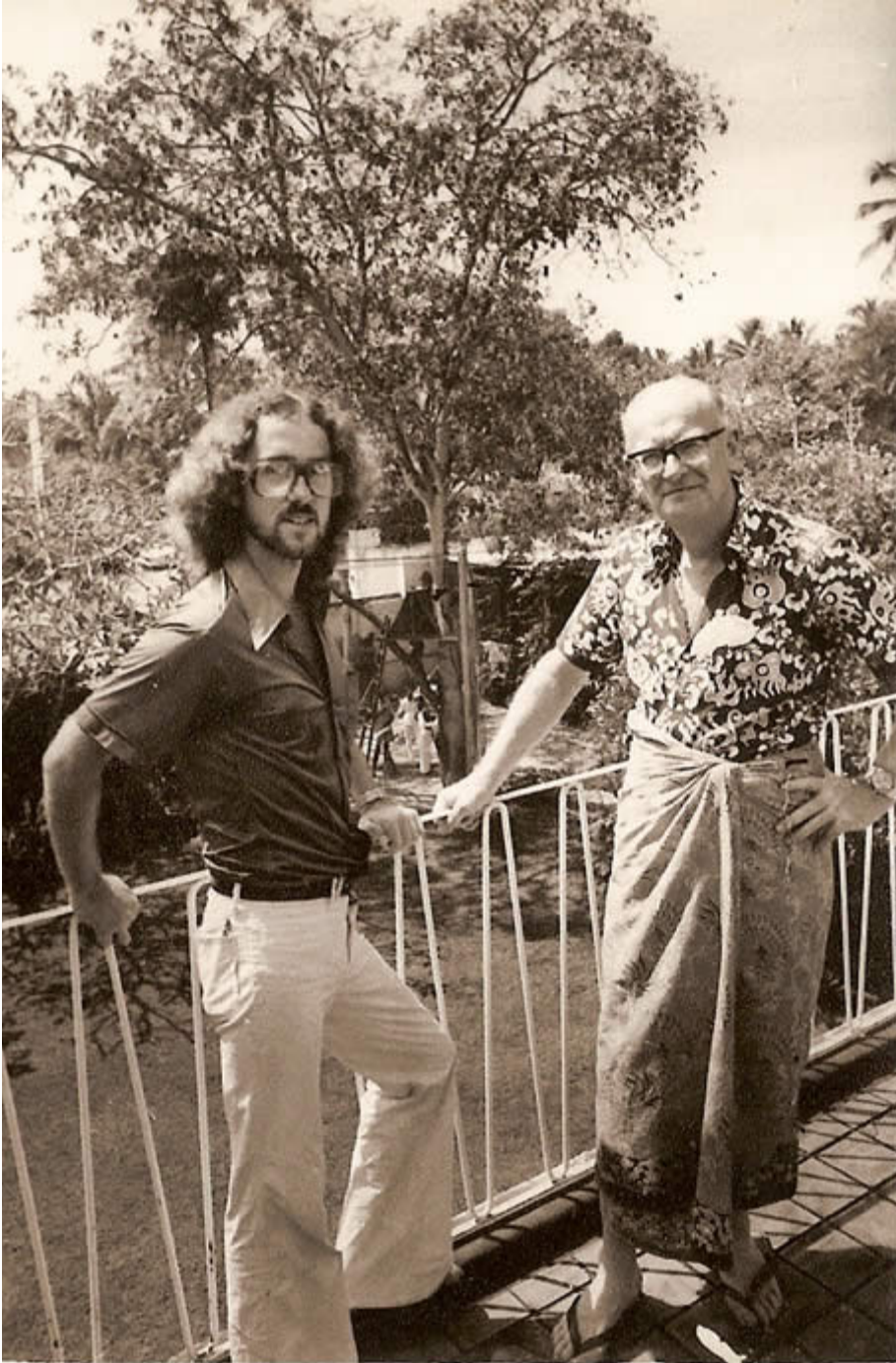
As I often do I also bunked with Scoop in the West End for a couple nights. We took off around the world in '78. She genuinely was too good looking for her own good and I watched with bemusement everyone trying to poach her from Chicago to New York, London to Paris, Rome and Athens where she decided to return to journo school. I continued on to Istanbul and the Asia Overland Trail across Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, threading the Khyber Pass down into the squalor of

India.



A first stop was Sri Lanka.





I actually more than paid for my way around the world by stringing travel articles to most of the Canadian, and a few American, newspapers. Here I interviewed Arthur C. Clarke at his place on Barnes Road in Cinnamon Gardens, Colombo. It started a life long friendship. He was generous to his friends. After the tsunami, it was Arthur who had his people track down a close Sinhalese friend of ours to find out if he survived. (Ari did.)



There in Colombo I shared a room at the ancient, crumbling, atmosphere rich YMCA with Tony Mayo. He had sold an Inuit collection to a museum. Another lightbulb flashed. I had read every *National Geographic* in the school library before I finished school. (Would that they had anthropology, archaeology and geology etc courses in school but no, algebra instead. Christ.) A door was opened....



Days later I stumbled on the Devil Dance cult and the fascination was instant.





That first major, comprehensive collection went to UBC's Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, designed by the brilliant Arthur Erickson who had designed SFU. Two months later the Smithsonian phoned – and I was off!



That led to living in Bangkok, the hub city of Southeast Asia, equa-distant from Kathmandu, Colombo, Manila and Bali. In early interviews I used to tip my hat to Tony for planting the seed in my mind. Here I'm making time with an Akha babe in The Golden Triangle while on assignment in '86 for the Tourism Authority of Thailand and whatever airline had flown me out from Canada.









I placed comprehensive ethnological collections with major museums in Europe and Japan as well as North America.





And I really started to live the adventurous life I sought since I was, at 12-years-old, galvanized by an article about The Explorers Club. I had made two vows at that moment. One was to become a member of that club. The other was to live as adventurously as possible. I don't have a picture of the bull elephant that charged me in a Thai jungle - I was too busy making my escape - but that was damned exciting and fun.



And this all led to writing adventure novels. Here, doing the edits in Bangkok on *The Bangkok Collection* aka *Thai Gold* aka *Nepal Gold* (the book's now had four publishers and three titles) for Jack McClelland who sold it to Bantam who made an international bestseller out of it. Bantam flew me to New York to meet with the president and editor-in-chief. They were grooming me for the big time...but then the vacancy rate went to hell in Saskatoon and, to save my properties, I had to set aside my writing career just at this heady juncture, fire my property manager, and take over the damn things myself. By the time the crisis was over three years later - I couldn't write (at least well) during that time - my \$82,000 in advances and the Bantam president and editor-in-chief were gone and so was my momentum, but it was still the right decision to make and I don't regret it. Real estate is *real* estate. Writing books ain't.



Among the old friends I visited in Vancouver on my sentimental journey were my masks and related collections at the MOA.



Serendipitously (the word incidentally derived from Serendib, an early name for Sri Lanka) I found Tony during the trip on Google – and living in Abbotsford! We had lost touch after he visited me in '79 in Toontown and I hadn't been able to track him down until now, when he put up a website. We spent a great evening together, half a lifetime later, and vowed not to make it another half a lifetime because we have no halves left. He's still an enormous, high quality collector, an amazing artist, and we share a mutual friend in Bob Bateman.



Spanish Banks in Vancouver. Luney-bin, Betty, Donna and I used to drive here in early 1967 at night when the tide was way out and walk around on the flats drinking beer (Rainier) and groovin' on the city lights.



English Bay, a stroll from Scoop's. It rains all the time in Raincouver but when the sun comes out, "all is forgiven" and it becomes the most beautiful city in the world. It was that rain I couldn't take so I moved back to the sunny prairies in 1970 determined to get into the media. The Star-Phoenix had an opening in September, but this was April, so I applied as a copy writer at the rock station, CKOM. They didn't have an opening but gave me a voice test, were impressed, then permission to use the control rooms to practice, and then the all night show. After a winter of that I'd had enough. I loved the thrill, relative creativity of the rock format, and challenge of radio but I'm not an all night guy and I couldn't sleep worth a damn in the day. I left, and after a wonderful hiatus landed at the #1 station, CFQC, as a weekend swing announcer, then full time Music Director (with the Saturday night show), the only such position in Saskatchewan at the time.





*Penny Lane* and *Georgie Girl* were boppin' out of the old Krautcan radio when Luneybin, Betty, Donna and I lived here on E. 13th in the early months of that magical Expo

year, 1967.



Life is good when a long legged blonde picks you up in her convertible. Charlotte the Harlot and I hung with the same crowd during our university daze, and she lives near Scoop in the Wet End. (Actually she's one of the classiest broads I know though I'm ashamed to say she is a, a, a lawyer, though with the Law Society setting policy etc, but with a name like Charlotte she has to be Charlotte the Harlot, right?)



In '68 and '69 during SFU, we lived in different suites at this magnificent place with pegged floors and leaded windows near campus. It was in my basement suite in July of '69 that her, Donna and I watched with saucered eyes on our snowy \$25 b/w TV as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon.



If she would have told me then that years later Buzz would contribute a chapter to my *Adventurous Dreams, Adventurous Lives* and write the cover endorsement (*I had no idea when I had my first youthful dream of flight that it would take me all the way to the moon - but that's the power unleashed in following one's dreams. Jason Schoonover's book should be required reading in every school. - Buzz Aldrin*) I would have told you were inhaling that stuff going around way too deeply.



We also browsed our old campus. Wanting to be a writer - the only thing I enjoyed and excelled at in school, writing compositions - I studied literature. SFU was a great educational experience. Being brand new - it opened in '65 and I started in Year Two - it was experimental and attracted top talent in profs. The tri-semester system was wonderful - a class was bite-sized, 3.5 months - and there were actually interesting courses! My marks turned around. I was awarded innumerable bursaries and even a scholarship, which shocked the hell outta me. Erickson designed a gorgeous campus. It was like going to university in a gigantic work of art. The architecture imparted a lightness, a freedom. It still does.



It was in a seminar room here in the Quadrangle that I took a Romantic poetry seminar with Margaret Sinclair/Trudeau that tragic, assassination summer of '68. There were only six of us and I always sat across from her because she was so juicy. We both gave reports on William Blake, she in a tiny, shy, self-conscious whisper. I felt sorry for her during her high profile years. She was in way over her lovely head.



It was also a left-wing pinko radical place then, the late sixties, and SFU was the Canadian Berkeley. I got caught up in all that bullshit, mainly because it provided a packaged, ready-to-wear direction for my healthy distrust and disrespect for authority. After graduation, it took some doing to deprogram, but I was greatly helped along by Saskatchewan's socialist NDP government with their utterly immoral bias against anyone trying to make an independent living. Their Office of the Rentalsman, the part of their Dept. of "Justice" which adjudicates tenant-landlord issues, made no pretense to fair play and cost me tens of thousands. The NDP demonstrated that they are every bit as morally corrupt as the Liberals and Conservatives can be, just more hypocritical and self-righteous about it. Happily, a rare fair minded government is finally in now and fired the lot of those sleazebags. Our old student rallies were held in the mall behind us.



Our old study carrels where we wrote many an essay. One semester during a major student revolt and strike I got behind on five term papers and had five days to meet their deadlines. I knocked off a paper a day and - to my amazement - got 4 Bs and a C! I was pleased to learn that *Adventurous Dreams, Adventurous Lives* is ensconced in the library. That was a rather long essay, he laughs.







I was delighted to discover that a painting on display near the class concourse, by Betty Meyers called *The Shoestring Experience*, is of Saskatoon!



I could even see the area where The Dragon Lady and I live - just above the river and between the bridges! It served to bond me even closer to my old alma mater. Because of all the bursaries I received I'm leaving an endowment for more and a scholarship in anthropology.



Alas, The Cariboo pub - the Boo - where so many of us students poured many a glass of beer back is also gone. Time has been hard on all the old beer parlours. At least another

likker store is in its



place.

This house (lower picture) in upper Burnaby no longer stands either and that's fine. My post-grad year-long hiatus was spent here and I learned what it felt like to be dead broke. No fun. Money is tickets to all the rides in the world and we didn't have none. This is our wildly painted '62 Krautcan van, Donna and Stokely my dog. God, I loved that dog. However, we did do the mandatory Mexican trip in the van - where I became fascinated with Aztec archaeology.



I headed up the Sechelt Peninsula and for once the Sunshine Coast was just that.



Janet Steffenbagel and I kicked around in the early '80s when I researched one of my most widely published articles on the prairies, on Joe Began, *Master Moonshiner Retires*. She just retired herself days before from the Vancouver *Sun*, catching up to Adrian Young who packed in Finance in Ottawa a decade ago, and I'm pleased to see that she's still a good looking broad. They built this fabulous log-and-stone property on several acres at Grantham's Landing.



She popped for lunch at the old *Beachcomber's* place in Gibson's Landing before I headed further up to Halfmoon Bay.





Ling-Ling and I poured back a lotta beer at the old Cariboo pub. He went on to a career as chief negotiator for Indian Affairs in BC and he and Koko, a fashion designer, also built a fabulous property on a large acreage overlooking Georgia Strait. To keep amused in retirement he's morphed into a local marriage commissioner - marrying people.



The view from their deck. Toontown gal Joni Mitchell lives directly below them on the shore. She's one of the most down to earth, candid people I've met, while filtering everything consciously through an artistic prism. She also doesn't photograph well – teeth everywhere. In real life, she's attractive, relaxed, natural and spontaneous, deeply comfortable in her skin. I haven't seen her in years so I didn't go a knockin', and I was on my own journey anyway. Just to the left a bit is the Lululemon guy, choppers flitting around like a herd of dragonflies.



Ling-Ling, Koko and I took in Canada Day in Secht.



Canada is a Disneyesque country where pigs ride horses though these oinkers had to hoof it on their hocks.





You can't say they don't have a sense of humour up here. I laughed about this ad for a local butcher shop for days.



I also visited Barb, with the most beautiful voice straight out of a person's core I've ever heard, in Sechelt, married to an old friend who I went to first year university with in Saskatoon in '64. Blair was a workaholic who worked a full time job besides co-owning Orca Brewery in town, and other interests. It was a helluva good beer. He didn't come home one night and was found croaked at his desk, while still in his 50s. The lesson is obvious.



I caught another ferry up to Powell River, then to Comox on Vancouver Island, and cruised down to Victoria. Here on Superior Street in old James Bay is where Wende and I lived the summer of '74 when I wrote one of my two training bra (unpublished) novels. I had resigned as Music Director to travel in Europe and write for a year and Dennis, my radio boss, signalled me that a position would open on my return. I'm fortunate in that I'm close to many of my old girl friends but Wende isn't amongst them. She's a dog doctor now and probably a good one, despite having trouble getting into Vet College because of low marks, as she was far more sensitive to lower mammals than hominids. Let's just say that it took me years to forgive myself for getting involved with someone like her and leave it at that. A mistake.





A lot of my early '70s musician friends from Toontown landed here, such as Gord Pendleton-Budd, who happily runs Gordie's Music. He's a major content guy drivin' a yellow Boxster, livin' his dream, and lovin' it. I stayed with him and Heather for a couple of days as I cruised old haunts around Victoria. In '74 the town was dead and most everyone living in it was close to being so too, but now it's a happening place with great

vibes.



The Three Amigos. In the middle is ex-Humphrey and the Dumptruck's Graeme Card. He, Gord and Rosie formed The Chattering Class which recently disbanded. Gord and I used to hit the bars together in Toontown in the early '70s, and I wrote the review for his first album. In '72 Wende and I took over Graeme's great place on Broadway in Toontown when he moved to Toronto. When Gord was still in real estate in Toontown in the '70s, he sold me a house on Broadway he owned that Scoop rented from me.



In school my nickname was Skin, short for Skinny. Now, as I geezinate, I augmented it to Wrinkled Skin – and please meet Old Fat Mike, as he calls himself. We were in the same grade from 6 to 12 and the UofS and in everything together from Scouts to Drama to Cadets. When we had IQ tests done in Grade Eight Old Fat Mike had the highest score in the whole school my mother told me when I asked. He didn't know that until this trip. We sat up way too late drinking Laphroaig and remembering things we'd forgotten. When you've known someone that long - he was also glued to a transistor radio when Mickey Mantle saved Don Larsen's perfect game back in that incredible '56 World Series by making that impossible running back, backhand catch - they're no longer just friends, but rather are brothers. And that's Old Fat Mike. He's CEO of an internet provider, & once negotiated land claims. When I asked if he knew Ling-Ling, who had done the same thing, the answer was yes! Actually, Charlotte the Harlot was acquainted with Ling-Ling too. Small world.



I've been around the world three times (and I'll be doing it for a fourth this winter incidentally) and the most beautiful 250 mile drive in the world hands down is through the Rockies on Canada's #1 between Canmore and Sicamous. And that's the route I took back.



And I got to see parts of it in detail.... A blocked highway lined traffic up for miles and hours not far from Craigellache.



That's where the Last Spike was hammered in 1885. I didn't make it to Calgary that day, but that's fine. I put up in Golden.



Once in Cowgary, uh, Calgary, I drove by the old family home. Mom bought it new in '69 and sold it just a couple of years ago to go live with my kid sister Karen in Regina where she's the curator of the Art Gallery of Regina. It still looks as spic-n-span as when she moved out. Lots of ghosts here....



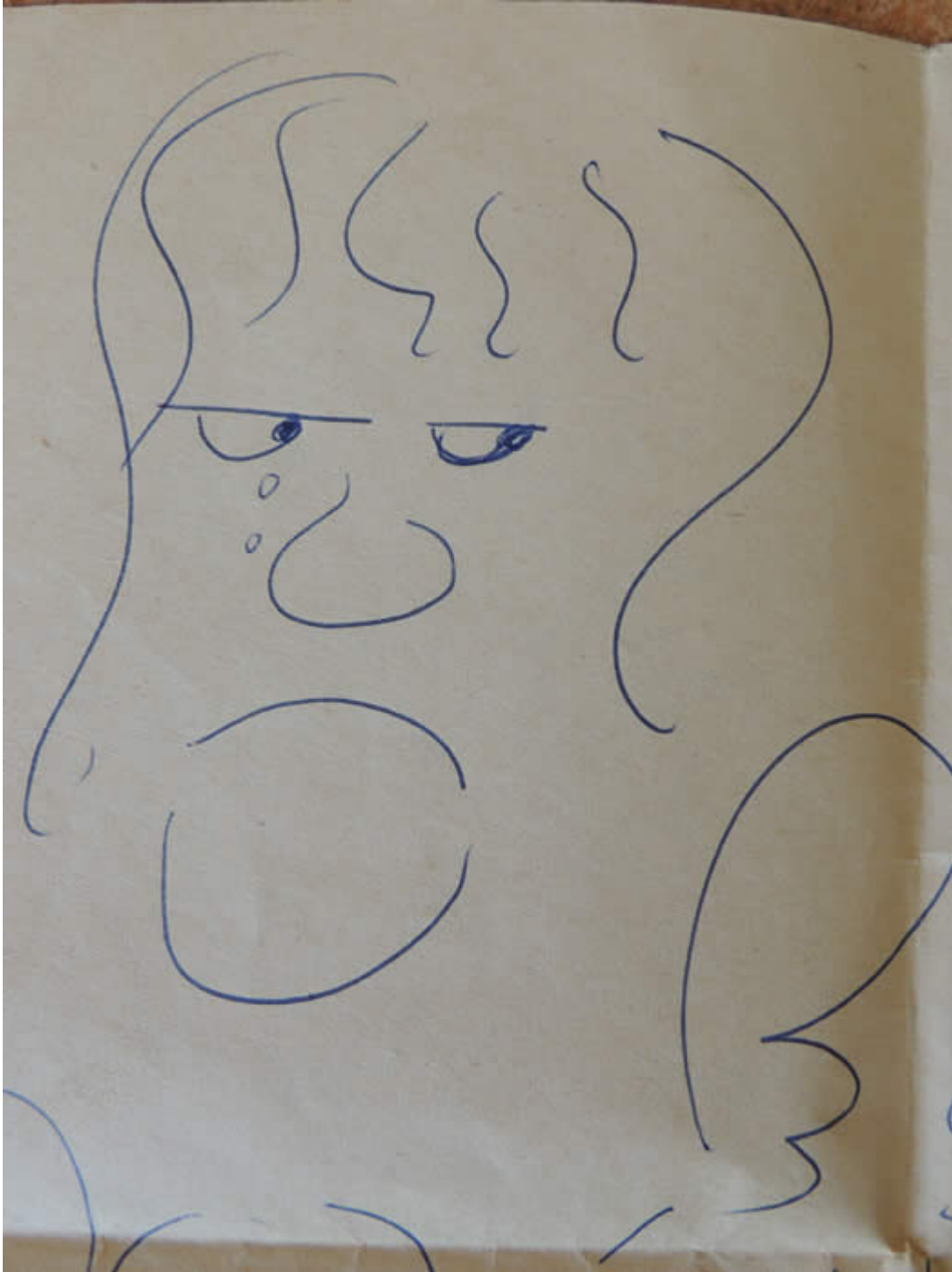
The founder of the Cowgary based Humpty's restaurant chain is Don Koenig. I hadn't seen him since '74 but because of my sentimental journey, I decided to drop by his office unannounced. We were good friends in 1966 & '67 when we were 20 and at SFU. At a student stag off campus that fall the revelries spilled out into the street and the oinkers roared up and began shoveling students into the paddy wagons wholesale. They could get away with crap like that then. One of them scooped up was Don. The next morning a bemused judge adjudicated over a huge herd of dishevelled, hungover students who had spent the night piled in a heap in the drunk tank. In typical oinker fashion the arresting pig lied and grunted that Don was in the thick of it. I testified that he had been walking away from the "riot" and was half way across the street when the oinker had trotted up and grabbed him from behind (asshole pig didn't want to be left out arresting someone, anyone) and the judge tossed out his case. Don finally thanked me for saving him from becoming someone's bitch in Oakalla Penitentiary.



Here upon meeting, Don said I was sarcastic and I thought he was increasingly and insufferably Teutonically arrogant and full of himself, a classic case of short man's Napoleonic complex. Gawd, he took the translation of his Kraut name too seriously: King. The last time I visited him in '74 our relationship had sunk to the point where there was no subject we could find to talk about, he was obviously thoroughly bored and felt supremely superior to me (although at that time all he had was a sandwich kiosk). I had decided to play him, knowing there would be one topic that would surely grab his interest: *Him*. So I subtly interviewed him, like I would in radio, focusing attention on him - and he suddenly came alive. He straightened from his slouch and leaned forward, his eyes widened and flashed with life and fascination because here was a subject he could really sink his teeth into! One he just loved talking about! When I left his home that evening I didn't let him see the disgust on my face, and I never called again. But that was years ago, and we were probably both right - I was sarcastic and he was arrogant and boring - and he's now a good model for the dome-topped Humpty Dumpty himself and I'm a smelly, hairy old guy. We talked about old college mates. I told him about the time at SFU in early '67 when I was playing poker with mutual "friend" Bob Bennett, a scion of that wealthy Okanogan political dynasty, and Bob thought he had a hot hand but didn't have the \$50 to hold the pot. I was opposite him with my cards and staked him his 50 -

and as we laid down our cards, he withered when my hand beat his. Bob skipped out on that debt, and Don and I agreed that he was less than honourable (though we used more colourful terms). That \$50 would be worth over \$300 today and was a ton of money to a student, and to me if I would have lost. But, anyway, Don's done well for a college dropout, now up to 47 franchises in his Western Canadian chain. Business bores me, to me it's a means to an end, but to him it's a life. I've got him and his truly much better half Jan, another Toontown gal, thinking of visiting Thailand in the next couple of years as he shifts his life from the office to the pasture, where I look forward to whipping his ass at snooker again (it irked him that he never could beat me, being a highly competitive guy with that disgusting superiority complex) and I'll try to keep him from being chucked into a Thai monkey house. Like the Bangkok Hilton. Maybe.





One old friend I was disappointed I didn't get to see from SFU on my sentimental journey was Babs, who skipped Grade Twelve to fire right into university at age 16. Cute little blonde with a head full of brains. I wanted to return this poignant cartoon and inscription she gave me which I've saved for 46 years but, alas, I couldn't roust her. She and Don were an item for awhile.



While in Cowgary local Explorers Club members gathered at Prairie-NWT Regional Director Lil' Mur Larson's (at right, looking uncannily like a big garden gnome) place and I was greatly honoured by being presented by Murray with The Explorers Club's Stefansson Medal. L-R: Susan Eaton, Andy Hogg, Robyn Usher, Hairy Smelly Old Guy, Gord Currie, Garden Gnome. Lil' Mur's wife Patsy, who cooked a great meal, shot the picture. Gord brought his bottle of Shackleton's whisky and the Gnome even sprang for a jug of Lagavulin-16, knowing it's my favorite Scotch and despite the cost. It was truly a memorable evening. And thank you to you all for it.



"The Stefansson Medal is awarded to Jason B.R.M. Schoonover FE (Fellow Emeritus-Jason) '86 of Saskatchewan 'For outstanding service as Communication Director, literary contributions, leadership of wilderness exploration by canoe and ethnology in Asia.'" John Pollack, our Chapter Chair, added: "As our Communications Director, Jason is the voice of the Chapter. He is a prolific author, ethnologist, and explorer who actively supported TEC and the Canadian Chapter, for more than a decade. Additionally he has led numerous Flag Expeditions in SE Asia."



When I got home after three weeks Madame Su suggested we have a few friends over so I slapped a chunk of dead camel on the barbie. She surprised me when it segued into a larger celebration. Thank you Su. (Photo by the brilliantly talented Natasha "The Beast" Yokoyama-Ramsay, a fresh graduate of photography school. And many thx to her old man, Chicken Legs, for fixing my website, Blah Blah recently screwed up.)



It was a nostalgic three weeks. Reflections as I drove the last leg back to Toontown via the badlands of Drumheller? I've shed a lot of, uh, Skins along the way but feel eminently comfortable in the one I'm in now. A lot of life is spent becoming and not enough just being.



I feel a deep satisfaction how life turned out. It often felt like pushing a boulder up a steep mountain but somehow I got the sucker up there and now I'm happily sliding down the fun slope on the other side. And actually have been for a lotta years. I feel very lucky. It's amazing how the long arc of life, if visualized and mapped early - and with a bit of luck - can unfold if desire and focus is sufficient. You only get one run at life, so get all you can out of it and do it *now*. That philosophy has stood me well.



Other thoughts? Great friends are the cherries on the sundae of a great life, to use an awkward metaphor, and we're blessed with more than our share (even if some are lawyers....). A few are in this much, much too long Blah Blah.



I've made some bad decisions with wimmen but mostly good. And one very good one was The Dragon Lady (looking bewildered when I surprised her with a forest of roses). In April we celebrated 25 years of being happily unmarried and it just gets better. But, of course, if you want the highest quality vehicle, TV, camera - or woman - you automatically pick up a Japanese model, right?





I'm also damned glad I returned to Saskatchewan in 1970. It's a relief to return to the still and quiet after all the people and pollution. Not just on the coast and Cowgary, but when I return each year from even more crowded Asia and elsewhere.



And particularly running back to Saskatoon. It's one of Canada's most beautiful cities - an oasis surrounded by hundreds of miles of grain fields keeping the crazies at bay. It's very

easy to live here. It's eight minutes from everything. Rush hour is less than that. People are friendly. You can talk to anyone. The air is clean.



It's now 249,000, booming, and it's predicted there'll be a million in just 50 years. I'm damned glad I'll have moved on to the final adventure by then. I don't want to live in a place that big and the rest of the world is way too overpopulated already. But the Left Coast, the Wet West Coast, will always be a warm part of my life and I visit frequently. Toontown is provincial, it ain't culturally plugged into the New York, Paris and Bangkok circuit, and I like that. I get to them frequently anyway. (Oh, and I don't have to spend winters here - and I don't!)



I'm a prairie boy. The one Skin I'm still most connected with is this one, the 10-year-old kid with the slingshot in his back pocket and a bonehandled jackknife in his front. I know it's bonehandled, I still have them both, including the ball glove, I was a snappy Little League shortstop. And I still have the same boundless curiosity for the natural world. Those and his bike are all he needed to be happy as he burst out the screen door (letting it slam and a mother who didn't mind) seeking adventure and exploration. I'm still doing that and it feels exactly the same. I just had to go through several intermediate reincarnations to get set up before I could return to my childhood roots.



And the best is yet to come....