



The author sporting historic *AV Kills* T-shirt, a gift of collaborator John Grinde.

The King Is Dead, Long Live the King

Life in A World Without Slides

Surviving (the) Depression

Sequel to

An Incredible Epic

Memoir of A Multi-Image Maestro

A Confabulation Based on The Author's Autobiography

For Audiovisual Aficionados

By Douglas Mesney — As Told to Himself

File Under: Geriatric Narcissism

Continued from

An Incredible Epic

Volume Six



The King Is Dead, Long Live the King

Sequel to
An Incredible Epic
Memoir of A Multi-Image Maestro

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The author has researched the information contained in this book to check accuracy. The opinions expressed in this book are solely based upon the author's own experience. The author assumes no responsibility for errors and inaccuracies. Resemblances to persons living or dead may be coincidental. Some names may not be real.

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¹ In *The Trip to Echo Spring* by Olivia Laing, confabulation is described as "so-called 'honest lying' or false memories." I would add that, we remember (and edit) selectively what we like and repress what we don't. Wikipedia defines the term as: "... a memory error defined as the production of fabricated, distorted, or misinterpreted memories about oneself or the world, without the conscious intention to deceive."

Notes to Reader

- *An Incredible Epic* is a work in progress; being expanded and upgraded as new articles and pictures become available. New versions are periodically published. You can see your Edition Number on the title page (iii).
- Volumes Nine and is filled with pictures that relate to the first six volumes. Volume Eleven has even more, woven into a 1982 treatise; a precursor to *An Incredible Epic* about how to produce multi-image shows, called "Confessions of a Multi-Image Maniac."
- As the Epic has evolved materially, so too has the refinement of its style(s). Please excuse the small inconsistencies you will encounter. And please don't fret about any spelling errors; they are elusive little buggers; let me know about them, please.
- The Epic was split into seven parts when the size of the single-volume files overwhelmed Microsoft Word (I should have used Adobe InDesign). The index (Volume Eight) could not be split and ceased being updated. Thus, it is of limited usefulness, covering only the content in the original manuscript – about 80% of Volumes One through Seven.
- Although unable to contact every person or publisher about the reproduction of their likeness or work, this book is a non-profit treatise written for historical and educational purposes. I hope nobody is unduly offended for their contribution(s) to this confabulation.¹ Please notify me of discrepancies, inaccuracies, omissions.

¹ Confabulation has been variously described as so-called 'honest lying' or false memories fabricated, distorted, or misinterpreted about oneself or the world, without the conscious intention to deceive. I would add that, we remember (and edit) selectively what we like and repress what we don't.



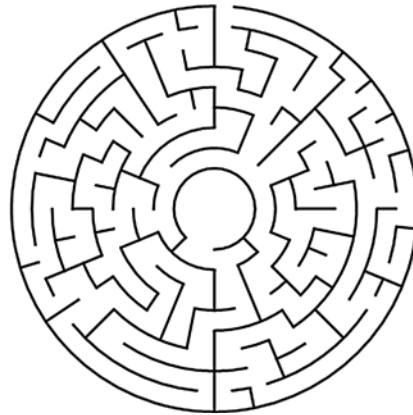
In memory of these mentors, colleagues, and friends, who departed during the production of *An Incredible Epic*:

Phillip Augustin	Thomas Leong
Carl Beckman	Tom Lorentzen
Kirk Beeler	Jimmy McCann
Max Bjurhem	Chris McDevitt
Gene Butera	Art Milanese
John Connolly	Don O'Neill
Wiley "Crash" Crockett	Geoff Nightingale
Jane Dauber	David Nolte
John Guild	Bob Peterson
Peter Grunert	Lindsay Rodda
Nils Gunnebro	John Sacrenty
Lars "Tummen" Haldenberg	Jim Sant'Andrea
Kurt Hjelte	Rick Sorgel
Burt Holmes	Larry Spasic
Brad Hood	Charlie Spataro
Doreen Jacklin	John Stapsy
Ed Just	Christine Ströman
Chuck Kappenman	Donald Sutherland
Bryan King	Randolf Taylor
Tony Korody	Glen Tracy
Alan Kozlowski	Duffie White
Stas Kudla	Randy Will
Craig "Buddha" Law	Constantine Zacharious

With appreciation for their contributions to my life and well-being.



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"You have to go where the story leads you."

Stephen King (PBS interview)

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Introduction

Psychologists say that we are products of heredity and environment. Philosophers praise those who stand-up after falling and try again. Women say, it's not what he's got, it's what he does with it.

From the genetic side, I was amply endowed, mentally and physically, and amply fed the right foods, the building blocks of our bodies; so, I was well equipped to sail across the sea of Being and deal with the voyage's vagaries—and there's been no shortage of those; life has been an endless opportunity for adaptation to an ever-changing environment. What do they say, "Adapt or die?"

As much as my life has been a quest for fame and fortune, living it has mostly been about survival. When I see a beggar in the street, I keep in mind that it could be me. I'm a survivalist who follows the Boy Scout creed, to "Be Prepared."

Thus far in my story, I have ridden out the storms. The most ferocious ones were the turns in the tides of the Economy; those were the longest waves with the highest peaks and lowest troughs. I became an expert at going broke. I learned to look ahead; to scan the horizons for approaching turbulence and volatility. But some storms were so huge, and I was so unprepared, that I was overwhelmed. Including the "hiccups", my overall trend followed the Economy, up and down. The economy was in a growth trend, almost continuously, providing ample opportunities to make a living.

My friend Kurt Boehnstedt used to say, "We get too soon old and too late smart." Retrospectively, writing *An Incredible Epic* gave me the chance to reconsider every chapter of my life and make judgements. There's not much I would have done differently, given the circumstances.

Near the end of *An Incredible Epic*, my business was evaporating as the economy went through pre-Crash contractions. I was caught in a "Technology Trap;" that is, I couldn't earn enough to keep current and fell behind, technologically. Simultaneously, I was going through some deep philosophical changes about my direction in life. Audiovisual production produced wealth but not happiness; I was chasing illusions. What do they say, "Money can't buy you love?" At the end of the story, my life has split, building a new career as a fine-art illustrator and producing AV shows to pay the bills. There wasn't enough income to support both enterprises and I faced an existential choice: To be, or not to be, an AV producer. As with most of the other major quakes in my life, my career as "Mister Incredible," AKA "The King of Slides" ended suddenly and with it the story of *An Incredible Epic*. What happened after that is what this sequel is all about. It's the sad part of my story, of my struggle to adapt to a global economy that is trending downward for the middle class, with technological changes of magnitude. It's an ongoing story of survival, fighting two dragons, depression and inflation, during the autumn of my life.

When I committed AV suicide, in 2007, little did I know that the global economy would have a near-death experience less than a year later. Although trillions of new dollars have been pumped into the economy to keep it afloat, recessionary conditions persist while machines—and now AI [Artificial Intelligence]—displace more and more jobs.

To digress for a moment, about what is happening and why: The world fundamentally changed between 2007 and 2009, when the fiat³ Ponzi scheme began to unravel in a cascade of bankruptcies “requiring” the US Federal Reserve to inject trillions of dollars (created out of thin air) to save central banks [CBs] and the Market. In my opinion, that event can be likened to a financial 911; a crisis was created to *change the rules*, further enriching TBTF [Too Big to Fail] banks, Wall Street and corporate elites. As for workers, I don’t know anyone whose lifestyle improved after the financial crisis of 2008-2009..

The prolonged recession, going on twelve years now [2019], has resulted in a *stagflationary* cycle that is morphing into deflation; that could spell disaster for the Fed and the dollar as the world’s reserve currency. The end of the dollar’s hegemony is happening in slow motion; death by a thousand cuts. All of us are feeling the pinch of stagflation; prices continue to rise, it’s hard to earn enough to keep up and the credit of most people, companies and countries is max’d out. Back when the Crash was playing out, we were told that it was a temporary condition. Yeah? On whose time frame? At my age, it looks permanent; because without radical change, we’ll all become serfs of the State.

Some say change is coming, that the Ponzi system is about to die and be replaced by a new world currency; some predict this could happen in conjunction with efforts by the elites to eliminate their arch enemy, Donald Trump, by crashing the economy to deprive him of a second term. We’ll see. With or without devious motives, the system will eventually go down of its own weight (of debt); it’s a mathematical certainty; it’s how the system was built, back in 1913, at Jekyll Island,⁴ by the (then) world’s biggest banks, based on interest-bearing debt instruments.⁵ There aren’t enough dollars in the world to pay off accumulated debt in the trillions; adding more dollars to repay debt simply creates more debt. It’s the equivalent of you or I borrowing money to pay our credit card charges. Continuous injections of “QE” by the Fed have been feeding inflation and destroying the purchasing power of our currencies. What was touted as a temporary remedy to the Crash has become a permanent necessity.

The good news is that all Ponzi schemes eventually collapse. The bad news is, you and I don’t know when. Until there is an alternative and ~~people~~ bankers choose it, we are stuck with a debt-based fiat money system which, mathematically, is destined to eventually fail.

³ Fiat is a Latin word that translates as, “by decree.” All paper currencies are fiat; they have purchasing power (a form of value) because the powers that be decreed them to be money. Once upon a time, paper dollars were IOUs, you could trade them in for real money—gold and silver. Tying currencies to precious metals insured stable value because mine supply increases the amount of gold money by less than 2% per year. [~180,000 total / ~3,200 annual]. The inherent discipline of gold and silver currencies restricts growth. Governments abandoned the gold standard so they could print as much currency as they wanted. That was OK at the beginning; but as more money is printed the value of each dollar is inflated away; you may end up with more dollars, but they buy less and less.

⁴ Wikipedia: At the end of November 1910, Senator Nelson W. Aldrich and Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Treasury Department A. Piatt Andrew, and five of the country's leading financiers (Frank Vanderlip, Henry P. Davison, Benjamin Strong, and Paul Warburg) arrived at the Jekyll Island Club to conduct a secret meeting to plan the country's monetary policy and banking system, formulating during the meeting the Federal Reserve as America's next central bank. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, the 1910 Jekyll Island meeting resulted in draft legislation for the creation of a U.S. central bank. Parts of this draft (the Aldrich plan) were incorporated into the 1913 Federal Reserve Act.

⁵ The reason it will fail is because dollars come into existence when loans are made, by the Fed to the US Treasury and by banks, to you, me, businesses and other countries. Every dollar comes with interest attached. To pay the interest, more dollars have to be created. It is a simple formula: $P < P + I$. That means the Principal is less than Principal plus Interest. So, the bottom line is: inflate or die.

The downtrend in the economy is structural, the result of debt saturation; and it is late in the cycle. The Ponzi's demise is near... and yet so far; the academics manipulating the economy pull one rabbit after another out of their hats. So, as much as I hate to say it, I don't think things will improve in my lifetime; in fact, I think they will continue to devolve.

Adapting to this new Reality has been my *modus operandi* since the end of my audiovisual career, in 2007, and the beginning of new ones in fine arts, printing and book publishing, which is where this sequel begins.

2021 Update

More than once, I've said: life turns on a dime. Well, a few short weeks after I wrote the Introduction you just read, life turned upside down. A population-control program has been initiated, globally, by a cabal of world leaders organized by the World Economic Forum [WEF] and the United Nations [UN]. Using Covid 19 as a cover, the eugenicists are inoculating the world population with poisons that will sterilize the young and weaken peoples' natural immunity to diseases and chronic illnesses (think, cancer) and thus encourage death before one's time.

The cabal also seeks a one-world government. To accomplish their agenda, the United States (and Canada) is being remade by a Marxist regime that is gaslighting the population, rewriting history, dividing the society, turning traditional values—even science—upside down, and wiping out anything entrepreneurial in favor of the mega-corporations. The rule of law is disintegrating; the Constitution and Bill of Rights are blatantly disregarded. Fascism is veering right, into a kind of Communism with American/Canadian characteristics.

Thus far (November 2021) Pam and I have been able to avoid the poison "vaccines" that have been mandated by virtually every government around the world. Being unvaccinated, we are segregated, discriminated against and generally hated by the vaccinated majority. We are the new lepers of society, the new *Jews*. Detention camps are being built, with double, razor-wire fences, guard towers, morgues and crematoriums.

For those reasons and because I am supposed to begin chemo therapy for my marginal splenic-cell leukemia, in the Spring, I can't say for sure that I will be alive a year from now. Of course, none of us can know that, really; the world could blow-up tomorrow. However, I know that my fuse is quite short now.

If we survive, I will continue to update *An Incredible Epic*; I have already begun work on Volume Nine, which will carry the story forward and be filled with many pictures that there was no room for in the original volumes. But now, my goal is to get the Third Edition printed and online as soon as possible, before my time runs out.

Backstory

I wasn't born the King of Slides; I was given that moniker by Bob Peterson in 1983, when we worked on a Boeing show together. The five previous volumes of *An Incredible Epic* traced my life up to 2007, the fateful year I committed AV suicide after working for 198 blue-chip clients in 68 countries.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, on January 28, 1945, I'm an Aquarian with Scorpio rising, Moon in Leo and Venus in Pisces. That should tell you all you need to know. But there is more....

Dorothy Mesney, my mom, was the daughter of a prominent New York judge, Franklin Taylor and Kathrine Munro, a socialite from Montréal, Canada. My dad, Peter Mesney, was the offspring of Roger James Mesney, the British chief engineer of the Anglo-Dutch Mining Corporation, and London actress Marjorie Unett.

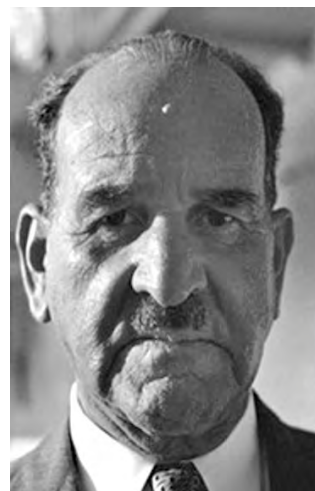
I grew up in the affluent Long Island [New York] neighborhood of Douglaston. Grandpa Taylor died when I was five; he had been supporting the family and after that they struggled. Dad couldn't keep up with mom's spending. From the age of eight, I worked at various jobs to earn my own money, starting with door-to-door selling of pot-holders and jewelry that I made myself, then greeting cards and eventually pictures.



I was brought up by theatrical parents (left). Dad went to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts [London] and Mom was a piano teacher and singer of gospel, spiritual and folk music. I had piano lessons in grade school but switched to a trombone in junior high and as a *Froshman* (cross between Freshman and Sophomore—I was in an accelerated junior high school program and did high school in three years instead of four) I was a member of the band and orchestra at Bayside High School until my trombone got stolen.

Six weeks after that, Grandpa Mesney (right) visited America from England and gave me a professional-grade Minolta SR-2 camera. I got hooked on taking pictures. My science class term project was a series of two dozen slides illustrating the growth of a bean plant from seed to sprout, including shots taken with a microscope adapter.

Then a neighbor, Glen Peterson, gave me a summer job at his photo laboratory in New York (Peterson Color Laboratory, favorite among New York's advertising agencies). I learned about the advertising business by delivering work to Mad Men. I used the money to build my own darkroom in the basement of the family house.

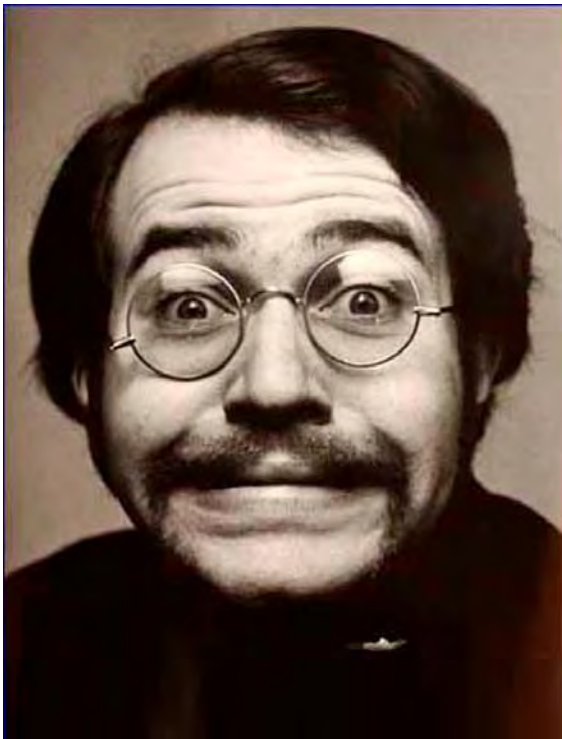


I was mentored by my alternate father, Bob Banning and Life magazine photographer, Ted Russell. In my sophomore year at Bayside High School, I teamed up with David Nolte, a fellow student. Mesney-Nolte Photographers shot portraits, weddings, bar mitzvahs and whatever other jobs we could land.

I spent my first year of college at St. Lawrence University. I had a scholarship but had to borrow most of the money for tuition and room & board (~\$15,000 1962 dollars) because my folks were going broke. I learned all about the ravages of debt watching my parents flounder and quit St. Lawrence in favor of more affordable Queens College [City College of New York (CCNY)]. Tuition was only ~\$2,000 and I could live at home in Douglaston. I attended classes at night and worked days to pay off my student loan.

My first jobs were in the advertising business. I learned the ropes of the PR business from Louise Friscia first, then at J. DeBow and Partners. After that I worked as a “board man” for Seymour Levy at a little ad agency called J. Charles David, Inc. I enjoyed doing layout and paste-up work and Seymour let me take pictures for a few of his ads—a huge motivator. Seymour also loved to take pictures; he understood my passion for pictures.

Next I worked for an industrial advertising agency called Basford, Inc. where I re-learned how to write (think) under the tutelage of Burt Holmes, one of my top three mentors. Holmes also allowed me to photograph my own projects (fact sheets for the American Iron and Steel Institute). Throughout this period, my photo kit and expertise ramped up. I continued to do private assignments outside of the office and began selling pictures to magazines; Car and Driver became a steady customer.



As the Viet Nam War dragged on and the Beatles started dropping acid, so did I. Starting in high school, in 1959, I smoked weed on a regular basis. I led a double life; most people thought I was a drinker (I was that, too). My hair got longer and I grew a Fu Manchu mustache. That irritated Burt Holmes' boss, department head John Paluszek, who subsequently fired my ultra-efficient secretary because he was a black man (in a world where secretaries were normally female and frequently hired for their looks and other benefits). That was cause for my resignation.

By that time (1967), I was ready to move on. Paluszek had been getting on my case ever since Burt allowed me to shoot my own jobs; in his opinion, photography interfered with my work as an assistant account executive and copy writer. Then, stodgy old industrial Basford got bought by a dynamic young consumer agency called Creamer-Colarossi. *Vive la difference.*

Other account execs asked me to shoot for their projects, and that really pissed off Paluszek. But I was sleeping with Don Creamer's secretary (so was Don) and she

arranged for her boss to put Paluszek in his place. I did more and more photography and those assignments, plus time spent with other Basford colleagues in the art department, particularly Kurt Boehnstedt, reinforced my desire to be a photographer.

After Paluszek fired me, the agency's other partner, Ben Colarossi, arranged to get me an office space at small film-production company run by Bob Gurvitz at 346 East 50th Street—a prestigious address. I worked out of there for the first year. My wife, the former Leslie Shirk, supported me. We married in 1966. She had a cushy job as a systems analyst for a burgeoning young enterprise-computer-software company called Management Assistance Incorporated [MAI].

Along the way I met Justine Reynolds in 1969. She was opening a school for aspiring models called Justine Model Consultants. She offered me the opportunity to share a large loft space at 23rd Street and Madison—it was the heart of New York's so-called Photo District at the time, a perfect location and a great opportunity to expand into fashion photography, where there were big bucks to be made (and beautiful girls to be laid).

However, I couldn't do it without Leslie's financial support—and my relationship with her was dicey; she caught me cheating and subsequently ran off with a surfer for half a year. I convinced her to return and try again; she did and helped me build the new studio. On the night we finished, after the champagne toasts, she announced that she was leaving me and moving to Virginia with her boss, who two years earlier bought my 1963 split-window Corvette. (!)

By then I was on my feet, generating enough income to support my newly expanded operation; but I was working my ass off to do it, days at my profession and nights screwing models.

As Volume One ended, I had just thrown a studio-opening party for Mesney's Mad Medicine Show (the name of my company) called the Mad Ball. It was the kind of event you might see in a movie. Justine and I collaborated; the guests included a bevy of her beauties. The darkroom was set-up as a sangria bar; red, white and rosé sangria were mixed in and served from the 3½-gallon [~16-liter] stainless steel film-processing tanks. Slide projections, color lights and a mirror ball illuminated my half of the loft; the shooting stage became a dance floor; Justine's space was the chill zone. Business doubled shortly after the Mad Ball, and that's where the story picked up in Volume Two.



Volume Two covered three transformative years: 1970-1972

The decade began with an influx of new business generated by my promotional efforts; those included the *Exposure* newsletter, Pixies, and most recently the Mad Ball. The work was dominated by automotive assignments. Working with Tom Ridinger (right) and Gene Butera, some of my best pictures were made for *Car and Driver* magazine and *Cycle*.

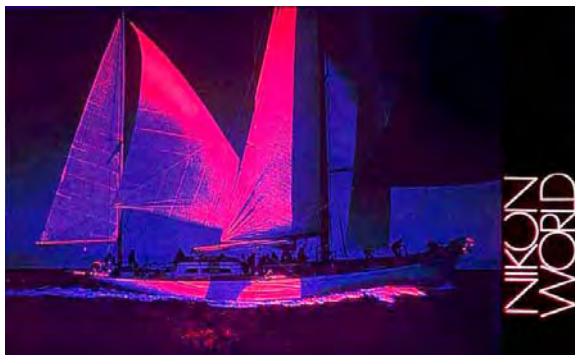


Ridinger and I collaborated with Art Guererro to produce an award-winning ecological ad campaign for the Motorcycle Industries Council.

One of five MIC ads. Model, Richard Faye



As my reputation spread, I got hired by “bigger” magazines like *Penthouse* and *True*. The editorial assignments generated interest from some of the heavyweights. I was hired by Ogilvy & Mather to shoot a Mercedes Benz ad campaign (above, right) and for Burson-Marsteller I photographed a Rolls-Royce Camargue.



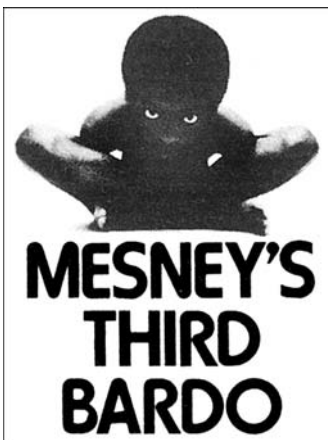
Following the same path, I launched my career into the boating business. When my pictures appeared in *Boating* and *Rudder* magazines, Nikon used my work for a promotional display at the New York International Boat Show and a spread in *Nikon World* magazine (left). That led to my first slide show, for the National Association of Engine and Boat Manufacturers [NAEBM], sponsors of the New York Show.



Burson Marsteller became a new client. Geoff Nightingale hired me to build a model city for Armco Steel's Student Design Program (left). That led to a widening stream of business from Owens-Corning Fiberglas.

Although business was good, it wasn't generating enough income to support both my apartment in Queens and the studio in Manhattan. I rolled the dice, ditched both of those and moved into a smaller space at a much classier address on Embassy Row: 23 East 73rd Street, the former Wanamaker mansion.

John Hanamaker



That was the smartest move I ever made. Business boomed after that.

I took over another floor in the building and convinced Tom Ridinger to leave Car and Driver and work with me.

The business was renamed Mesney's Third Bardo.

By the end of 1972, work from the Burson-Marsteller agency began to dominate our order book.

As Volume Three begins, I am on the cusp of an entirely new career, as a producer of multi-image slide shows and aviation photographer.



Executive Jet Aviation [EJA] ad, 1974.

Rapid growth characterized the rest of the 70s, as detailed in Volume Three.



1973 was our penultimate year of publishing. Ridinger and I produced more than sixty covers for Beeline Books while also packaging the design and production of Show and Gallery magazines and producing record-album covers for Willie Nelson.



'73 was also the year of the Arabian Oil Embargo. The economy went into recession. Starved of advertising revenues, magazines that had been my bread-and-butter client base struggled; their assignments evaporated.

However, audiovisual business filled my purse, made possible by technological advances in slide-show control equipment, particularly by Audio Visual Laboratories, with whom I established a symbiotic liaison that enriched my technological prowess and reputation.



Character actor Jan Leighton in AVL Christmas ad.



Falcon Jet, 1974

Burson-Marsteller acquired new business from an array of aviation companies.

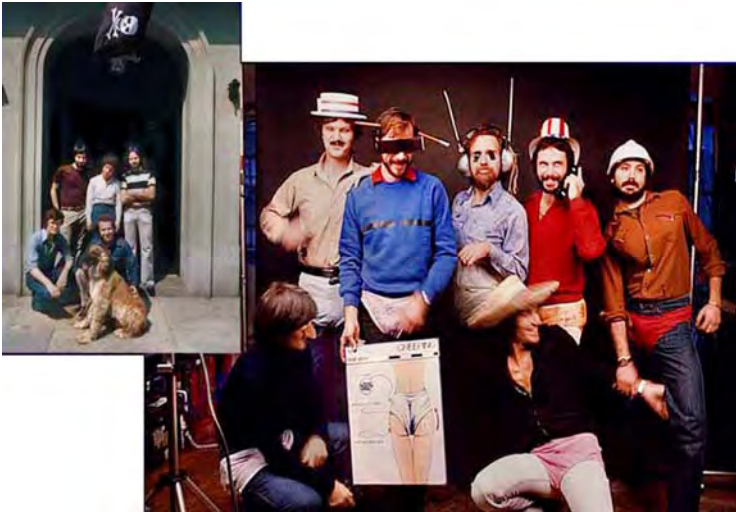
We produced both print work and slide shows for Executive Jet Aviation [now called Net Jets], Piper Aircraft, Falcon Jet, Alia Airlines and Arab Wings.



Yours Truly with Cyclopan camera at Yankee Stadium and Mystic Seaport.

Then came Cyclopan, a 360-degree camera that expanded my photographic capabilities and tied-in with the panoramic format of increasingly large slide shows. It became a unique promotional device, if not a profitable business segment.

Nearing mid-decade, I had so much business that I hired Pat Billings to assist (right).



Within five years the staff grew to include 35 people at various points. The slide shows we made required more and more people as they got increasingly complex.⁶

Big AV projects for Burger King and World Book funded my company's rapid expansion into audiovisual production. I put the profits back into more gear and R&D (research and development). That investment—and my ongoing promotional efforts—paid off in spades. By the end of the 70s, Incredible Slidemakers became one of the top ten multi-image companies in the world.

In the latter half of the decade, the beauty industry became our dominant market segment. What started with a six-projector show for a Long Island salon called Peter's

⁶ Incredible Slidemakers at studio party. Left to right: Michael Chan, John Leicmon, Tim Sali, Yours Truly, Jim Casey (kneeling) Fred Cannizzaro and Rocky Graziano.

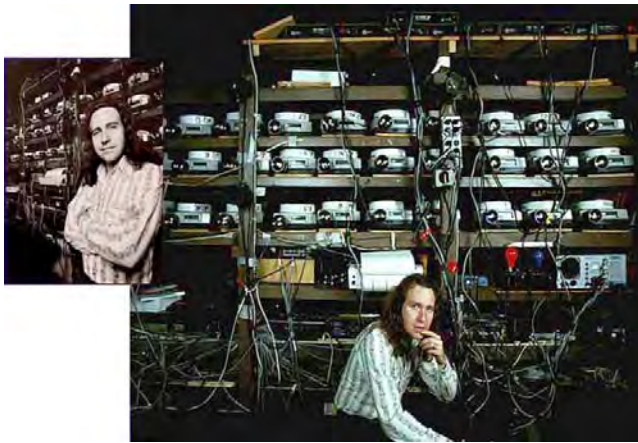
Place led to prestigious shows for Vidal Sassoon, Clairol, Ardell, Zotos and InterCoiffure (an international association of elite hairdressers).



VIDAL SASSOON WIGS



Working for The Village People also did a lot to raise the company's profile; celebrity sells.



Business on the whole was booming; runaway inflation pumped up the bubble economy. When it came to money, it was a case of use it or lose it. Companies spent fortunes on slide shows. By the late 70s, a fifteen-projector show was nothing unusual.

Winning awards at slide-show festivals became my passion; by the end, I earned more than 150 of them. The most prestigious prizes were awarded by the Association for Multi-Image [AMI].



Left, Yours Truly in projection room at 73rd Street studio.
Right, small part of awards display at Brussels studio.

Many of my award-winning shows were made for Audio Visual Laboratories, to demonstrate their cutting-edge gear. Those shows were creative expressions with no holds barred; I could do anything, as long as AVL founder Chuck Kappenman approved. In 1978, Incredible became AVL's defacto ad agency.



Near the end of the 70s, my pet project, Magic Lasers, almost bankrupted the company; I invested too little too late in a technology that was a black hole for investors; but it was fun while it lasted.

Left, ad for Magic Lasers. Right, Incredible Slidemakers stand at National Audio Visual Association [NAVA] trade show in Dallas.

Purchase Point saved the day when I was hired to produce a launch show for Rank Xerox, in London. Getting away from my growing “family” of helpers for that summer-long stint was transformative. I got to compare the workings of my company with those of a bigger and more successful production company. Purchase Point hired “above” themselves, employing people “smarter” than them. I was too insecure to do that, I guess; or too proud (egotistical). Mom said: “You can do anything....” But it dawned on me that my propensity to hire beneath myself might not be a good idea.

At the close of Volume Three, Incredible Slidemakers were producing a show for a prestigious new client, The Washington Post.

By then, the Forox Department, under Fred Cannizzaro, had become a profit center of its own.

Incredible Slidemakers were leading the way when it came to the development of special effects graphics.

[Many Photoshop effects and their ilk derive from the pioneering camera work of The Incredible Slidemakers.]



Volume Four began in 1980, with “A Method In the Madness,” a high-profile conference involving the who’s who in the slide show business, organized by Yours Truly. More than any of my efforts to date, that event propelled me to the front pages of the trade press, and thus, the attention of the AV community.

With the new decade came more peaks and valleys during the international segment of my roller-coaster ride through life.



Incredible Slidemakers ended on the trash heap of history, taken down by Paul Volker's draconian interest rates, which did more to grind the economy into a halt than, possibly, today's zero-rate and negative interest rate policies.

I moved to Hawaii (right and below) and began a new life as a freelance entity. Things didn't go according to plan. There was next to no production work in Hawaii and a local graphic designer tied-up what little there was.



I should have known better; my mistake was equating staging with production. Everyone wants to go to Hawaii. Why would anyone hire a Hawaiian producer and deprive themselves of a trip there? They wouldn't and didn't. But it wasn't a total loss. I met my future wife, Sandra Sande, on an inter-island Aloha Airlines flight.



Together, we started a new business—Hawaiian Panoramas—selling framed Cyclopan pictures. That business broke even, at best. Just as I was going bust, Australian Lindsay Rodda hired me to produce car-launch shows and train his crew in "New-York-style" multi-image production. Sandra and I ended up Down Under for a year.



Our Australian fortune was re-invested back in Hawaii.

Twice unlucky, we found ourselves selling Hawaiian Panoramas on the streets outside of the Honolulu Zoo, where artists and bucksters were permitted.



Our ship was sinking, but Chris Korody threw me a lifeline and we went to work for Image Stream, in Los Angeles. Those were my happiest days in the slide-show business. Image Stream was probably the best multi-image shop in the world, at that time; I did some of my best work there, producing with the support of the “Stream Team” (left).⁷

However, I was seduced away from Image Stream by a Vancouver producer who needed help with an Expo show for Air Canada. We left Image Stream and moved to Vancouver. It was Sandra's home town and I loved Vancouver from the first day I set foot there.

Said producer double crossed me and hired a local to produce the detailed plan that I made on spec (speculation). Silly me; why didn't I know better than to reveal the core creative before getting a signed contract and retainer?

After a dreary winter of incessant rain and no work, pent-up in a North Vancouver apartment, we were at our financial ends again when the phone rang.

Sven Lidbäck was calling, from Sweden, with an invitation to produce a launch show for the Saab 9000 Turbo 16. Within a month we were living in Stockholm and working at Audio Visual Centrum AB (right). AVC gave us a sweet deal. Saab invited me to produce another big show and a two-month gig turned into nearly ten-year-long sojourn in Scandinavia.



During our third year there, AVC went bust owing me beaucoups de bucks. Returning to America or Canada held no prospects; I had no contacts there anymore; that network was gone; and we hadn't the funds to return there, anyway. Instead, I stayed in Sweden and opened my own company—Incredible Imagers AB—across the street from AVC. Saab and a few other AVC clients moved their business to my company; but Sandra moved out—after catching me in an affair with AVC's foxiest secretary.

Then came news that Image Stream went under; Korody succumbed to the same problem I had, five years earlier: overhead too high to withstand an economic downturn. John Emms, who I hired at Sonargraphics (Australia) and who was subsequently hired by Chris Korody (on my recommendation), was a free agent. I convinced him to join me and together with my new girlfriend—Kodak account executive, Elisabeth Ivarsson—we grew the Swedish incarnation of my Incredible company into the most highly awarded AV studio in history.

⁷ The original Stream Team. Left to right: Ted Iserman, Susy Dillingham, Chris and Cathy Korody, Brad Hood.



Between 1986 and '88, three of our shows won consecutive Grand Prizes at the New York International Film & TV Festival, our trophy collection grew to more than one hundred and I was inducted into the AMI Hall of Fame.

Flush with success, more and more of our business was coming from Europe. I moved Incredible's HQ to Brussels, Europe's emerging new capital, to avoid expensive flights from Scandinavia.

To build the Brussels studio I borrowed (aka "leveraged") to the hilt. Svenska Handelsbanken even matched my investment, kronor for kronor; and me not ever Swedish. (!) But business in Europe was booming, while America struggled to get out from under the crash of the S&L [Savings & Loan] banking crisis.

The Belgian company was named Incredible Imagers International. When I left Elisabeth behind, to run the Stockholm "satellite sales office," she left me.

The Belgian business didn't last long. When US President George Walker Bush (the senior) went to war with Iraq, that crashed the European economy (not the American). I let the staff go and liquidated the Brussels company, salvaging just enough to start over.

Saab—my lost loyal client—came to my rescue with a 60-projector Image Wall for the International Motor Show circuit [Frankfurt, Turin and Tokyo], produced in Stockholm (right). Then, Max Bjurhem came through with another show for Scania Bus; and there was more. I was on a roll again, working frugally and mostly alone (camera and audio work were farmed out).



With the fall of the Berlin Wall, opportunities abounded to develop businesses in former Soviet satellite states. After an exploratory trip to Tallinn, Estonia, I tried to open a visitors' center and opened a company in Tallin—Incredible Imagers Estonia.



When I couldn't get financing (the Estonian Kronor wasn't in circulation yet and Stockholm banks did not deal in Rubles, which were the hold-over currency in the country), I decided to move back to the States, to a house I purchased on Vashon Island, Washington, near Seattle (left).

My last job in Sweden was producing a mindblower for Kurt Hjelte, the guy who brought me to Sweden eight years earlier. It was the end of that cycle in the grand arc of my international life. I was burned out on AV and wanted to go into the restaurant business.



Volume Five began with me on the verge of emigrating to Vashon Island but not before nearly turning an avocation into a profession during my last year in Sweden.

My interest in the Culinary arts blossomed when I returned to Stockholm. I built a mini-restaurant in my Stockholm flat and apprenticed at a bread bakery (Vetebullen), then at Nodiska Kompaniet [NK] with Steffan Petersson, an award-winning *pâtisseries* (left).

On the way back to America, I made a stopover in Seville, Spain, to visit the 1992 Expo., which is where Volume Five began.

By the time I moved to Vashon, I was burned out on AV. Going broke is no fun; the experience of dismantling your life and giving up the things you love is disheartening. However, there's a Yin for every Yang and the end of one cycle begins another, as we travel around the Karmic Circle of life.

The year I spent preparing for the return to America refilled my coffers and rekindled my spirits. I was a man on a mission again, hell-bent to make my fortune in the restaurant business.⁸ Although I stashed a hefty sum, there wasn't enough capital for a new venture; so I went back to work as a photographer and independent AV consultant to generate the necessary funds.

My first job was for a former competitor, Rick Sorgel, a founding partner of Sorgel Lee Riordan Studios in Milwaukee [Wisconsin]. He hired me for a cross-country assignment shooting for Isuzu. I was given a Rodeo LS for the roughly 14,000-mile [~22,500 km] trip and liked the SUV so well that I bought it by trading Isuzu most of my shooting fee and drove it for 23 years.



⁸ A popular aphorism has it that, "The make a small fortune in the restaurant business, start with a large one."



In Canada, I consulted with a prominent hotelier, Montréal's Price family, for a multi-image Visitors Center which they proposed building near their river-front Auberge St. Antoine, in Québec City.



That was followed by a two-year-long stint in Malaysia producing a show for that country's flagship carrier, Malaysia Airlines, in partnership with Thomas Leong in Kuala Lumpur and Doug Ethridge's Avcon studios, in Seattle.

While in Malaysia, I joined a group of colleagues on a month-long foray into Rajasthan, India.



Flush with funds, I bought a property at the Vashon ferry dock—the Costa del Sol Mexican cantina—and created Fork Inn the Road restaurant.

Although I manifested my restaurant dreams, so many mistakes were made that, three months after opening, I had to go back into the slide-show business to pay the restaurant's burgeoning bills.



My former AVC student, Filip Järnehag (lower left), hired me to co-produce shows for Wärtsillä [a Finnish manufacturer of gas turbine electric/heat co-generation plants] and the Swedish telecommunications giant, Ericsson.

Another former client, Max Bjurhem, contacted me to produce a show for Scania AB [one of Europe's largest manufacturers of heavy-duty vehicles].



To free myself from the shackles of my dying restaurant business, I sold my 80% share in to my partner, Hita von Mende; then, we split up.

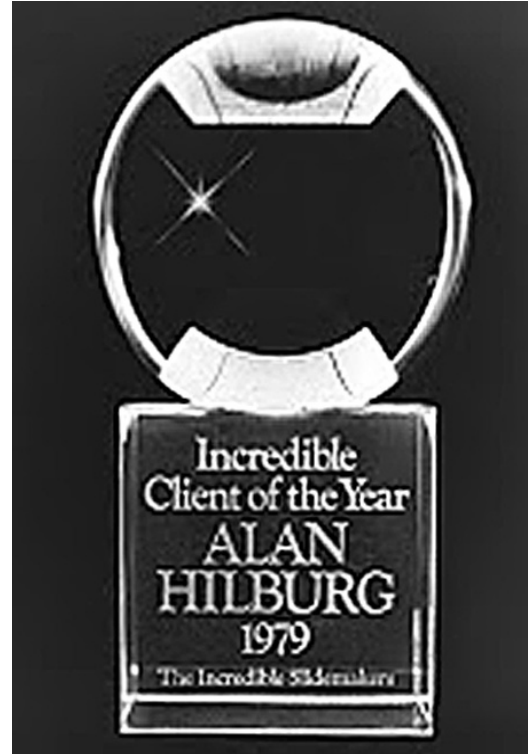
I returned to Sweden and produced Max's anniversary show, working with Filip Järnehag. While in Sweden, I made a side trip to Poland, where I met my future wife, Anna Raus. I spent a winter in Poland, living with Anna in Poznan while she attended a business school.



Anna Raus in front of her school in the Old Town section of Poznan, Poland.

Back in Vashon, former colleague John Whitcomb [Pran AV, in Texas] got me involved in an enormous project building a Visitors Center for AT&T's HQ in New Jersey. I partnered with Watts-Silverstein and went to work with them, as an employee; ultimately, that was a mistake.

Sound recordist Libby Furnau holds route map for Swedish Match shoot.



Then, another former Client of-The Year, Allan Hilburg, brought me a \$1.8-million production for Swedish Match that involved a global photo and video reportage mission. Watts-Silverstein was the producer of record for that job, too.

I quit Watts-Silverstein before the Swedish Match job was completed because, in my opinion, the client's interests were being abused to generate bonus bucks for Watts-Silverstein, who were trying to paint a rosy economic picture of their enterprise, which was being considered for purchase by an AV conglomerate in a deal that would net the owners a bigger bundle. It was a matter of principle and honor; for Hilburg, I fell on my sword. Then, in a twist of fate, I got hired by Lexivision, Swedish Match's promotion agency, to become a staff creative director. Anna and I returned to Sweden and set-up house in Stockholm. Getting there was half the fun: we got into a kerfuffle with US Immigration; the only solution was to get married.



Lexivision went bust a year later and cancelled my contract. Luckily, Max Bjurhem hired me to produce the Scania International Photo Library; it was a year and a half long, pan-European job across 22 countries resulting in >3,000 digital images. I became a Photoshop expert.



Anna and I got back to Vashon in time to ring in the New Century. I went back to work for Sound Images producing extravaganzas for Nike. We formed an informal working partnership and invested in the latest technological incarnation of the slide-show business: Watchout, a digital-presentation programming application, like PowerPoint on steroids.

Dave Frey and I committed heavily to Watchout and were among the first (and only) producers to use the program to create original content rather than screen videos.

The AV work I did there was the best I ever did; but Dave never entered any of it into competitions; he didn't believe in publicity; he thought it worked against him by alerting competitors to the existence of a lucrative AV customer.



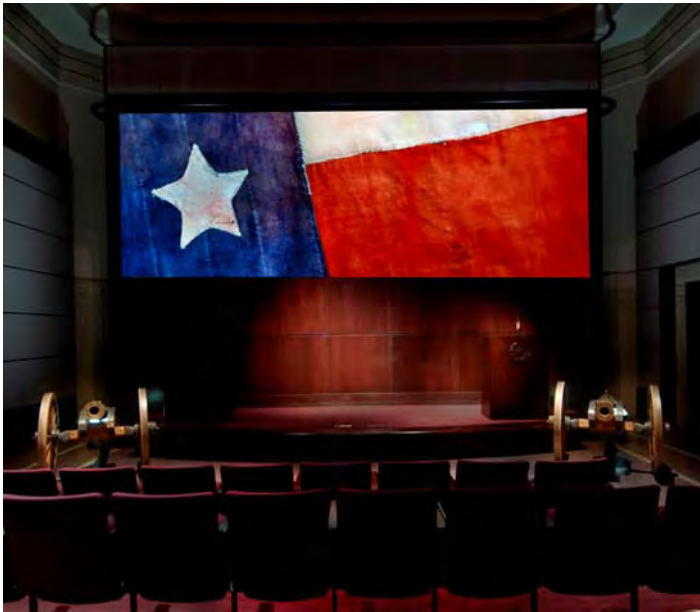
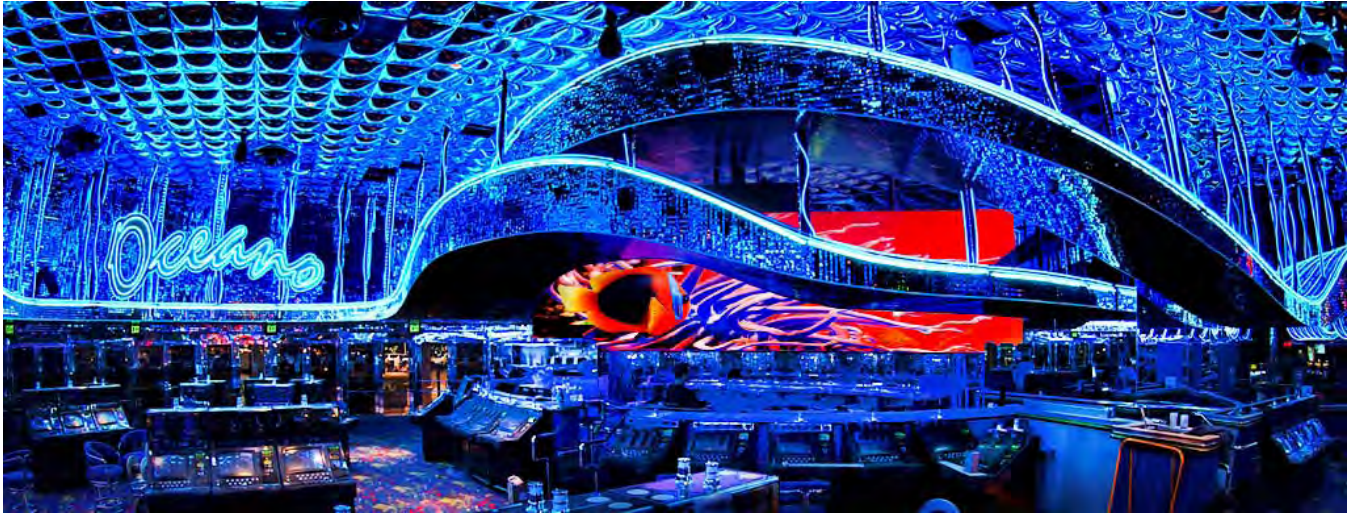
Above, Sound Images studio in Portland.

Below, my Watchout studio on Vashon Island.



The profits generated by the Nike business paid for expansion of the Vashon studio. I kept investing in Watchout technology and came out a winner. There weren't many Watchout producers doing very large, multi-projector shows; so, by collaborating with Watchout's producer [Dataton AB, Sweden] I got a lion's share of that business, producing shows for Nintendo, IBM, JD Edwards, and Samsung, among others.

Anna left me in 2002. Free again, I explored the world and shot stock pictures in the Yucatan, Belize and Greece. I used those pictures to make new Watchout demo shows. One of those demos was used by NEC to show off a new line of digital-video projectors.



My work appealed to Quantum AV [Reno, Nevada] and they hired me to produce content for a chill lounge in the Peppermill Casino (above).

Simultaneously, the Texas Museum of History (left) hired me to convert a 1992 Watts-Silverstein slide show (Texas Forever!) into Watchout format; by then, it was impossible to make new slides or service the antiquated slide projectors.



Other clients included New York Life's annual meetings (three years in a row); continued work for Nike; and a major production for the Centers for Disease Control; that was by far the biggest show I ever worked on, involving 19 screens floating across a vast, 200-foot-wide [~61 meters] plenum above the CDC Museum in Atlanta [Georgia] (right).

Despite my commercial success, I was unhappy and didn't know why. I moved to Vancouver to get away from the ghosts in the Vashon studio. In my new surroundings, I spent a summer reading the Tao and came to realize I was working against myself, against my true nature; I was rowing my boat upstream, against the flow, instead of gently down the stream, going with it. As mentioned, The Law of Attraction holds that "like attracts like." That's another way of saying, you are what you think; that is, your manifestations result from your intentions (what you think about). I wished to be free, to do my own thing, and that's what I got—more wishing. Instead, I needed to stop living as I had been and start create a new reality and way of life for myself. It was as easy as "just doing it."

I gave up commercial work except projects for Dave Frey [Sound Images] and Steve Oliker [Oligopoly], two producers who hired me to do my thing instead of theirs. The money earned from shows produced for Nike and New York Life funded my transition into fine-arts work, as did the king-sized show for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [aka CDC], shown above.



The stock pictures taken on my trips abroad became the stuff of fine-arts photo-illustrations. Scenes from the Peppermill Casino's *Oceano* show were also repurposed as framed art. Those were presented to Vancouver galleries. All of them turned me down except for an upstart art emporium called Oh My Godard, featuring the work of Michael Godard. His style appealed to Vancouver's growing population of wealthy Yuppies and, as it turned out, so did mine.

Act Nonchalant, 2004

Although the phone rang less often, I still got audiovisual work—and needed it to pay the huge bills accrued making inventories of canvas and art-paper giclée prints; thousands were spent on Epson printers, ink, media and framing supplies.

New AV clients included the Seattle Art Museum for whom I produced an intra-museum digital signage system, and a prestigious show for the newly-build National Constitution Center, in Philadelphia. However, my AV days were numbered because I was becoming technologically obsolete. The obsolescence began when my third wife, Anna Raus, left me, hired three lawyers and took me to the cleaners. Paying her alimony robbed my R&D money for three years. Then, the costs for fine-arts printing and framing left zero money for upgrading my Watchout kit.

In 2007, I was faced with an existential choice when Steve Oliker told me that I would have to upgrade my Watchout system if I wanted to continue working with New York Life. I declined his offer after calculating that, factoring in the cost of new gear, I would lose money on his job. In doing so, I committed AV suicide. I wasn't worried because sales of my work at Oh My Godard were starting to take off. I was on my way to becoming a world-famous illustrator, or so I thought, which is where this sequel—Volume Seven of *An Incredible Epic*—begins.

2007 – Naked Truths – Preconceived Notions

Being an insular world, Vashon was the perfect place for test marketing new pictures and refining my sales pitch.

However, I didn't fit the mold of the average Island artist. The art community on Vashon didn't know what to think of me or my work.

On one hand, I was ahead of the curve in digital imaging, successfully selling a new kind of pictures (digital montages) in a new form (giclée prints) at a trendy gallery in Vancouver (Oh My Godard).

On the other hand, I was a bit strange, especially with my dress (or lack thereof).

I was at the height of middle-age anxiety, suffering what the Swedes call *Vasaloppet* syndrome. *Vasaloppet* was the name of a strenuous race that a lot of 50+ men, who probably shouldn't have, ran to verify their vigor.

Being in my early sixties, the bloom was certainly off my rose; but I was reasonably buff for a guy my age. I was vain and liked to show off my physique, sometimes in naughty ways. Thus, whatever my artistic peers thought of my work was less consequential than what they thought of me, the person.

With a few exceptions, my efforts to get my work shown more on Vashon were for naught. The Heron's Nest gave me some wall space. That was odd considering that my work was not welcome at the Blue Heron Art Center, who owned and operated the Heron's Nest gallery.

Believe it or not, to donate my work to the Blue Heron's Art Auction fund-raiser, I had to call them. Politically speaking, they didn't want my work on their walls; but they couldn't deny my donation for fear of bad publicity.

I didn't mind their snobbery; I wanted my stuff in the Art Auction just to have it seen by influential Vashonites. I reckoned if one out of a hundred liked my work, that was >thirty.

Like all successful galleries, the Blue Heron relied on snob appeal; it was run like a country club for artists young and old. Molly Reed was the director of the profitable non-profit; but Janice Randall ran the place, ably assisted by Pauline Richardson.⁹

Will Furth was the artistic director; he set-up all the Blue Heron exhibitions. I showed him my samples, but Furth was biased against giclée limited editions. I got the feeling he and the others at the Blue Heron thought my stuff was "imitation" art.

Furth, like most at the Blue Heron, only wanted to show original oils and watercolors.

⁹ I invited Pauline for coffee in hopes of getting to know her better. She obliged once; we had coffee just across the street at the Stewart Brothers coffee roastery; maybe that was a mistake. (They say never pee within a mile of the flag pole.) After that; she ducked out of further get-togethers with me.



Left: River of Life, 2003

Part of my problem was that people didn't understand that my pictures were illustrations; many thought they were photos.

Only some of my more fanciful scenes, e.g., *River of Life* (left) revealed the scores of elements I used to make a picture.

Others, like *Golden Temple Pilgrims* or *Kashmir Dream* (below) appear real, although they are montaged fabrications.



Golden Temple Pilgrims, 2008



Above: *Kashmir Dream*, 2008

My hyper-real pictures posed a perception problem: people thought they were “snapshots” of real places. One afternoon at Oh My Godard I overheard a couple discussing *Up the Creek*, an illustration of Yaletown [Vancouver] where they were visiting friends. She wanted to buy it but he objected; he said, “We can take that same picture with our own camera.” I reckoned that, if other people thought that they could do what I did, I had a problem.

Realizing that my hyper-realistic pictures were misunderstood, that they looked “easy” to make, I started to work on scenes that were more “fantastic”—as in fantasy.

At the same time, I started referring to my work as illustrations; that term best described what my pictures were all about. Photographers “take” pictures, whereas illustrators “make” pictures; that distinction may seem trivial at first. However, people assume that an illustrator (like a painter) puts more work into a picture than a photographer.

2007 – Blue Heron Arts Center – Art Auction

Whatever the reason, the only way I could get my work on the Blue Heron’s walls was to donate to their annual Art Auction.

If only temporarily, hanging my pictures at the Art Auction assured that the 99% of the Island’s top 1% would see them.

The Art Auction was a two-night event:

Friday evening was a silent auction for the hoy polloi; participating artists got a token discount that night; it was less formal and less expensive (both the refreshments and the art prices).

Well-heeled patrons—the folks I wanted to see my work—attended a banquet-style event on Saturday night. Many wore black tie to that elite event. It cost north of a hundred bucks for a sit-down dinner prepared by a local restaurant—usually the Hardware Store—followed by a live auction emceed by a local, amateur auctioneer.

Every artist wanted their work auctioned on Saturday, of course; it was certainty you’d get more attention, and maybe more money. However, year after year, my work ended up in the Friday silent auction. To solve that problem, I donated canvases that were too big to be shown in the outdoor tent where the silent-auction was set up. Ha!

When I dropped off my donation—colossal, 40 X 80-inch [101.6 X 203.1-centimeter] canvases of *Shikara Sunset* (left) and *English Bay Springtime*—the gallery gals were flummoxed.

My plan worked; the two big pictures totally dominated one of the most visible walls inside the Blue Heron gallery; nobody could miss seeing my work. Mission accomplished.

However, only one of the two pictures sold; *Shikara Sunset* was returned to me—damaged. The commercial value of the picture was essentially destroyed; would you buy a scuffed-up picture? However, when I pointed out the scuff marks to Janice Randall, she just shrugged dismissively and said, “These things happen.”



I couldn't believe the disrespect.

Stewing about the damaged mural, I calculated my loss; the cost of the ink, canvas and stretcher bars for the two works I donated totaled nearly \$600. The piece that sold fetched \$300, of which I received \$100; that left me with a \$500 loss.

In the past, I would have chalked-up the loss to charity; after all, they would have me think that my contribution was supporting the Blue Heron's educational programs... yadayadaya. However, when I noticed that the Art Center staff were driving new cars, and eating out frequently, I stopped donating to their auction and instead gave pictures to the VIPP art auction (Vashon Island Pet Protectors); the cars they drove were older than mine.

Aside from the Vashon galleries, Patty Wagner gave me several opportunities to show my work at Chase Bank, when she managed the Vashon branch; and a year later, when she jumped JP Morgan's ship to work at PSCCU [Puget Sound Cooperative Credit Union], she gave me a show there. Wagner was a friend of my sister Kathy; that's probably why she gave me the respect that few others did. My sister would have told Patty that most of what was said about me was gossip.

As far as I was concerned, gossip was good; P.T. Barnum once remarked, "I don't care what people say about me, as long as they spell my name right."

2007 – Island Galleries – Grasping at Straws

It wasn't easy getting shows on Vashon; the island was overpopulated with artists; there wasn't enough show space to go around.

No matter whether they liked me or not, the "legit" galleries on Vashon wouldn't touch my work: they were oriented to original oils, watercolors and encaustics.

They weren't interested in hearing about the new, giclée-art paradigm—selling limited editions and making money on volume, rather one-off sales of originals.

I came close with Erik Hefflefinger; he ran the prestigious Silverwood Gallery near the yacht club. Hefflefinger renovated Vashon's old Masonic Temple into a gallery, to feature his fine-jewelry work and his wife Martha's playful portraits of dogs.

Silverwood did shows monthly. Hita had a series of hugely successful shows there. I nearly begged Erik for a show; I thought I had a chance, having done a photo essay about him years earlier, when he opened the place. But it was not to be.

On the other hand, Priscilla Schleigh gave me space to hang a couple of pictures at her arts and crafts store, the Giraffe. Schleigh had previously managed Heron's Nest; she always gave my work a good display.

I tried to get a show at Two Wall Gallery (located in the central hallway—hence, “two walls”—of the Rice building) but, Jack Strubbe didn’t like the idea that my work was also being shown in the Heron’s Nest, just up the hall; so, that never happened, either.

Lorna Cunningham gave me a show at Vashon Intuitive Arts; however, her new-age shop was on the wrong side of Bank Road; VIA didn’t draw many visitors, except the incense burning, crystals crowds. The night that my show opened, fewer than fifty people showed up and half of them were the VIA volunteers; it was pathetic and made me realize that there was no market for my work on the Island.

2007 – Seattle Galleries – No Sale

To properly brand my new enterprise—*Douglas Mesney Art*—I put together a logo, based on a beautifully-calligraphed rendering of the word “Art” made thirty years earlier, to illustrate an article in *Show* magazine.



Then I spent nearly \$1,000 on branded clothes—hats, hoodies, blazers and shirts—emblazoned with my new logo, in multi-colored embroidery.

From then on, I wouldn’t go out in public un-branded; my uniform became a Mesney-Art baseball cap and hoodie. I wore the shirt and blazer on special occasions, like pitching new galleries and gift shops in Seattle.



Seattle Sunset Celebration, 2006

I targeted tourists with a single product—an ultra-wide panorama of Seattle, called *Seattle Sunset Celebration* (above). The new scene was an update of the Seattle panorama that I made in 2003—one of my first major Photoshop accomplishments.

By 2006 my digital imaging skills were much improved; I updated the skyline, adding new skyscrapers built during the three intervening years as well as fireworks and, in the first version, a Boeing 737 (it’s small; look above the buildings to the right of the moon).

Seattle Sunset Celebration was test-marketed at Oh My Godard; 15% of their customers were tourists from the USA, most of them from the Seattle region. One afternoon, I overheard a gallery visitor comment to her companion that it was a picture of the 911 attack. Kelly and Paige agreed, the 737 in the picture looked like it was headed for the Columbia Tower; so, that plane was outta there!

A second version of *Seattle Sunset Celebration* was released in 2007, without the Boeing 737. Two copies sold at Oh My Godard, in as many months. That gave me confidence to approach retail shops in Seattle. Getting a spot in the gift shops and galleries that tourists populated was a tough row to hoe; it was necessary to “prove” that your item(s) would sell; that’s when my Vancouver credentials at Oh My Godard were helpful.

The first place I pitched was a curiosity shop called Pirates Plunder, located at in Pier 57, the epicenter of Seattle’s waterfront tourist mecca. They agreed to show the smallest version of *Seattle Sunset Celebration* and offer rolled up versions, sold in tubes. They had never tried selling pictures in tubes, but were reassured by my spiel, about selling Hawaiian Panoramas in Waikiki.

Encouraged, I next approached Beth McNeal who ran Simply Seattle, a gift shop near Seattle’s famed Pike Street Market, another tourist mecca. I called in advance and made an appointment; McNeal seemed impressed by my courtesy call but was less enthusiastic about selling my panoramas. She thought they took up too much wall space and were too expensive. Besides, all her walls were jam-packed with all kinds of trinkets and trash.

However, before going to pitch McNeal, I had cased the store and discovered an odd-sized space in the corner of a window that was perfect for a panorama. I measured the space and made a print that perfectly fit. Beth agreed to take it on consignment, but warned that my price was too high.¹⁰ I didn’t quibble with her; I was just happy to have a foot in the door, a space in the place—in the window, no less—to see if my work had sales appeal.

Compared to the other things in the Simply Seattle shop, my stuff was on the high end, price wise. What McNeal really meant was that, when they came to her store, her weren’t thinking in terms spendy items; they were looking for bargains; her average sale was less than fifty bucks.

Beth turned out to be right; the print sat in Simply Seattle’s window for three years before I was asked to take it back. The same thing happened at Potluck Gallery; but Sandy Bradley wasn’t as patient as Beth McNeal; I only lasted a year there.

The next spring, I approached several shops serving the University of Washington. The school district was an enormous market; customers included students as well as visiting parents, siblings and friends. Targeting the University Frame Shop and University Book Store, I made a new picture, *University of Washington*—a stunning panorama of the UW campus at cherry blossom time.

¹⁰ As I was printing and mounting my own canvases, I could keep my retail prices low, but not low enough; the big publishers of posters and picture books offered beautiful pictures for considerably less than my giclée prints. My pictures were the most expensive items in the shops that carried them. That high price was a dubious distinction.



University of Washington, 2008

At the time, I was doing nudes of Ashley Elba Brown, a Vashon gal who was a student at the “U-Dub” [UW]. Ashley got me a pass to be on campus, ostensibly to shoot stock photographs of her for Corbis, perched in a cherry tree, working with a lap top. After shooting those, I made the panorama of the campus.

To digress for a moment, about Ashley: It was the height of my nudes period; my pictures of Ashley were meant to out-do Goldfinger—my “Golden Girl” was going to sparkle with *glitter*.

First, I hand-coated Ashley with Tropicana coconut oil (ooh, la la... that was more fun than body painting). She looked so good oiled that we did a series of statuesque shots of her glistening body; the best of those ended up being Photoshop’d onto a Grecian pedestal.

Then I sprinkled Ashley with gold glitter; however, it didn’t stick very well. I guess some of the oil got absorbed while we were doing the pedestal shots. Spraying her with more oil didn’t help, it made things worse. We shot anyway; but the pictures were unusable because the blotchy glitter made her look like she had some kind of skin rash.

Geez, the studio was a mess after that; the sparkles got everywhere; it took hours to clean up and, years later, I was still finding bits of glitter here and there.

When I showed the panorama print around on Vashon, it got good reviews, but neither of the University shops would take it; they said I needed to apply to an approval committee, provide samples ... yadayadaya.

2007 – Vancouver & Whistler Galleries – False Hopes

Up in Vancouver, I first approached a print gallery called Fast Frames located on the corner of busy Denman Street just a few blocks from my Nelson Street studio.

Giclée prints were new then. Fast Frames’ owner Mary Paul and her framer-partner, Steven Boyd, were impressed with the 72-inch [182.88 cm] wide canvas of *Summer Sunset* that I showed them; but, we had a politely argumentative discussion about the price.

These were the heady days before the crash, when people had money to burn. It was my opinion that the piece should retail for \$1,600. Mary raised her eyebrows, shook her head and said, in an arrogantly-dismissive tone, “No, thank you.”

We worked our way down to \$1,200; I balked at going lower. According to the “keystone” pricing method used by many shops, wholesale is half of retail, production cost is half of wholesale. As my production costs were \$300; that called for a wholesale price of \$600 and a retail price of \$1,200. Mary still didn’t like it; she said nobody would spend that amount in her gallery, where the average art-poster sale was less than \$100.

It should be noted that Fast Frames made their money on custom framing; they offered “affordable” (cheap) art as a loss leader for framing revenue. I argued that it would take 12 poster sales to make a commission equal to one of my big panoramas. Steve’s opinion was that it was worth a try; Mary begrudgingly obliged him.

The picture was prominently positioned in the window facing Denman Street. In the first days (then weeks) I stopped by the shop, to chirpily say “hi” and ask how the comments about *Summer Sunset* were going. I tried to avoid Mary Paul; ever since the day we met, whenever she saw me, she glared.

Steve’s enthusiasm was waning when, lo and behold, the piece sold. Mary reluctantly issued my commission check, but she didn’t want a replacement panorama or any other work; she actually seemed pissed that it sold. I gave up with them and they gave up on me.

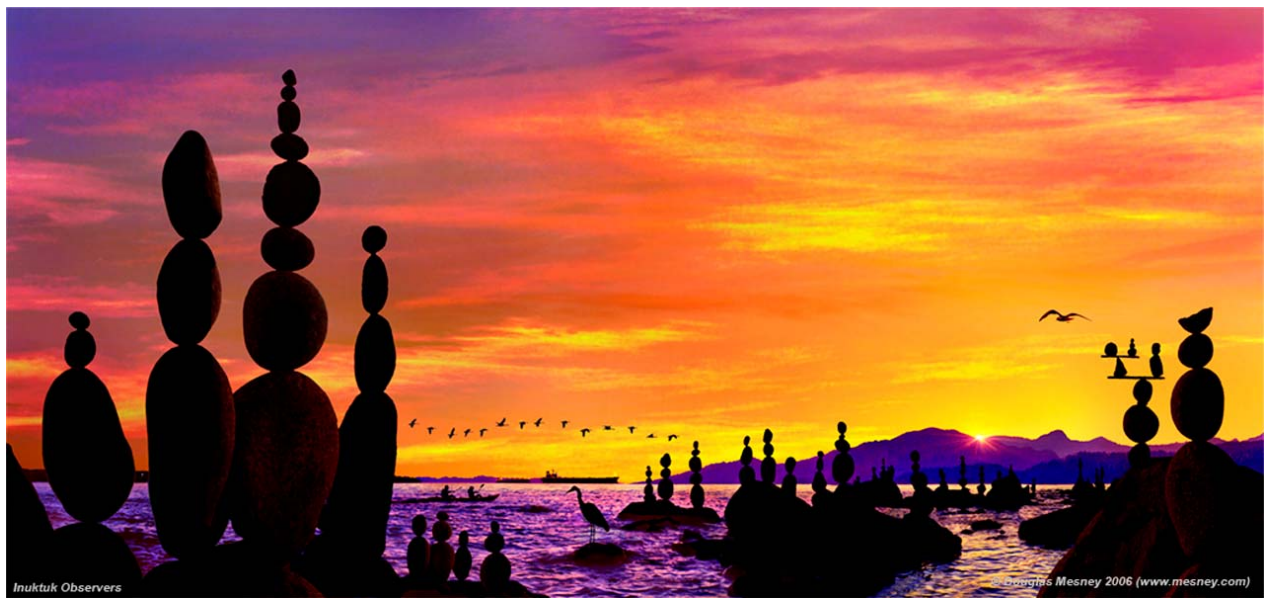
[Spoiler Alert: Mary came down with cancer and Steve took over the store while she was convalescing. Nearly 10 years later, when Mary returned, I re-approached Fast Frames when I moved all my work up from Vashon. Pam and I brought over a 96-inch [243.84 cm] stretched canvas of *Kashmir Dream*.

Mary still held a grudge for me; she nixed the pix, said it was too big and they didn’t have many Indian customers. Steve said it would have to sell at prices comparable to the shop’s other offerings; they had no room for expensive art. He said he knew that the big picture was worth ten times as much, but he would sell it for \$300 and my cut would be \$150. That was a pretty easy way for them to get me out of their hair, once and for all.

I still have that big picture and 98% of the 500+ others brought from Vashon; no gallery wants them; they aren’t selling, even on eBay. The only thing left to do, it seemed, was give them away.]

Around the same time, I began checking out restaurants and bars that offered opportunities for artists to display their work. Not just any place qualified; my panoramas were just too big and/or odd-sized for many locations. I did eventually manage to find home for a display at the Bayside Lounge, a popular bar in the Sands Hotel, at the intersection of Denman and Davie Streets, overlooking English Bay.

When I cased the lounge, I saw that they were already displaying a few pieces bearing price tags. Manager Tony D’Andrea explained that he got them from the gals who ran *Oh My Godard*. When the gallery went out of business, they took back most of the artworks, leaving him in the lurch. I showed up just in time to cash in on the suddenly-available wall space. Within a week, I had the place filled with condo-sized pictures. However, despite lower prices, nothing sold.



Inuktituk Observers, 2006

Actually, I did sell one piece. It was a fluke; someone made off with a glass-framed giclée of *Inuktituk Observers* (above) that was being kept in the hotel's storage room. Tony made good on it; I recovered my costs for the expensive framing work, done at Northwest Art & Frame, in West Seattle.

Plaza Art Galleries at Whistler resort was also on my list of target markets. Located right in the middle of Whistler Village, on Main Street, the gallery was filled with an impressive collection of limited-edition giclée reproductions by many talented and "apparently famous" international painters; their prices were commensurately formidable. I truly believed my work could sell there and reckoned that my *Whistler Moon* illustration (below), of Whistler Mountain, would give me a foot in the door.



Whistler Moon, 2007

I worked hard to make *Whistler Moon*. Jeff Smith (a salesman and art installer at Oh My Godard gallery) and I trudged a half mile [0.8 km] up Mount Sproat, through heavy snow and dense stands of fir trees, up and across a craggy rock ledge, to overlook Whistler from a distance of four miles [six kilometers]. That viewpoint, across Alta Lake from an altitude of 2,000 feet [609.6 meters], was an angle not seen in any other shots of the resort already on the market. A moonlit effect further differentiated my picture from all the others (and there were plenty of those).

However, the Plaza Gallery owners, Anne Marie Little and David Helfrich, weren't particularly impressed with that scene or any of the other two dozen pictures that I schlepped up to Whistler to show them. To my utter astonishment, I was roundly rejected. The gallery owners explained that they had too much stuff already and sales were not going well. (The economy had already begun to turn down; the Crash of 2008 was imminent.)

Greg Smith, my Vancouver dentist, recommended that I show my work to another of his patients, Christie McPhee, who ran Starfire Galleries in up-market West Vancouver. I hauled a load of stuff across the Lions Gate Bridge to the trendy town of West Van only to find that she only handled originals.

Oh well, Greg tried his best. He knew I needed business; I had spent many hours in his chair and bartered some of my pictures, to reduce my formidable dental bills. Greg was a wannabe photographer; he appreciated my work and was keenly interested in digital imaging. I tried to teach him Photoshop; but he wasn't geeky enough to learn the necessary computer skills.

2007 – Vancouver Island – Another False Hope

My colleague and client, Ron Jacklin, offered to show me around Victoria, on Vancouver Island, in search of galleries.

Ron was living in my rental unit, at the Westport; we loaded up my Isuzu with as many pictures as would fit and took BC Ferries, from Tsawwassen (about 20 miles [32 kilometers] south of Vancouver), to Shwartz Bay (20 miles north of Victoria). Ron's parents lived nearby, in the fashionable Oak Bay neighborhood; that's where we stayed. It was awkward because Ron's father, retired from the insurance business, was quite ill and disposed to depression. His mother was having difficulties caring for him. Ron kept the conversations light, telling stories about when he secretly grew pot in the back garden, only to have the crop stolen.

The next morning, we took it easy after a nice breakfast prepared by Ron's mom. In the afternoon, we began a two-day gallery tour. First we went north, to Qualicum Beach, where I presented my work to Marlowe Goring at Qualicum Frame Works. Then, in nearby Courtenay, I visited Timms Gallery and showed my samples to Marilyn and Dan Timms. Both galleries had just finished installing new, six-month shows, and both had long waiting lists.

Discouraged by the failures of my first foray, I went for a long run along Beach Drive and Dallas Road, enjoying spectacular cliff-side views of the blue Pacific. I ran past a man flying a radio controlled, saucer-shaped drone, exercising his high-tech toy in the stiff winds that were sweeping up the cliffs from the sea, 500 feet below. The distractions vanquished the dragon of defeat.

The second day began with breakfast at Rebar restaurant (Langley Street & Bastion Place) followed by a visit to Lighthouse Galleries, at 45 Bastion Place, one of Victoria's tourist hot zones. Roger Zwicky & Allan Moss were kind enough to take a look at my stuff; but, I could already see, on my way through the front door, that the gallery was full to the brim with the same assortment of giclée canvases that filled Plaza Galleries, in Whistler Village. Moss explained that they only did business with established art-publishing companies; they recommended that I submit my work to one of their publishers. Hmm.

Next on my list was Bourne Galleries, at 752 Douglas Street. I had good feelings walking in; Douglas Street was a good omen. The gallery was right around the corner from the famed (and always full) Empress Hotel; it occupied a two-story building with an all-glass façade that curved around the corner. Inside, an intriguing interior design featured a two-story atrium with sweeping stairways leading to a balcony that overlooked the lobby showroom.

As display spaces go, Bourne Galleries was an artist's dream come true. John Bourne, the gallery owner, had the looks and dressed the part of an English gentleman; however, he was no art aficionado; for him, it was simply a matter of making money—he might as well have been selling sausages.

Bourne had a franchise to sell the works of Thomas Kinkade; the entire gallery was full of Kinkade's stuff—paintings of picturesque, Tudor-style homes buried in snow; they made you feel like you were in a Christmas shop.

Compared to Kinkade's, my work was at the other end of the fine-arts universe. That appealed to Bourne and he decided to make my work the subject of a marketing experiment. Kinkade's pictures weren't making the money he reckoned they would when he invested the family fortune for the gallery franchise. He needed to generate more income and was looking for another "product line." So, Bourne took me on. Halleluiah!

Not only that, I got prime space in the balcony section and on the walls of its twin stairways. Bourne took everything I had in the Rodeo and another load, too. I was in heaven; but it was a good thing that I didn't order a new Cadillac.

Within six months, after only three sales, John called to ask me to come and get my work. He explained that he was closing the gallery; the sales just weren't there. For whatever reason, Empress Hotel guests didn't walk around the corner in his direction; they went the other way, around to the other sides of the harbor, to the Royal BC Museum and Beacon Hill park. His fate reminded me of the dividing line on Vashon Island; galleries on the north side of Bank Road got less business than those on the south side.

The return of my canvases from Bourne Gallery stressed the storage space at my studio; there was no room to make new work (and no need to, given the dire state of the economy).

2007 – River Mill Gallery – Michael Chan

When Michael Chan was searching the Internet for self-references, he found himself mentioned in the Profile section of my Incredible Images website,¹¹ whereupon he got in touch with me.

It was a surprise hearing from him; but I was even more surprised to hear that he had gone into the art-gallery business—and he was surprised to learn about my fine arts work.

Chan once worked at Incredible Slidemakers, assisting Jim Casey in the photo studio. After retiring from the commercial-photography business, Michael built the River Mill Gallery, in Westfield, New Jersey, to showcase his talented wife's oil paintings and watercolors; he also displayed his photography there.

Chan, like many other photographers, learned that photographs don't sell anymore; digital photography and the Internet killed that market; now everyone thinks they can make their own pictures.

To augment sagging picture sales, River Mill Gallery was also a custom-framing shop. Chan took great pride in that aspect of his work. He decided to use pictures from my *Undercurrents* collection (seventeen panoramic scenes originally made for the Oceano show at the Peppermill Casino) to showcase a new line of frame designs. It was a piece of cake for me; all I had to do was roll up the canvases and ship them in a tube; the stretching and framing was done on Michael's end.



Undercurrents Collection on display at River Mill Gallery, 2016.

Michael and I both had high hopes; River Mill was prominently located in a community of up-market families (business executives, lawyers and stock brokers).

Plus, Michael told me he'd never seen anything like my work; he thought the underwater fantasies were perfect for families with young kids, especially after the Disney movie *Finding Nemo*.

I had to agree after having watched kids' reactions to the Undercurrents pictures hung at Oh My Godard. Kids would get all excited; "Look Ma, it's Dory!"

¹¹ www.incredibleimages.com

Our excitement didn't last long; the pictures lingered in the window through the winter; the Christmas shopping season came and went, as did the January and February sales. The retail doldrums doomed any realistic hope of success.

Michael called and offered to return my work; I told him to keep the stuff; he had invested heavily in frame parts, much more than I invested in canvas and ink. Besides, I didn't need any more pictures returned to me—stretched canvases were bulky and the studio was already exploding with inventory. He was appreciative and said he would keep on trying, adding that he planned to put the stuff on eBay.

[Spoiler Alert: In 2016 Chan wrote to say that he never had any luck selling online. I told him not to worry about it, that I appreciated his trying. Chan wanted to return everything, but I nixed that. He insisted on paying me \$500. Bonus!]

Michael's experience on eBay matched my own, confirming my conjecture that nobody buys pictures anymore; they make their own. The internet and modern smart phones with built-in cameras destroyed the market for commercial and fine-arts photographers.

I wrote him this letter:

November 8, 2016 [Election Day]

Hi Michael,

A quick note to ask, how is it going on eBay? Have you had any luck? As you haven't written I figure you haven't—but thought I would ask anyway.

It befuddles me how the picture market has so totally altered. There's no demand for art pictures now that everyone has a camera phone (my wife's *Huawei* makes terrific pictures). Around here, the only business the frame shops get is custom-framing peoples' own work. Folks are living in smaller places with bigger windows and huge TVs; there's scant wall space for art of any kind. On the supply side, the picture market is totally flooded with a surreal variety of shapes, sizes and styles. It's a bad equation, too much supply, not enough demand. What I find confounding is there doesn't seem to be a solution; even giving away my pictures is proving to be difficult.

The same thing happened in the book business. Remember when people had libraries in their homes and offices? Now, most people only want electronic stuff. Printed books can be made on demand for those who want them. As mentioned above, people don't have a lot of wall space; shelf space is at a premium; so, you don't see many books in modern households.

What to do? Aye, there's the rub.

My latest idea [2016] is to find an unoccupied retail space nearby, where I can install a “Pop-Up Picture Gallery” and sell stuff at ridiculously low prices (think *Dollar Store*). I'm going to make a few calls; we'll see how far I get; I'll keep you posted....

Forgive me for rambling. Just wondering your thoughts on the dilemma?

[Spoiler Alert: I made those calls and was refused.]

2007 – Modern Sailing – Grecian Odyssey

One night in May, John Connolly called me from Istion Yacht Marina in Lefkas, a town on the island of Lefkada, off the southwest coast of Greece, 242 miles [389 km] from Athens.

Connolly told me that, if I could get to Patras [Greece] within 60 hours, I could join him on a 10-day sail through the islands in the Ionian Sea.

Thus, I began another sailing adventure with John Connolly.

Those days, I was always in travel mode; my passport was up to date; all I needed to do was arrange a ticket (using United Airlines [Star Alliance] air miles) and pack my bags.

I packed a full set of photo gear, having learned what was useful (or not) a few years earlier, on a cruise with John Connolly to Belize and Guatemala. This time, Johnny knew how I operated; he assigned me a big cabin in the stern, where I could hang gear from an upper bunk and sleep on the lower one. (My hanging-basket rigs, described earlier, allowed my hard drives and other accessories it to swing in all directions, keeping them more stable as the boat rocked and rolled.)

After flying all night and dealing with Greek customs officials overly interested in my professional-looking photo gear, I taxied from Athens Airport [ATH] to a bus depot in a remote part of the city, near the outskirts. That ride alone was worth the price. The vestiges of privilege and wealth disappeared behind me the taxi headed into the poor part of town.

This bus station, like so many others, anywhere you go, was in the low rent district. passengers came from all walks of life. The bus was the only way to get to Lefkas without hiring a cab or an airplane.

The little café at the bus station served delicious fast food which I had plenty of times to sample during my all-day layover, waiting for the 6:00 pm [18:00] departure, heading south. The bus cruised at high speed through the night; the air conditioning and loud music kept me awake the whole time, despite my exhaustion (I hadn't slept in two days).

The bus arrived at dawn; I found a cab; but the driver wasn't sure where to take me because there were two marinas in Lefkas. I flipped a coin and chose K&G Marina. The office there was closed; but it was a nice place to wait. I busied myself taking pictures of the extravagant yachts. At 9:00 am a snazzy looking young woman arrived to open the office. She didn't speak English but graciously made me a cup of much appreciated coffee. She pointed to 10:00 on the clock and gestured for me to sit tight.

When the boss arrived an hour later, he fired-up the office computer and searched for Modern Sailing... nada, then Connolly... nada. Seeing I was confused, he offered that Johnny was likely at the Istion Marina, down the road. He phoned over there and discovered that was indeed the case; so, he drove me over to the other marina in his Ferrari convertible. Talk about gracious!

I wish Connolly could have witnessed my stylish arrival; but, the Bavaria 41 he chartered was at the far end of the docks. He was as amazed to see me as I was to see him; less than three days before, I was finishing dinner in Vancouver; now we were bear-hugging half a world away.

None of the crew had yet arrived; the others were due in after lunch; that gave Johnny and I time for a private moment, to catch up. Johnny assigned me to a big, 2-berth rear cabin; it was on the port [left] side. Rear cabins are the most comfortable; the stern is the most stable part of a boat. In a bow cabin, the incessant pounding of waves can be annoying.

Although “only” 41 feet long [11.74 meters], the big monohull had a wide beam (width) that was 13 feet [3.9 meters], with three two-berth cabins, two heads (toilets), a shower, a comfortable saloon with table seating for six, a decent-sized galley, and a navigator’s desk.

I chose the upper berth to sleep in and used the lower one for my camera gear and digital equipment. The camera bags got tied down and the digital darkroom gear (laptop and two outboard hard drives) was suspended over the mattress in free-swinging nets, as mentioned.

Monohulls behave differently than catamarans; their narrower width increases roll to; they ride the waves making the ride more “exciting,” but less safe for my gear.

I had a lot of gear to watch over; my kit included Nikon D1X and D1H cameras, three zoom lenses (with a doubler on one) covering 17 to 420 mm, and two super-wide lenses [a 10.5 mm fixed-focus and a 12-24 mm zoom] for shooting scenes in the boat’s tight quarters. It would have been nice to have a flash for the interior scenes, but the strobe, batteries and radio remotes would have required a third bag, which was a no-no (I only have two arms).

Johnny’s paying customers—my models—included two couples and two solo guys, all successful professionals in early-middle age and—blessing of blessings—all fit, good looking specimens. After they got settled in the other three cabins, we all drove into town to shop for groceries, mostly for breakfasts, lunches and snacks. To avoid heavy-duty KP (Kitchen Patrol) we ate dinners at restaurants every evening except one; that night, Johnny put on his chef’s hat and made a pasta with a fabulous seafood melange.

At the orientation meeting I explained that my mission was to make documentary pictures for Modern Sailing Academy about the trip, with emphasis on Johnny as teacher and coach. Nobody had any problems appearing in pictures and everyone signed model releases. For a model release to be legal, a remittance of some value must be made, so I paid each of them one dollar.

After the meeting, we strolled through the marina to the nearby, seaside Taverna Kanioria for dinner. Johnny was the star at that meal (and every other); he assumed the role of a gracious host, although each was paying his or her own check. Conversations around the dinner table were exercises in self-control for the crew; they wanted to talk about sailing; they had a master sailor in their midst and were dying to ask questions. But convention had it that one didn’t talk “shop” during a meal.

Johnny loved to spin yarns about his sailing adventures; he had plenty of exciting ones, some of them I heard on the Belize excursion. However, that night he told us about his early career as a rock-show promoter. It turned out that, Johnny was an Allan Freed wannabe, a promoter who put together rock shows in amphitheatres for thousands of teeny-boppers. Everyone was curious to hear about the inner working of show business; they were torn between subjects, sailing vs the secret lives of the stars.

I had heard many of Connolly's stories before, not only on the Belize sailing trip in 2003, but also from the times we spent together when Johnny and his (then) Turkish wife Ipek lived in Seattle. Ipek, who grew up in Istanbul, had a high-pay job doing risk analysis for a huge electric utility, Seattle Light. They lived in a spacious condo overlooking Lake Union. We got together several times before Ipek decided to move back to California, where Johnny still lived aboard *Amazing Grace*, his power yacht.

Ipek and Johnny came to visit me on Vashon Island; they reciprocated with dinner at their place. When Ipek went down to California, to spend the July 4th holiday with Johnny, she loaned me their condo, to photograph the Lake Union fireworks display; from their balcony, there was a bird's eye view of Seattle's biggest fireworks display.

To digress for a moment, about Murphy's Law: What could go wrong did go wrong. I photographed the fireworks with a brand-new lens, a Nikkor 80-400 mm zoom that I was anxious to try out. The lens featured Nikon's latest digital follow-focus technology. You've heard of auto focus no doubt? Follow-focus keeps moving objects sharp; but I was unaware of how it worked, until I started shooting the fireworks.

I shot the fireworks using exposures ranging from 5 to 10 seconds. Such long exposures gave fireworks a special look—there was enough time for the rockets' streamers to trace their full paths onto the ~~film~~ sensor, making them look longer and more graceful. When the first shot appeared on the camera monitor, the image was diagonally smeared; it looked as if I had bumped the camera during the long exposure. I fired-off another frame and got another smear, but from another direction. What?

That time, I knew I didn't bump the tripod. Was it the wind? No, there wasn't any wind; in fact, the lack of breeze was making the fireworks "cloud up," subsumed to invisibility by their own smoke. I changed the exposure, trying to identify the problem; maybe the camera didn't like 10 seconds? I tried 20 seconds... then 30... then just 5; nothing stopped the smear effect.

I never did find out how to fix the smear problem until Francois Faurous (Veho Graphics) hired me to shoot Panorama Towers, a prestigious Las Vegas condo development. He and I went over to the Orleans Casino to get a long shot of the Panorama Towers buildings; there was a fabulous 180-degree panoramic view of the entire Strip from the Orleans' rooftop.

I chose the Nikkor 80-400 mm zoom to shoot the components for the Las Vegas panorama; that lens made stitching easy; the pictures it shot at the long end (400 mm) were perfectly rectilinear, with no "pin-cushion" or "barrel" distortions; when the sectional panorama frames were overlapped, everything lined-up.

(To get the most resolution (the most pixels) I shot each piece of the pan as a vertical, overlapping frames on their short sides. The resulting *Sunrise Strip* panorama required 18 overlapping frames, left to right.)

As I was shooting the individual panorama sections, I previewed the results, to confirm the capture was good before moving on to the next section. As I got to frame seven or so, I noticed that the image was smeared. Damn.

A second exposure produced the same result. I was flummoxed and the client was standing right next to me, intensifying the pressure and making me sweat. I didn't know what to do; I just started shooting frame after frame hoping that one would be ok. Francois inquired why I was shooting so many frames.

I could only feebly reply that I wanted to capture certain flashing lights. In the end, 17 out of the 18 pieces needed for the panorama had at least one sharp frame; the missing one was in an unimportant dark area of the picture, easy to obscure in Photoshop.

I wasn't shooting cars and airplanes any more, and I never shot sports, so, I didn't pay attention to the follow-focus functions of the Nikkor 80-400 mm lens. After the July 4th fireworks-shoot catastrophe, I didn't use the lens at night again until the Panorama Towers shoot; from that I deduced that the smear problem had to do with long exposures--but what, exactly?

I consulted Nikon Professional Service; they were little help over the phone but offered to check the lens for free. I gratefully accepted their offer; in point of fact, the lens had been dropped and nearly broke in half; it was put back together by Nikon, which I reminded them when discussing my new smear problems. (Subsequently, Nikon's tests revealed no problems.)

All I could do was put on my thinking cap; eventually I sussed the answer: the follow-focus processing algorithm was designed to track a prominent moving object and, like the "anti-shake" feature, keep the moving object in the same place, relative to the borders of the picture, by shifting the position of lens elements. (Amazing, eh?)

The smear in the Las Vegas pictures was being caused by the headlights of moving cars; the camera tracked the brightest headlights and kept those perfectly sharp—smearing everything else. All I had to do to fix the problem was turn off follow-focus. Ha!

Meanwhile, back in Greece....

When I shot pictures, I was an animal; I covered subjects thoroughly, shooting from every conceivable angle and a few inconceivable ones. I was all over the crew during the first morning's sail; I wanted them to get used to seeing me, to forget about me, to lose any innate shyness. After dinner that night, I treated them to a slide show of the day's shots, played on my laptop; that bonded us; they saw I was as serious about shooting as they were about sailing. Once my subjects granted me their trust, I had the "control" I needed.

Kefalonia was a big island; the first two days of the trip were spent circumnavigating it. Our first port was on the north end. It was early spring; the weather was crisp and clear, but it was still too early for bikinis.



Yours Truly in Kefelonia's port and at Preveza necropolis.

Johnny took us on an all-day driving tour around the island; we stopped at the ruins of an ancient amphitheater and visited a walled necropolis, in Preveza. Connolly was an enthusiastic tour director; wherever we went, he was able to recount volumes of history, facts and figures.

The next day we sailed to Ithaca, the island made famous in Homer's *Odyssey*. I got more than one shiver down my spine as we sailed through the narrow passage into the island's well-protected harbor, thinking about the thousands of sailors who had voyaged to Ithaca before us.

There was a festival going on in Ithaca; traditionally-dressed women were performing folk dances in the town square; it was a real bonus. I made an ass of myself joining in the dance to get close-up pictures; but the crowds loved it and they cheered me on. Later that night, in the tavern, I was a local celebrity.

The latrines on our boat were full by the time we left Ithaca; we needed to have the sewage tanks pumped and the water tanks refilled. We sailed back to Lefkas, and got the boat serviced before sailing north to Paxos.

In Paxos, we stayed in Gaios Harbor, a snug little anchorage and docking area on the edge of the island. Gaios was protected by an adjacent, smaller island, separated from it by a narrow channel through which John maneuvered the boat ever so carefully, making our arrival more exciting.

Paxos turned out to be the most picturesque of all the places we visited. I shot a 360-degree panorama of the harbor, called *Paxos Sunrise* (below). It is not often that I had the opportunity to make a fully-circular, 360-degree panorama; reality doesn't often align elements into a pleasing arrangement, when seen from all angles.



I discovered the *Paxos Sunrise* opportunity on a photo walk, at dawn, the morning after our arrival. I left the boat just before sunrise knowing that the early-morning sun would drench the colorful harbor with golden light. I shot my way along the waterfront ending up at the foot of a long rock jetty, built for a lighthouse, that marked the entry to the hidden harbor. Out on the jetty, the view was spectacular—a full-circle panorama—but, I had no tripod, no way to accurately line-up the sequential frames necessary to capture the full scene (27 frames using a Nikkor 210 mm zoom on the long end). I had to wing it, hand-holding the camera as precisely and steadily as I could.

John got sick toward the end of that sail; it was hard to imagine why; we had all eaten at the same restaurants every day and the same provisions on the boat. But, by the end of the cruise, Connolly was in bad shape. After the crew left and the chartered catamaran returned to its owners, John checked himself into a hospital in Lefkas; they transferred him to a bigger institution, in Athens, where he lay for three weeks after undergoing surgery to remove a sizeable bit of his bowels.



Johnny and Cindy Connolly with Yours Truly and Johnny's boat, *Amazing Grace*, in Sausalito, 2014.
Photos by Pamela Swanson.

[Spoiler Alert: The last time I saw Johnny was in 2014, when I took my new wife and a western-states road trip and we stayed with him on his boat, in the Modern Sailing marina, at Sausalito. The three of us went out for dinner that night, to John's favorite Indian restaurant. He hardly took a bite of his food and confessed that he had been diagnosed with liver cancer, was on chemo and no longer had an appetite. That visit was the last time I saw him; he was dead within a few months; of chemo I suspect.]

Those who knew him will tell you, John Connolly was first and foremost a teacher; every moment with him, every encounter, elicited words of wisdom.

2007 | Modern Sailing – Grecian Odyssey | Plates N^{os} 1-8

These are photos made during a week-long sailing odyssey through the Ionian Sea, at the invitation of Captain John "Johnny" Connolly, a neighborhood friend from Douglaston.

Connolly started his career as rock-show promoter. He spent his time schmoozing with the hoi polloi of the music industry, booked acts and venues, collected the proceeds and kept what was left over when all was said and done. He had more stories to tell than we had time to hear; he liked to hear himself talk.

The crew wanted to hear all about his Rock'n'Roll exploits; he got questions like, "what was so-and-so really like?" He never answered those; he'd excuse himself for something or change subjects altogether; I found him "scatter-brained."

Apparently, the R'n'R business provided anything but a steady income. To supplement his, Connolly started teaching music icons how to sail their mega-yachts.

At the time we reconnected, he was represented by Modern Sailing Academy, in Sausalito, where he lived aboard his boat, Polaris (later renamed Amazing Grace). The Academy agreed to my joining the crew for the second leg of Connolly's blue-water-sailing class, in the Ionian Sea, aboard a forty-foot [~13-meter] Bavaria yacht.



Besides myself (behind the lens) and Captain Connolly (left), there were four other crew members.

Clockwise around the table at a restaurant in Corfu, they included: Holly Williams; Richard Buch; Linda Kurkle and Steve Fisher.

By day, we'd sail to a new destination, find a berth in the harbor and head for the nearest taverna. Johnny always ordered large Greek salad with extra balsamic vinegar on the side. Our ports of call included: Kefalonia, Ithaca, Lefkas, Paxos, Corfu, Parga and Sami.

Plate N° 1: Connolly (top, center) was an exceptionally good instructor given a lifetime of experience sailing big boats. His program included "class" learning in the morning, and sailing in the afternoons and, on one occasion, the dead of night. He let the crew members sail most of the time, taking the helm only in dangerous conditions.

On this trip, those dangers included high winds and narrow berths in popular ports. Only Richard Buch managed to back the big boat into a narrow slip in Corfu (bottom left of Plate N° 3). In Parga, the winds were so strong and the seas so rough that even Johnny struggled to dock the big Bavaria; it took him a half dozen passes.

Plate N°s 2-4: Navigation and safety were subjects taught and practiced daily. Connolly repeatedly called upon his students to learn traditional sailing, by the stars; perhaps because he was a seasoned sailor, he didn't put all his trust in electronic gear and warned others not to. That said, it took a bit of practice for his Gen-X crew members to get the hang of using a sextant.

Every morning began with the Captain's question: "Where would you like to sail today?" He let the crew decide. They had all studied up before the trip and had favorites, but a daily consensus was easily reached. Wherever we moored for the night, Connolly would rent a car and give the crew a guided tour of the islands; he knew them well; this wasn't his first cruise in the Ionian Sea.

Plate N° 4: (Bottom) Captain John Connolly and the Ionian Sea cruise crew posed for a shot in the harbor of Paxos.

Plate N° 5: Captain John Connolly and the Ionian Sea cruise crew can be seen on the cliffs of Ithaca, as can I at the bottom of Plate N° 8.

Plate N°s 6-7: When we arrived in Ithaca, we discovered that the town was preparing for a festival. What luck, I thought, to have such a unique opportunity to shoot stock pictures. I went back to the boat and got my gack [equipment].

I thought about model releases but decided against bringing them; it would be too complicated, given the language barrier as well as the spontaneity of the situation. No releases would disqualify the shots from 90% of their stock-sales potential; but I reckoned I get the shots first and worry about releases later; and that turned out to be the right decision.

I went into full reportage mode; it was quite apparent that I was not just another tourist—and there were plenty of those; a couple of hundred yachtsmen (ahem, yachts-persons) had gathered in the town square by the harbor.

It was a marvelous setting and a cast of fifty were decked-out in traditional Greek costumes. The weather could have been better, but what the hell; better soft light than hard squinty shadows.

As the shoot began, I was struck by the lack of resistance on the part of my subjects. Usually, when you aim a camera at people, more than half will turn away and object; but these folks loved having their pictures taken. Soon it became apparent why.



Whilst I was photographing the dancers, I felt a tap on my shoulder; it was a cute little television PA [Production Assistant] asking me to get out of their shot. Sure enough, the local TV station had a crew on site.

Later, over dinner at Panos Georgios seaside taverna, the owner came to our table to greet us; he said he recognized me from the afternoon's festivities (I was hard to miss).

Festival dancers, Ithaca, Greece, 2007.

As his English was perfect, I asked about the festival. He explained it was a staged event produced by the Greek Tourist Promotion agency in Athens, and he was one of the island's event organizers.

We got to talking about who I was shooting for, which led to a discussion about the stock photography business and the need for model releases.

Plate N° 7: Panos and his wife are seen in the lower right. He offered to organize as many model releases as they could; that was a lot; they were well connected and knew all the townspeople who performed in my shots. In exchange, I gave them a full set of all my best shots, as digital sub-masters.

Plate N° 8: The only important picture is the one of me, on the cliffs of Ithaca. Do I look like a sailor, or what? Ha!

The last day of the Ionian sailing odyssey ended back where we started, the yacht-harbor in Lefkada. The sail back from Ithaca breezed by; there were good winds and fair skies that morning.

We arrived early. Steve spent the afternoon catching rays. He treated us to some pricey wine at the last night's meal together; we chose to eat aboard. Captain Connolly made a Mediterranean-themed pasta dish he dubbed, "Mariners' Delight." It was bits of every kind of sea creature available at the market (there wasn't much left by the time we got there) in a rich, garlicky tomato sauce with the tang of balsamic vinegar. I contributed a box of baklava and kataifi, for dessert, and a bottle of Ouzo, to serve with espresso, after dessert—even though I wasn't drinking then.

[Spoiler Alert: I was so chuffed with the Ithaca-festival shoot; I reckoned the material was worth mega bucks, in the stock-photo market. Haaaa ha ha!]



2007 | MODERN SAILING - GRECIAN ODYSSEY | CAPTAIN JOHN CONNOLLY | PLATE N° 1
See caption for details.



2007 | MODERN SAILING - GRECIAN ODYSSEY | CAPTAIN JOHN CONNOLLY | PLATE N° 2

See caption for details.

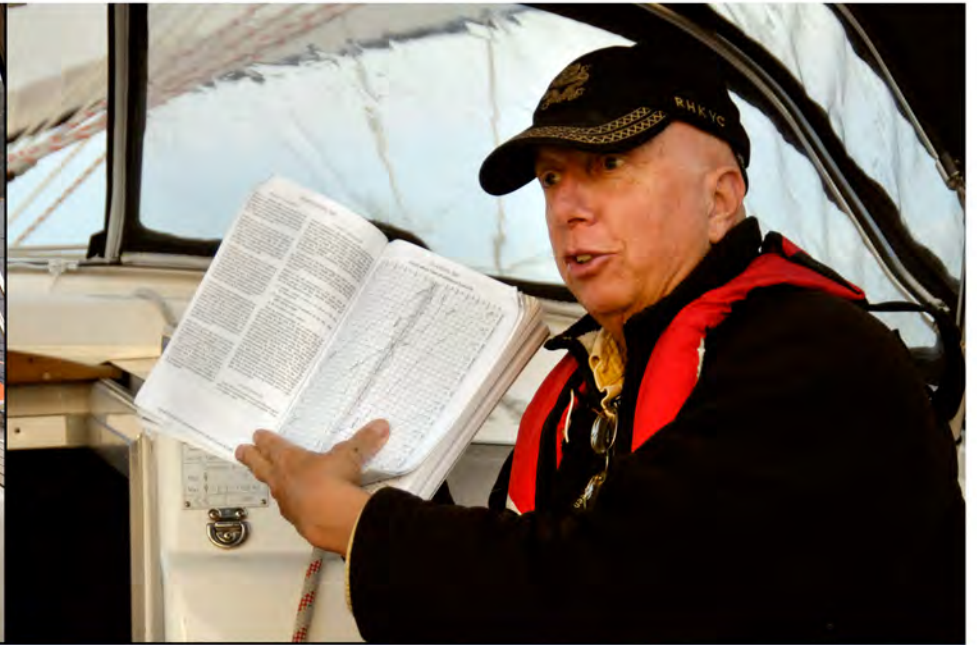


2007 | MODERN SAILING - GRECIAN ODYSSEY | CAPTAIN JOHN CONNOLLY | PLATE N° 3
See caption for details.



2007 | MODERN SAILING - GRECIAN ODYSSEY | CAPTAIN JOHN CONNOLLY | PLATE N° 4

See caption for details.



2007 | MODERN SAILING - GRECIAN ODYSSEY | CAPTAIN JOHN CONNOLLY | PLATE N° 5
See caption for details.



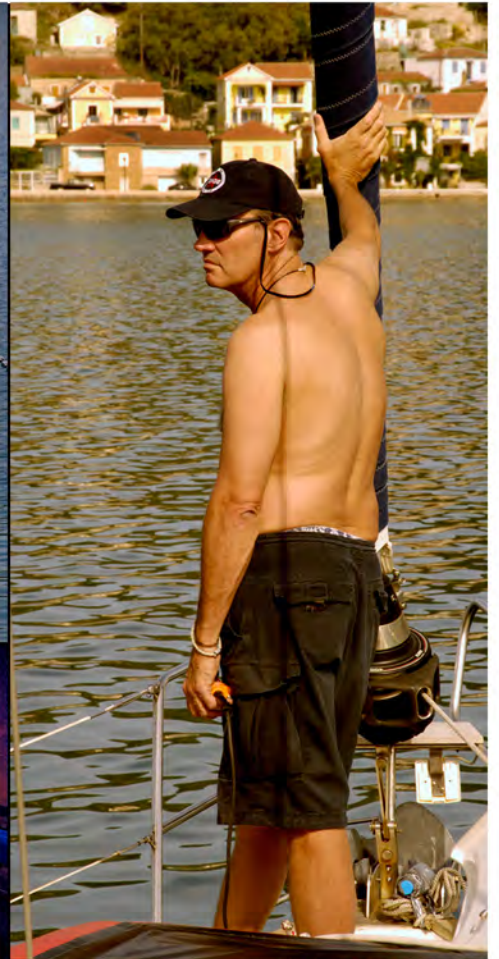
2007 | MODERN SAILING - GRECIAN ODYSSEY | CAPTAIN JOHN CONNOLLY | PLATE N° 6

See caption for details.



2007 | MODERN SAILING - GRECIAN ODYSSEY | CAPTAIN JOHN CONNOLLY | PLATE N° 7

See caption for details.



2007 | MODERN SAILING - GRECIAN ODYSSEY | CAPTAIN JOHN CONNOLLY | PLATE N° 8

See caption for details.

2007 – 07.07.07 – Lucky Number

I have a new lucky number now—777. It used to be 77, my draft number.

On July 7, my day started with a challenge—figuring out what to wear to an important wedding; Jon Bromberg was marrying off his daughter. I had received an invitation about two months earlier and originally decided not to go.

First, it was going to be a hassle driving 150 miles [241.4 km] each way to and from Bellevue, Washington, from Vancouver, BC. Second, and more to the point, Jon had dropped-off my radar a few years earlier; I gave up on him when my emails went unanswered. However, some background is in order.

When I closed Incredible Slidemakers, in 1981, Jon went to work for Randy Wills, managing Staging Techniques' LA office. In 1993, Jon left that job to go to work for Microsoft. A year later he moved his family up to Redmond and in 1995 they bought into a pricey home in Sammamish, a trendy gated community inhabited by well paid professionals working in Seattle's growing tech sector.

Jon was (deservedly) proud of his powerful new position, reporting directly to Bill Gates, managing a small department of stellar graphic designers gathered together in a department called Shows 'R' Us [a word play on the company called Toys 'R' Us.

Bromberg handed-out a lot of plummy staging contracts; he accumulated millions of air miles, flying to every major presentation made by Bill Gates; he told me once that he had more than a million miles in his United Airlines *Mileage Plus* account.

For a time, I was a beneficiary of Bromberg's largess. Almost as soon as I got set up on Vashon, he gave me contract work doing photography for his two media designers, Gary Carter and Kevin Feldman; their job was designing PowerPoint shows to illustrate Bill Gates' presentations.

The first job was right up my alley: they sent me to photograph Kelseyville, a little town of about 3,300 in Lake County, California. I stayed there for about a week, operating as a true reportage photographer, reconstructing the history of a fictional family that Microsoft was using as an example.

Gary Carter conceived a theme picture that conveyed the family's history—a bulletin board covered with memorabilia (pictures, press clips, blue ribbons, etcetera) accumulated through the years by the daughter. It was pure make-believe; no such bulletin board ever existed; the whole thing had to be made up.

JB (Bromberg) was reassured when his Gary and Kevin gave my work a thumbs up. Then, Jenny Mills joined the staff as an assistant producer and became my day-to-day contact, while Jon moved up the ladder to bigger and better things.

Carter and Feldman and I became true colleagues for a while; they made the two-hour drive from Bellevue to Vashon, on several occasions, to spend the evening playing pool and socializing.

Vashon pool room awards display, 1993.



That was during the time I was in restaurant mode; when the house rigged as a private dining room and gaming lounge; when the pool table was set up. The pool room doubled as a trophy room, decorated with most of my major AV awards; it was my “silent” salesman.

I brought out my best Scotch whiskeys on those evenings. The three of us sipped Lagavulin, Laphroaig and Talisker single malts. They were chuffed, playing pool on a table once used by the King of Sweden; spirits were high. I thought I had a future, working with them; but it all dissolved away.

Microsoft got tired of paying freelance photographers and video crews. They built Microsoft Studios (the original broadcast center for MSNBC, among other things). Jenny Mills was transferred to the new Studios operation; she pressured Bromberg to stop outsourcing and keep his work “in house.” Thenceforth, Gary and Kevin had to come up with convincing reasons to hire me. That was difficult; what I was doing wasn’t unique enough to make me indispensable.

The Microsoft parade moved on. Gary invited me to his wedding. He married a Microsoft lawyer and gave her a Mercedes as a wedding present. After that I never heard from him again, or Kevin. I didn’t hear from JB anymore after that either. Then, half a decade later, out of the blue, I got invited to the marriage of Bromberg’s daughter.

After considering the alternatives, I went to the wedding. I figured that the who's who of the Seattle AV sector would be in attendance—there might be some business connections to be made. I justified my mercenary tactic by reminding myself that JB was, after all, a Jewish New Yorker—a breed that has refined profiteering to a fine art. Ha!

I reckoned that I was probably invited to the wedding on the assumption that I would bring a gift of some value for the bride and groom. They say that, traditionally, a gift should be worth many times more than the cost of your seat at the banquet.

My gift was an 84-inch [213.3 cm] wide Light Jet print of *Baby Fish*;¹² it cost \$500 to print and laminate (see picture in earlier section, *2003 – Sailing Odyssey – Belize & Guatemala*).

I hadn't been to a big reception for ages and wondered if the size—and style—of my European-tailored dress clothes would fit. Although my suits still fit me after nearly twenty years (it pays to keep "fit"), they weren't the "right" clothes; the suits—custom-tailored at Old England in Brussels—didn't suit me; I wasn't a "suit" anymore. What to wear?

That sartorial situation turned into an existential event. It was to be a formal wedding; however, I wanted to dress with some "flair." After considering a beautifully-embroidered East Indian top, I went for a safari-style outfit, cut from a light-gray, wool-worsted fabric; but I couldn't find the right shirt to go with it; the ones I had were either too conservative or too whacky.

So, I went looking for a new shirt at a nearby, non-profit thrift shop run by West End Seniors Center, in the nearby Denman Mall.

It was a Saturday and Pamela Swanson was working at the thrift shop, as a volunteer. I saw her through the window before I went into the shop; she was adjusting clothes on a rack near the front window; she was wearing shorts, a fitting top and big earrings; but it was her long, light hair that caught my eye.

It took me some time to find a top I liked; she distracted me. I wondered if she was a customer or shop attendant. There was nothing on the men's rack, so I turned to the women's and found a bright pink sleeveless silk top that I eventually chose. When I took it to the counter, Pam rang up my \$3.00 sale with a smile that was genuine. She had blue eyes and was well tanned.

On my way home, I was hard on myself for not having asked her out; but she might have thought me rude to hit on her in the store. An old Viking axiom came to mind, one that Kurt Hjelte told me: "The shy boy never kisses the girl."

Although attracted to Pam, I found myself in a conundrum: After breaking off with Anna, I didn't think I would/could be with anyone again. However, moving to Vancouver gave me a new lease on life—nobody knew me; I had no baggage, no "history." I could be whomever I chose to be.

¹² Wikipedia: LightJet is a brand of hardware used for printing digital images to photographic paper and film. LightJet printers are no longer manufactured but are however remanufactured and resold; and their lasers are still manufactured.

I became flirtatious and dressed the part; I had something to prove (to myself)—my virility. I was a sexagenarian in more ways than one; a character straight out a Thomas Mann story; in some ways, and a rather pathetic one, at that.¹³

My goal was to latch on to a young Asian girl; there were thousands of them in Vancouver; the city is nicknamed “Hongcouver” for a reason; 110,000 Asian kids attend universities and English-language schools in Metro Vancouver.

My Swiss friend, Erik Gessinger—one of Ron Jacklin’s students, who worked for him after graduation—dated an endless parade of Japanese beauties, all in Vancouver to pass the TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language].

Watching Eric in action, I wondered if an alluring Nipponese princess could fall for an old guy like me. A four-decade age difference was certainly pushing it; but I tried, wearing brief and brightly colored clothes--and having no tan lines. I felt like a mutant-cross between Leonard Cohen and Tom Cruise. As a potential sugar daddy, I had a lot going for me; a *pièd-à-terre* in Vancouver and studio estate on Vashon Island. Anyway....

Half way home, I turned around, went back to the shop, and asked Pam out for a coffee. At first, Pam turned me down; but I was good at fast talking and she finally agreed to have coffee with me, at English Bay beach, a week hence.

The next Saturday, I met Pam at the thrift shop when she got off from work. We got take-out coffees from the Starbucks on the corner of Denman and Davie Streets, walked across to the beach and sat on a log.

Our conversation got thick fast. I discovered Pam was philosophical; she was a poet; we thought alike on many matters. I asked her out again and she accepted; but when we met that second time, there was some resistance on her part (or maybe I assumed too much). Pam told me that she was gay. I said that didn’t matter, that I liked our conversations. I meant it. For once, my dick wasn’t my compass. Ha!

We met again and that time found ourselves in bed together. I’m not sure who was more surprised at what happened, me or her. Soon enough, Pam was staying over a few times each week. She always left at dawn (and still does...!), which was a switch—it used to be me who snuck-away in the wee hours.

To say that Pam and I had different lifestyles would be an understatement. She was as fixed in her ways as I was in mine. But we agreed to a steady relationship and live together. We reckoned it was synergistic, i.e., $1+1=>2$.

¹³ Wikipedia: Speaking of Nietzsche, [Mann] says: "his personal feelings initiate him into those of the criminal ... in general all creative originality, all artist nature in the broadest sense of the word, does the same. It was the French painter and sculptor Degas who said that an artist must approach his work in the spirit of the criminal about to commit a crime." Nietzsche's influence on Mann runs deep in his work, especially in Nietzsche's views on decay and the proposed fundamental connection between sickness and creativity. Mann held that disease is not to be regarded as wholly negative. In his essay on Dostoyevsky we find: "but after all and above all it depends on who is diseased, who mad, who epileptic or paralytic: an average dull-witted man, in whose illness any intellectual or cultural aspect is non-existent; or a Nietzsche or Dostoyevsky. In their case, something comes out in illness that is more important and conducive to life and growth than any medical guaranteed health or sanity... in other words: certain conquests made by the soul and the mind are impossible without disease, madness, crime of the spirit."

Right after my affair got going with Pam, I moved from the Westport, at 1435 Nelson Street, to Hempstead Manor, two blocks down, at 1655 Nelson Street, closer to Stanley Park. Pam helped with the move. We were like two little ants, moving small loads on hand-carts. I counted our trips over the course of a month and they totaled more than 180! Pam was a committed helper. The move cemented the bond between us.

Ron Jacklin volunteered his teenage daughters, Lauren and Amanda, to help during my move. They were visiting from Kelowna (242 miles [389.4 km] northeast of Vancouver), where they lived with their mother, Ron's estranged wife Tanus. Truth told, Ron didn't know what to do with the gals when he went to the office; so, he loaned them to me. The two girls did their best to fulfill their dad's wishes, but they were no help at all. They couldn't figure anything out for themselves and sat around waiting to be told what to do (and how to do it). When I saw them dragging the corners of my velvet cushions on the pavement, I blew a fuse and sent them back to Ron. When the move was complete, Pam and I picked up where we left off—she would stay the night occasionally, but be gone way before I awoke, not to be seen again until (possibly) the next night (or possibly not).

Then there was the girl next door—Carol Smit—who moved into suite 104, the studio apartment next to my corner suite, while I was away.

To digress for a moment: At the time, I was embroiled in a political battle with the Strata Council of my building, Hempstead Manor [1655 Nelson Street] over an issue relating to suite-owners' rights—what they could have and/or do on their balconies (or patios). My activities were at stake; I used my patio as an outdoor extension of my studio; I did carpentry and spray painting out there. (I felt a bit like a street entertainer.) I needed a 2/3 vote—50 of 75 suites owners—for my amendment to become a Strata bylaw, allowing me to use my patio to make pictures. To get the needed votes, I polled every suite owner personally. I unabashedly knocked on doors, cold-calling everyone in the building. That was a very un-Canadian thing to do, I was told; but what the heck, I started door-to-door selling when I was 8 years old. I knocked on Carol's door, to solicit her vote. When our eyes met, there was a flash; momentary electricity. You know what I mean, I'm sure.

The next evening, Carol knocked on my door; she had a question, before signing the ballot in favor of my amendment. I was wearing nothing but a favorite old thread-bare pull-over that was a bit see-through; she had a hard time keeping her eyes focused on mine. I invited her in, for a glass of wine. Before long, I was massaging her feet. After that... well, you know....

Carol and I had a brief but intense affair. When I say "intense," I proposed to Carol that she quit her job and work for me, as a sales rep and assistant. I offered her a 40% cut. However, my sudden intense interest in her spooked Carol. When I gave her a special crystal to wear (I was wearing a matching one) she refused my gift and broke off with me, explaining that she couldn't give me what I needed; she couldn't be the person I wanted her to be. I smashed the crystals and moved back, to Pam.

Pam didn't *know* about Carol, but she had a sixth sense. She came banging on my door one afternoon, while Carol and I were in the sack. Pam was upset; she came to tell me it was over, for a while anyway. She was confused, she said; about herself, about us, about my effect on her. As I ushered Pam into the living room, a naked Carol snuck out of my place back to hers. Close call!

Still, Pam was going away if I didn't take some sort of action. I asked if I could at least call her; she said OK. Push come to shove, Pam had it all over Carol; the difference was *spirit*. Carol made our parting easy; she rejected me. Did I overplay my hand? That didn't matter, it was done, *finito*; that cleared the decks for Pam. But I'm getting ahead of myself, again.

2007 – Bjordahl Wedding – Catered Affair

At the end of summer, I hosted Pete Bjordahl's wedding. It was Indian summer and the weather was perfect. About fifty guests attended. The ceremony was held behind the house, in a secluded spot in the forested part of the property that I called "the fern glade"; the ferns there grew chest high there, providing a magical setting.



There had been a panic earlier; Pete's bride, Chloe, forgot to bring the wedding rings. Fortunately, one of her bridesmaids was still off island and able to pick them up.

Pete had the reception catered by his favorite Hawaiian restaurant (he was born and raised in Maui before coming to the mainland after college). I prepared the house for self service. I was happy not to be cooking; there was plenty for me to do, playing host while emptying ash trays and bussing dirty dishes. My outfit was a risqué combo of black short-shorts and a yellow see-thru Indian shirt; I was in manic mode then; Anna was gone and I was back on the block, more stoned than ever, looking for love. Although a few eyebrows were raised, the guests soon found me the life of the party. Joey and Randy Pharo brought several cases of champagne; the party went on well past 2:00 am, although most of the guests took the midnight ferry back to Seattle.

The first big party I threw on Vashon was for Lou Hetler's 80th birthday (my sister Kathy's husband); about one hundred people came to that affair, too. I had few problems handling everything pretty much single-handedly. It was a beautiful day, a warm summer afternoon; the party overflowed onto the back deck, easing the crowding inside the house. At the height of the party, the power went out. Yikes! No music, and worse—no toidies!

A few calls to the neighbors confirmed that everyone else had power. Puget Power assured me that a crew would be out to investigate—the next day. What to do? I handed out rolls of toilet paper and sent people into the woods behind the house, boys on the north end, girls on the south; it worked great; the party roared on, until dark.

2007 – Revelstoke & Kaslo – Sweet & Sour

When Troy Mayhew and his wife Agnes saw my work in the window of the Oh My Godard gallery, they and nearly caused a traffic pile-up when Troy suddenly stopped, to grab a parking space. Kelly and Paige were happy to give them my number, after Troy explained that he and Agnes were starting a gallery in Revelstoke, a Whistler wannabe, 352 miles [556 kilometers] northeast of Vancouver. The ambitious young couple visited my studio and pitched me about selling my pictures at The Cabin—a mini-mall and entertainment center for snowboarders, skateboarders and their ilk. The Cabin, they explained, was going to offer a variety of services and concessions—a shop selling fashions and winter-sports gear; a cocktail lounge and restaurant; a bowling alley; an indoor skateboard park; and art gallery. Although still under construction, parts of The Cabin were up and running. They were in the so-called “soft opening” stage, putting the finishing touches on the décor in the cocktail lounge, bowling alley and retail shop.

Troy told me I could use every wall in the place, save for one that was reserved for local artists. (The young man had a handle on community PR, eh?) The deal was that they would sell my canvases on a 70:30 consignment basis. It was the Christmas holiday season; people were in holiday mode, spending money; our spirits were high; we were clueless about the imminent financial collapse. The Mayhews asked if I could please arrange to hang my work before New Year’s Eve—the night of The Cabin’s grand-opening party. I drove down to Vashon to service the house, check-in at the Heron’s Nest, leave gifts with my sister and the Lorentzens, and drive the Rodeo up to Vancouver, for the trip to Revelstoke. The Luxury Liner would have carried way more, but it didn’t have snow tires. The Isuzu wouldn’t start, the battery was dead; it hadn’t been driven in quite a while. I only went to Vashon once a month; keeping the Rodeo’s battery charged was a challenge. Whenever the battery died, I just charged it up. However, mine was a “trickle” charger; recharging the battery took 12 hours; so, I spent an extra night on the Island before heading north the next afternoon. It rained very hard that evening, so hard that water started leaking from the transom and mull cover of the doors between the bedroom suite and studio. Yikes!

Donning rainwear, I got out the ladder and went up on the roof to look for the source of the roof leak. I reckoned that the integrity of the roof may have been breached by the horn cleats I installed to hang a giant net over the pond (to keep predatory birds from fishing there). Twelve cleats were fastened to the roof rafters with 8-inch [20.3 cm] lag bolts; the bolts penetrated the shingles; they had to be the culprits; but which one(s)? When the rain eased off, I did my best to seal every lag bolt with roofing cement (a kind of stocky tar). Geez, that stuff gave the roof a trashy, hillbilly look. The rain stopped before I finished that triage. That was good and bad. Working was more comfortable, but I would have to wait until my next trip to know if the roof was water tight. To detect any further leakage, I laid out pans under the leaky door frame.

Back in Vancouver, Pam helped me stuff the Rodeo with as many canvases as would fit. With the car packed we were ready to roll. The battery struggled to turn over the engine, but the car finally started and we left with a sigh of relief. I reckoned that all the battery needed was a good long highway drive.



Our trip plan had four parts. It began with a visit Pam's family in Kamloops (220 miles [355 kilometers]) north of Vancouver) on the way to Revelstoke. Part two was hanging my canvases at The Cabin, in time to ring in the New Year with Agnes and Troy. The third part involved photographing Revelstoke Mountain (to make *Blue Aurora*). Finally, we planned to visit Pam's father, in Kaslo, on our way home to Vancouver.

The Kamloops gang celebrating Halloween at the Dempster's trailer in 2016. Seated on couch, left to right: Kelly Garioch with Maggie; Travis Dempster, Tara Garioch. Front row: Annabelle Garioch, Charity McCarthy with Rylee, Ryan McCarthy.

Pam and I were by that time close enough that she felt comfortable introducing me to her family—her mother, Beverly, younger sister, Ann, and her brother in law, Blaine Dempster. We stayed at the Coast Kamloops Motel, near the top of the hill on the south side of town. The next morning, we took everyone out for an extended breakfast at the White Spot restaurant. I was surprised how much Pam and Ann looked alike—and how small and frail her mother was.

(Pam told me much later that I was scrutinized with disbelief; none of her family thought she would ever be going steady, at least with a man.)

After breakfast, Blaine helped me organize a new battery for the car. The only shop open didn't have the right size; it wouldn't fit under the hood; so, I put the new battery on the floor of the back seat and ran extra-long jumper cables out the back-right window, over the rear-view mirror and (by leaving the hood ajar) into the engine compartment. It took a while to jerry-rig, but the kluge worked and we were back on the road by lunchtime.

Route #1 was the only highway between Kamloops and Revelstoke. Fortunately, it was a major route, frequently plowed. Unfortunately, I had to pee well short of our destination, but there were no rest stops, we were driving through the boonies. It was dark and there was little traffic except for a few long-haul truckers working through the holidays; so, I pulled over to the side of the road to take care of business.

Climbing out of the Rodeo I slipped and took notice that the road was an ice rink; what appeared as clear road while driving was actually a two-inch-thick [5 cm] sheet of glare ice covered with a sprinkling of sand. That gave me the willies.

Back on the highway, I tried to hold my speed down to 50 mph [80 kmh] but I was repeatedly tailgated by truckers. They thundered along at twice my tempo; some of them drove double rigs; it was white knuckle stuff whenever those super-long, tandem trailers passed us.

We got to Revelstoke on the late side and stopped just outside of town, at the Peaks Lodge. The hotel looked terrific buried in fresh powder snow.

Peaks Lodge Winter Moon, 2008.



Although exhausted from the relentless tension of scary driving, after we checked in I went back out, to capture content for the illustration *Peaks Lodge Winter Moon*. The proprietors, Tara-Lea and Alek Shaman, couldn't help noticing me photographing the hotel. Alek came out asking me what I was up to. He was pleased to hear of my picture plans and welcomed us to the hotel. The next morning, Alek was a big help when the Isuzu wouldn't start (baby, it was cold outside). He took a break, from plowing the parking lots, to give me a boost. In gratitude, I sent them a 48-inch-wide [122 cm] stretched canvas giclée of *Peaks Lodge Winter Moon*, with a thank you letter and a request to refer any admirers to the display of my work at The Cabin. They came back to me with a request to sell postcards and prints of the panorama at their hotel, which they did for a few years. The next day was New Year's Eve, the deadline for hanging the show at The Cabin. Pam and I concentrated on getting all the canvases hung before dinner time. Troy and Agnes were kept jumping by Revelstoke revelers; there was little time to talk.



Blue Aurora, 2007

On New Year's Day, Pam and I drove around Revelstoke; there weren't many photo ops there. In the afternoon, we went up Mt. Begbie Road to photograph Revelstoke Mountain Resort from the southwest side of the Columbia River. We found a stellar viewpoint for a panorama of Mt. Revelstoke with the resort prominently centered. the ingredients shot there became the illustration titled, *Blue Aurora*.

Pam Swanson photo.



I had big plans for Blue Aurora; I reckoned that prints would sell like hot cakes, to tourists visiting The Cabin; I sent Troy and Agnes giclées in an assortment of sizes from six feet [1.83 meters] to six inches [15.2 cm], together with signage, a brochure and other promotional materials—a sizeable investment in time and materials. Oh, and I had another set of prints on display at Oh My Godard. If I recall, I sold one canvas, a small one. I have a bunch of them here in Vancouver; if you're interested, give me a call.

We stopped at The Cabin to say goodbye before heading to Kaslo, with our fingers crossed. The car was good if I kept the engine going; when I shut off the engine, it struggled to restart.

There were no auto services open during the New Year's holiday; I had no choice but to leave the engine running the entire day. We were burning a lot of gas but at least we were able to keep going.

The 197-mile [317-km] trip between Revelstoke and Kaslo, along Route 23, is a back-country bi-way that crosses the Columbia River at a place called Shelter Bay, where a small ferry transits the river every hour. There were a lot of cars lined up for the ferry when we joined the queue; it was apparent that we would be waiting at least two hours.

We couldn't stray too far from the car because, as above, we couldn't turn the engine off. We got a lot of dirty looks; but nobody came up to us, to complain about our blatantly extravagant pollution. The whole scene waxed existential.



To kill the time, we amused ourselves baiting blue jays, for pictures. I got enough good ones to make the illustration *Snowy Berries*.

Snowy Berries, 2009

I started getting nervous about our fuel supply when the second ferry left without us; that meant another hour's delay. After crossing the Columbia, the road followed a feeder river, through a long canyon.

As darkness descended, we found ourselves alone on the road. Our cell phone reception slowly faded out; the fuel meter hovered near empty and I was clueless about how long the battery would hold. It was well after dinnertime when we rolled into Kaslo. Pam knew a motel near her father's residence and we checked in there.

As we pulled into our parking space, the car upped and died. The engine quit before I even turned the key. That was one of those moments—a serendipity that really makes you wonder. I looked at Pam, she looked at me, then we both cast our glance to the sky and offered gestures of thanks to the Powers that Be—the power that I call my "lucky star."

The manager of Kaslo Motel gave us a jump-start the next morning and sent us in the direction of the town's only auto service, Kaslo Automotive. The place turned out to be a page from the past. Had I still been working for Car and Driver magazine I would have shot a picture essay about that unique, old-fashioned service station. I could tell, from the smell of the place, that we were in a garage that had serviced cars since the days of Model T Fords. Indeed, the septuagenarian proprietor's attire suited the scene; he wore a white technician's jacket with nary a grease stain.

It took some time to test my two batteries and the Isuzu's electrical system. He determined that my alternator was failing, intermittently charging the battery. He didn't have the parts needed to fix the Rodeo; but, he got on the phone and located the parts in Castlegar, at Columbia Auto & Radiator Service; that was far away, but on our way home. After charging my battery, the kindly garage proprietor charged me a pittance for all his efforts; his was a textbook case history about good, old-fashioned customer service.



Kaslo: David (left) Bill and Pamela Swanson, 2012

I already knew a lot about Pam's father, William "Bill" Swanson. She was very proud of him; he was kind of an obsession, more than most fathers are for most daughters; I hope he knew that. Pam had every reason to be proud of her dad; he was quite a man.

Bill Swanson worked his way from laborer to successfully-self-employed civil engineer; a guy who, in his late '60s, after retiring, went to Papua New Guinea for CUSO [Canadian University Overseas Service—the Canadian version of the US Peace Corps], to engineer and manage the building of rural roadways and bridges.

Although I knew a lot about him, he still surprised me when I met him; he was frailer than I imagined. Pam forewarned me that her dad tired easily and lived on a strict, self-imposed schedule. We took him out to eat at his favorite place, the Kaslo cafe; after that we had a visit at his apartment.

At my request, he set up his slide projector and showed pictures of PNG. He wasn't much of a narrator; but that was no problem with Pam there; she filled in all the details. Pam had near-total recall of the days when she and her brother David visited their dad in his jungle habitat.

To digress for a moment, about Pam's brothers: David Swanson is two years younger than Pam. The two of them are like two peas in a pod. David lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 2014, David retired from work as an operator at Pointe du Bois dam, for Manitoba Hydro (electric company). However, Dave's had a couple of dozen jobs, each more different than the others.

Pam has another brother, Lloyd, eleven and a half years her junior—roughly the same age difference as between me and my sister, Barbara. Lloyd retired from the Winnipeg Police, where he served on the bomb squad (seriously), Lloyd is the sanest of the family; he's willing to listen, is the most like his father and successfully raised three kids (two daughters and a son); that's why I've appointed him to be the executor of my will. Lloyd would pass the marshmallow test; that's big.



[Spoiler Alert: David brought Bill Swanson to visit Vashon the next summer. Her father was much more alive on that visit; it's how I like to remember him.

[They overnighted at the Back Bay Inn, about 10 miles from my place. My buddy Troy Kindred owned the place then and he took special care of them. We had dinner there after an afternoon tour of my house and property. The next morning, they left. The brevity of their visit astounded me.

David (left) and Bill Swanson, 2013. Photo by Pam Swanson.

[I think Pam's dad was more interested in knowing that his daughter was in good hands, than in sightseeing; but she says he was always like that, always moving on.]

Pam and I left Kaslo after an early breakfast and arrived in Castlegar at lunchtime. Columbia Auto replaced the dead alternator; they'd gotten advance notice of our imminent arrival from Kaslo Motors.

Columbia's grease monkeys swung into action as soon as we arrived. Pam and I took a stroll through the nearby streets; it was a short walk; the garage was near the highway at the edge of town; there wasn't much to see, do or eat. By the time we got back to the garage, the car was just emerging from the service bay. I was needlessly nervous when they handed me the invoice; their service was as fairly-priced as the Kaslo garage. I was learning that one of the biggest cultural differences between the US and Canada comes down to work ethic.

Under normal circumstances, obeying the speed limit, it should take 8-9 hours to make the 453 miles [729 km] drive from Kaslo to Vancouver. It was mid-afternoon before we hit the road to Vancouver, from Castlegar. Pam had to be at work the next morning and we were hard-pressed to make haste because a major winter storm was fast approaching from the east.

If the mountain passes closed, Pam would be AWOL [Absent Without Leave] from work. However, with a new generator, we powered our way through the passes ahead of the storm, missing each pass closure by just one hour. We pit stopped at Penticton, then filled-up on fuel and snacks in Hope. It was just after midnight when I dropped Pam off at her Haro Street apartment—the end of one my most epic driving trips.

Back in Vancouver, I organized a second shipment to The Cabin, of larger pieces. Troy's colleague took them to Revelstoke in his big, open-top, Ford F-350 truck. Then I set to work making a 20 X 4-foot [6.1 X 1.2-meter] panoramic print of *Moon Jellies (Night)*, meant to hang on the most prominent display space at The Cabin—the long wall in the bowling alley. After midnight, the bowling alley went into “disco” mode; ultra-violet “black light” made the bowling balls and pins glow in the dark.



Moon Jellies (night), 2006

Moon Jellies (Night) was chosen for the bowling-alley because its deep-blue, underwater tones were enhanced by the ultra-violet light. I made the giant print as a triptych [three sections] for ease of handling and for “protection” while printing.¹⁴ Why I chose Moon Jellies over Blue Aurora for that triptych remains a mystery.

2008 – Epson 9880 – Printing Improvements

After a tumultuous holiday season, dealing with Carol and Pam, I hunkered down in my new digs at Hempstead Manor.

There was a lot on my plate. Pictures were selling at Oh My Godard. Most of my time was spent printing pictures, building frames and stretching canvases. I also updated my website—www.mesney.com—to get more eyes on my new illustrations.

Spring came early; by late February I was photographing flowers, to make new pictures for the gallery. According to the market research I did at IKEA, floral subjects were big sellers; pictures of flowers came in fourth, behind landscapes, seascapes and abstracts.

¹⁴ A few of my super-long prints had failed: one from a software issue and the other when a spent-ink reservoir decided it was time to be emptied. The latter was especially painful—the failure occurred when the job was 90% finished, after 18 of 20 feet [5.5 of 6.9 meters] of canvas had already run through the printer. After those incidents, as well as the *Flower Moon* episode, I didn't trust the Epson 9800. Printing *Moon Jellies* in three parts cut potential losses to a maximum of 1/3 of the printing cost. In addition, local Revelstoke framers and art installers couldn't handle a 20-foot-wide picture. In the end, it didn't matter; as winter warmed to spring, the art market melted along with the snow.



To put my research to the test, I made an illustration of a dark purple iris, called *Flower Moon*.

The picture got its title from the Farmer's Almanac, where every full moon was given a name; Flower was the name of the full moon in May.

Although a sales success, *Flower Moon* became a nemesis. The picture proved problematic to print after I traded in my trusty Epson 7800 for a newer 9800 model (to solve the metamerism problems described earlier).

The new machine wouldn't print *Flower Moon* correctly; a horizontal, faded band appeared on prints made from any and every file of that image.

Flower Moon, 2007

The problem stumped Christopher Royals and Devan Burnett at Tricera Imaging, where I bought the machine. Technologically, the 9800 was basically the same machine as the 7800; the only difference was size—the 7800 printed on media up to 24-inch-wide [60.96 cm]; the 9800 printed on media in widths up to 44 inches [111.76 cm].

After wracking my brain in search of a solution and wasting a ton of ink and canvas, I gave up and called Epson headquarters in Long Beach, California. They referred me to their Canadian office in Toronto. The situation turned into a fix-it folly. FedEx made a small fortune flying test prints to Toronto and printer parts back to Vancouver while a procession of seven techs visited my studio between June and September, eventually replacing every vital part of the printer before admitting defeat.

First, I dealt with Epson's Canadian sales manager, Tony Rossi; then marketing manager Tamara Walsh; then a half-dozen others. None of them had ever encountered a problem like mine. Neither had any of the seven repairmen.

Actually, the repairmen were hardly that; they were humanoid robots who took directions over the phone about how to install the parts shipped in from Toronto. None of them knew a damn thing about how Epson printers worked. All said that the problem had to be my Photoshop files.

Finally, a real tech called Jesse figured out that it was the printer after all, not my Photoshop files. Jesse was one of Epson's top trouble shooters. At first, like those who preceded him, he couldn't accept the failure of my machine. He put me through hoops, to prove it was the machine's problem.

After every part of the 9800 had been replaced and the machine still didn't print *Flower Moon*, everyone was flummoxed; the repair department gave up. In the end, it took a stern letter to Epson's president, John Lang, to organize a replacement machine—a new 9880—almost a year later.

[Spoiler Alert: Two years later, I arranged to trade in the 9880 for a 9900. That deal was made with John Harrington of JVH Technical, in Seattle. His son, Ryan, delivered and installed the new machine in November, 2009. Harrington found a buyer for my used 9880, which facilitated the deal; Tyler Boley converted the 9880 for use printing black and white images.]

2008 – 🍷* Godard Gone – Eye Candy Fails

During the post-holiday retail doldrums, nary a picture was sold at Oh My Godard.

Undaunted, I kept on producing more canvases; but the sales slump dragged on through March.

Since they started repping me, the gallery had sold more than \$30,000 worth of my work, but I hadn't been paid my commissions. I didn't press them for payment but should have.

Then came news from the gallery's landlord that the Godard company was past-due three months for rent, that the gallery would be closed forthwith. Suddenly, we had less than 24 hours to get as much as we could out of the place before the doors were padlocked. Holy cow!

The episode that followed reminded me of the time when Peter Coppola and his cohort Lenny Nedlin stayed up all night emptying Peter's Place salon back in 1977.

Kelly, Paige, Jeff and I sprung into action. The gals stayed in the gallery wrapping the art and getting it ready for Jeff and I to schlepp in the company van. We took my stuff to Hempstead Manor and all the rest of it—about 100 pieces of Godard's art and the works of half dozen other artists—got taken to Kelly's condo, a block away from the gallery. What a chore that was, a real "Chinese fire drill;" but, we got it all out before the next morning.

The sheriff didn't lock the doors for another three days; we could have taken our time, although that wouldn't have made it any easier. Sometimes "shock therapy" is the easiest alternative.

As we were emptying the gallery, Jeff confided in me that Kelly and Paige hadn't been paid for a good long time; they were living off savings and loans from the Bank of Mom & Dad.

Jeff and I got along well after having installed the biggest picture I ever made—a 12-foot [3.66 meter] wide canvas of *Summer Sunset*—at Scott Dale's luxury condo in Burnaby. The print was hung over his equally wide bed (such a stud). We nearly got arrested doing that install. The walls were concrete and Jeff had to use his Dewalt drill in hammer mode. It was well past the construction-work curfew and the noise drove Scott's neighbor crazy. It was an adventure that, together with our trek up the mountain to shoot the *Whistler Moon* vista (picture in previous section, *2007 – Vancouver & Whistler Galleries – False Hope*), bonded us, like a father and his son, given the differences in our age.

The four of us held a powwow at my studio shortly after the evacuation. The gals were undaunted; they knew what they had sold, that there was no reason why the gallery should have failed; they wanted another go at it. I felt the same way. Although the gals never disclosed their numbers to me, I had a feeling that gallery sales were in the six figures; they had sold \$30,000 of my work in a year's time and we were just getting started.

Kelly and Paige knew I was committed to helping them succeed; among other things I had built and installed a Watchout promotional show that played nightly on a big screen in gallery's front window. Now, in our moment of need, I saw an opportunity to participate in their gallery business; that would assure retail display of my work.

I offered to lend Kelly and Paige \$13,658.88—the amount it would take to lease a retail space on Beaty Street, right around the corner from Canada Place.

[Spoiler Alert: I am a glutton for punishment.]

The gallery business appealed to me; at Oh My Godard, I learned that the art business could be lucrative; I saw how artists like Michael Godard and Thomas Kinkade made their millions—it was a question of scale and distribution; more eyes meant more business.

For example, let's say that 1% of the population buys art (not to be confused with crafts). Greater Vancouver had a population of roughly 2,500,000 people, 1% of which is 25,000. Continuing, 1% of those art buyers—250 people—might have interest in my work; and 1% of those interested prospects—25 people—might actually buy one of my pictures. That was roughly the number of pictures that I actually sold at Oh My Godard, as it turns out.

My hopes had been to piggy-back on Godard's success; I wanted to have wall space in all of his galleries. When I added-up the populations of the cities he was in, I saw the opportunity to sell 10 times the number of pictures. Making 250 pictures per year was doable, I could handle that volume in my current facilities; that would provide a good income.

At his Vancouver gallery, Godard's work out-sold mine, 10:1. The gallery also handled a half-dozen other "published" artists—those whose work is printed and distributed by publishers, like posters and calendars. Most of them sold on par with me; a couple of them outsold me 4:1. The bottom line was that, by my best guestimates, Kelly and Paige were turning over close to a half-million dollars a year. By extension, Godard's combined sales must have been something north of two million. That's why it came as a shock when the Vancouver gallery was shut, followed by most of Godard's other galleries. It didn't add up.

It turned out that Godard's partner absconded with all the money, forcing the company into bankruptcy. However, as far as I was concerned, the important lesson was that—barring theft or other disaster—the gallery business could be a money machine.

Kelly and Paige put together plans for a new gallery that looked good on paper. The Vancouver Winter Olympics were just a year or so away. Thousands upon thousands of people would flock to the Canada Place arena, many of them passing the Beaty Street gallery on their way.

As an investor, I wanted to be involved with the business as much as possible.

But after they got my money, the gals resisted me. They became reticent and possessive.

When I created a hip logo, it was turned down in favor of a cheesy design by Paige.

Logo design © 2008 Douglas Mesney



I suppose that I pushed too hard for too much too fast—my usual error.

Pushed aside, I confined my efforts to making new illustrations. I visited the new gallery less frequently. At the old gallery, I used to like watching the prospects, to see which pictures pulled them in; but there were never any people to watch. A bad sign.

Beaty Street turned out to be a flawed location. There was a lot of car traffic but almost no pedestrian traffic. Although there were a dozen new condo towers going up within a few blocks, they wouldn't be open for another year or more. By the end of the first month, everyone knew Eye Candy was in trouble; there were virtually no sales. The few days I went there to watch customers, only a handful of people walked by. There was nothing about the street that encouraged window shopping. The gallery was all but invisible, tucked away in the corner of a condo canyon. The high-rises blocked the light, making the atmosphere gloomy on all but the sunniest days.

To address the gallery's visibility problem, I came up with a plan to display giant pictures in the windows, a yellow one and a red one (those are the two most noticeable colors, according to research)—big enough and bold enough to catch the attention of passing motorists, who had only a split-second to notice what was in the gallery.

Kelly and Paige had decorated the window with wide a variety of pictures; there were two dozen of them, at least. I tried to explain that, in this case, less would be more; a few big pictures were better than a bunch of little ones. They agreed to do a test—what did they have to lose, nothing else was working; that is how I came to make the 80-inch-high [203 cm] prints of *Shikara Sunset* {left}, a yellow picture, and *English Bay Springtime*, a red picture. When those big beauties went in the gallery windows, passing motorists could “see” them in the blink of an eye. However, that didn't help. On one-way Beaty Street, there was no way a car could pull over and it was too complicated to get back; you couldn't just circle the block.



However, that didn't help. On one-way Beaty Street, there was no way a car could pull over and it was too complicated to get back; you couldn't just circle the block. The situation bore testament, that the three most important things for a successful gallery are location, location and location.

As the Christmas season began, and the uptown shops started filling, it became evident that few would be shopping at Eye Candy Design Solutions. Sales were not generating enough money to keep-up with the rent. I didn't have any more money to loan them, and I was their last resort.

When the new gallery closed, after only six months, it was a mercy killing. The alternative would have been a longer, more agonizing death. If the gallery had been able to hang on until the Olympics, would things have been different?

Actually, no. Things got far worse. The worldwide economic crash was a *force majeure* that would have ultimately doomed Eye Candy Design Solutions.

By the time things were over near, Kelly and Paige owed me \$16,892.02 for artwork sales as well as the \$13,658.88 that I lent them, to open Eye Candy Design Solutions. Needless to say, the invoices I sent them remained unpaid.

[Spoiler Alert: In 2009, I took Kelly and Paige to Court. For reasons, unknown (I like to think that honesty was their motivation), they kept their corporation alive and I was able to take legal action.

We ended up in binding arbitration; that's the way the small-claims system works in British Columbia; it is fast and efficient, very different than legal system in Seattle.¹⁵ I agreed to a "haircut" of 50% and monthly payments of only \$100. To the gals' credit, I have received payments on time for nearly ten years; we're well past the halfway point. When the final payment is made, in 2022, I will invite them to a champagne dinner, to celebrate—*inshallah!*

2008 – Indian Odyssey – Pandey Wedding

Earlier that year, fragments of a letter from Narbdeshwar Pandey arrived.

Pandey had written the letter on cheap paper; it fell apart in the international post; some kind clerk taped it back together, after a fashion. The partial address Pandey scrawled was water-stained and barely legible; but somehow Pandey's letter made it to my condo post box.

¹⁵ I got to know more than I ever wanted to about the American justice system [sic], when I sued John Knudsen for malpractice; his improper preparation of a prenuptial agreement cost me a bundle, when Anna and I divorced. When my lawyer, Nancy Sorensen, submitted the pre-nuptial agreement to Pete Buck, Anna's attorney, he just laughed. For technical reasons, the pre-nuptial agreement made by John Knudsen was invalid. I reckoned that Knudsen owed me what I lost to Anna. It was difficult to find an attorney to take my case—lawyers don't like suing their colleagues, the ones who do are considered vultures—but, Andrew Benjamin agreed to take my case, for a fee of \$5,000 and 50% of the winnings. He did a good job; he won the case; however, the judge made no monetary award, stating that there was no precedent case in which a monetary award was made, that the black mark on Knudsen's record, at the Washington State Bar Association, was sufficient reprimand. For me, it was throwing good money after bad.

Inside the “envelope” was what seemed to be an invitation. Pandey had done his best to write it in English; but I couldn’t figure out what he was saying.

A week later I got a follow-up call came from Pandey, in New Delhi, asking if I got his letter; he explained that he wanted me to be the guest of honor at the wedding of his daughter, Priyanka, to Jitendka Dubein. How could I say no to that?

What a photo op, being at a genuine Indian wedding. Nuptial celebrations in India are elaborate; they go on for days; the costumes are colorful and ornate. I enthusiastically agreed to go to the wedding and asked Pandey to organize a trip to Kashmir afterwards.

In early May, I embarked on a six-week Indian odyssey, a triangular course between New Delhi, Khumhati (a remote village in Bihar province, 1,250 miles [2,000 kilometers] east of New Delhi), and Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, passing through the holy city of Amritsar on the way.

I burned-off United Airlines airmiles for the flights to and from New Delhi, paying only for my excess baggage, which was considerable. In addition to a duffle bag containing six weeks’ worth of formal and informal clothes (attire for warm and cold climates) I had a cabin-sized Temba equipment tote carrying a digital darkroom (Dell *Inspiron 8200* laptop, two LaCie hard drives, as well as the electrical cords and converters needed to run the stuff).

I packed all the gear at the Vashon studio; on the way back to Vancouver, I stopped in Seattle to pick-up my favorite travel food—a dozen Noah’s blueberry bagels (now called Einstein’s) on Capitol Hill. Noah’s used real fruit, not the horrible “natural” blueberry flavor that so many other bagel makers use; I can smell that phony stuff a mile away—and did you know, “Natural Flavors” are actually artificial?

The bagels were individually packed in Ziploc® baggies and tucked into odd corners of my luggage. Three weeks later, sitting in my Khumhati “hotel” room (a neighbor’s house), I ate the last of those bagels; it tasted as fresh as the day I bought it (OK, the day after). that made me wonder, about the quantities of preservatives that Noah’s bakery must have used; because, in the hot desert climate of Bihar, fresh-made local bread went moldy in just a few days.

When I arrived in New Delhi, Pandey’s brother, TK, picked me up at Indira Ghandi International Airport [DEL]. He spotted me easily, I was wearing my “guerilla” outfit—black, safari-style attire with a matching, black, multi-pocketed, “photo vest.”¹⁶

TK spoke very little English but was very chatty nonetheless. As best he could, TK explained to me that he was in several businesses. I didn’t understand much; but his prattle passed the time as we rolled through the city.

¹⁶ On my trip to Rajasthan, in 1994, when Pandey was my travel guide, I learned how annoying beggars can be, especially the gangs of kids that surround you, groping you all over, reaching for anything of value and running away with what they find. All my exterior pockets had both zippers and button-down flaps; I had interior pockets for especially valuable stuff, like money and travel documents.

TK drove past New Delhi's familiar post-card scenes and continued for some time. We ended up in a blighted neighborhood, where he left me at a fleabag hotel, explaining that Prem Pawa would pick me up the next morning, to serve as my guide.

The hotel was the sleaziest dump I ever stayed at. There was a single bare lightbulb illuminating a concrete room with peeling paint and a solitary electrical outlet; the bed was a sheet of plywood with a 2-inch-thick [5 cm] mat stuffed with lumpy cotton; the shower was a trickle of cold water; there was a hole in the floor for doing your duty; and the whole place reeked of chlorine—I guess that was a plus.

Although it was midnight, I was wide awake, given the 12-hour time difference between Vancouver and New Delhi. I was too nervous to sleep; the locks on the door were flimsy; the windows had no bars; anyone could sneak in. I locked my gear cases and chained them together (making them hard to move); nonetheless I couldn't sleep.

At 8:00, Pawa arrived right on schedule. He came to my room, commented on its Spartan qualities, and explained that Pandey, while trying to be generous, couldn't afford better. He promised that things would improve, when he was handling the details. He was going to escort me to Kashmir, after the wedding. His immediate mandate was to see that I got on the right train at the Central Station, to Khumhati. I didn't know what to expect after the previous night's experience, but at least his car was nice and he even had his own private chauffeur.

At the station, I was glad to have Prem Pawa by my side; the station was a sea of humanity; thousands upon thousands of people, waiting for trains that were usually late—sometimes for hours, or even days—or unexpectedly cancelled. The trains to Bihar were the most problematic—it was the poorest Indian province, the one with the most train robberies. [Yikes!]

Prem apologized that tickets were not available in first class; I would be travelling second class on the way to Khumhati and third class on the return. I was glad to have locks and chains.

While waiting for the train, Pawa and I discussed the next leg of my trip, to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. I was lucky that the war between India and Pakistan subsided; I happened to be in India during a three-month cease fire; there was a window, an opportunity to visit the legendary, contested region.

Pandey's arrangement with Pawa, to take me to Kashmir, was a kind of "carrot" to get me to attend his daughter's wedding. Pawa explained that Pandey would pay him for the trip, that Pandey had borrowed money for the entire wedding from him, that the trip to Srinagar was included in that loan. Pawa further explained that Pandey was going to repay him by becoming his indentured servant for six years. What?

I didn't want any part of that deal or any other that would enslave poor Pandey. I told Prem that I would pay my own way, and that I wanted to go first class. We agreed on a fee of US\$ 6,000, which I settled in cash. The whole thing was like a scene in a movie, with me counting out hundred-dollar bills in that dilapidated hotel room, spreading them across the filthy mattress.

With a broad smile, Pawa picked up the cash and explained that when I returned to New Delhi from Khumhati, I would stay the first night at his home, with his wife and daughter.

We waited at the station for six hours before the train to Bihar arrived. When we ran out of things to talk about, it was totally boring; but we both endured. Prem wouldn't let me out of his sight. He came aboard with me to make sure that I got the correct bunk on the train; that was a good thing—somebody else was already sitting in my spot. There were some sharp exchanges before I could claim my space.

There were four bunks in my cabin; mine was an upper berth; normally I would have been happy about that; but, not in this case, because my gear was chained under the lower bunk.

The train was a milk run; it ran along the local track slowly and made stops every 100 miles or so [160 kilometers]. The frequent stops were mildly interesting during the day, but annoying as hell at night. At each station, local vendors would troupe through the cars loudly hawking drinks and snacks. The official railroad caterers came through three times a day, on a schedule; they were way more discreet.

I was never for want of food on the trip, but was starved for privacy. My cabin mates changed thrice before I arrived at Khumhati station, two days later. One guy was a complete boor who picked his nose and ate it, he snored a lot too. The next day a young couple replaced him; they kept to themselves and snuggled quietly. They were replaced with another couple and their little daughter, maybe 6 years old; they spoke English, Halleluiah!

It was nice to be able to converse, after not understanding anything for the last 48 hours. They confirmed when I should be getting off the train and gave me some tips about how to order food from the cabin attendants. (I didn't want any food, for fear of having to use the toilets. Yuk!)

Once passed the city limits of New Delhi, the landscape became one continuous, unending wheat field, an ocean of golden grain being harvested by men and oxen; it was a scene that hadn't changed in centuries. The journey made me realize that India is another world, a land of villages that are so remote as to make their governance anything but centralized. I stepped off the train at Khumhati and into that other world.

I don't remember what I thought the place would be like; but, in my imaginings, it was nothing like what it turned out to be. We were deep in the boonies; the town was ramshackle; the train was surrounded by throngs of villagers, hundreds of them, who came to meet arriving passengers, some of whom were travelling on the train's roof. I hadn't seen Pandey in fourteen years; what would he look like?

Everyone looked the same in the sea of faces that stared at me as I worked my way down the steps of the train, with three big bags. Wanting to be my porter, various guys tried to wrench the bags from my hands; a couple of them didn't want to let go; the situation was a bit scary, until Pandey found me. I was easy to spot—the only white guy getting off the train. I must have looked a sight, having slept in my clothes for three days, without washing or shaving.

Pandey and his sons, Raj, Kamal and Vinay, came to fetch me in the well-used family Ford—a dirty-white sedan with a cracked windshield and thread-bare upholstery. Some angry person at the station knifed his rear tire, probably for parking close to the train, as if he were like some kind of VIP.

After stuffing my gear safely in the car, the boys set to and had the tire changed in mere moments. I was surprised that everyone seemed to take the whole incident in their stride; they dropped off the slit tire at a repair garage on the way out of town and off we went to the Pandey house.



300-degree view of the Pandey compound from just outside the front door of the house I called home.

The Pandeys were of the privileged, formerly-priestly, Brahman caste. The Pandey house (leftmost in the picture, above) was at the center of a family compound, the nucleus of a tiny village, located a half-hour's drive from the nearest town, way out in farm country. The Pandey family lived there for generations. Narbadeshwar's father, a great progenitor, was the patriarch. His six sons kept the farm going, with their wives and families.

The Pandeys lived off the land; most of the men tended the fields and farm animals; just a couple of them worked, to bring in expense money; perhaps that gave them entitlements? I don't know. Certainly, they lived a subsistence life compared to Western standards; it was like stepping back several centuries.

My room was supposed to be a thatched-grass hut that the boys built in my honor. Three tethered cows, two sheep and a dozen chickens roamed the grounds just outside the "window." I was chuffed with the little grass shack, but worried about my gear. Pandey agreed there was a security problem. I gave him some money and he arranged to rent his neighbor's house for me. They were both excited to make some greenbacks.

The neighbor's house wasn't electrified, nor was the Pandey's for that matter. They hired generators and an electric-light show for the wedding—the whole house was wrapped in color lights which flashed on and off; it was primitive; but in Khumhati, it was tripping the light fantastic. Pandey got the electricians to rig up a light bulb and a plug socket in my room; the jumble of wires—many of them bare—was a real Rube-Goldberg kluge; the generators only ran a few hours each evening; I managed to scrape by with only a few brief blackouts.

In Pandey's village, I was like *The Man Who Fell to Earth*—some kind of friendly alien who wanted to take pictures of everything and everybody. The village kids couldn't get enough of me; every morning, twenty of them would be waiting outside the front door of my house; I could see their eyes peering in the keyhole and through the cracks between the wall boards. When I emerged from the house, they squealed with delight. The kids followed me around, wherever I went; I felt like the Pied Piper.

A few eyebrows were raised when I showed up wearing short shorts and a see-through top made of saffron-yellow silk; but after a while they got used to my presence. I made it a point to take a bazillion pictures of everyone during that first day; I wanted my cameras to be familiar, so that I would not be intrusive at the wedding.

To impress everyone, I made a big fuss about shooting a portrait of the bride.

She got all dressed up for the picture and they let me into the private, ladies' quarters, where there was a wide balcony with open-air lighting.

There I took the picture that became the illustration *Indian Bride*.



Indian Bride, 2008

Although I looked forward to photographing the wedding, I got a little irritated when it became apparent that Pandey had invited me to be the official wedding photographer; suddenly I had responsibilities that I didn't particularly want. Nor did I know "how" to shoot an Indian wedding; I had no idea what the ceremonies were about, what the customs were.

For example, I made a real faux pas when posing the bride and groom for their wedding portrait. It was after midnight, time for the bride and groom to leave. Everyone was gathered in the courtyard, to wish them a bon voyage. The place was packed; you could hardly move. At the last minute, Pandey ran up to me and asked if I had taken a portrait of the couple.

The portrait was one I had been trying to shoot for a couple of days, but the couple was always either busy or not properly attired. When I replied that I hadn't, Pandey put a stop to the proceedings, corralled the couple, and delivered them to me. What fun.

It was the middle of the night and I had no flash. There was only one place a portrait could be shot—where there was a light bulb bright enough to illuminate them.

With impatient crowds of revelers surrounding me, anxious to throw their rice and get back to the party, I posed the couple on the stairs under a single, bare-bulb light that dangled from the ceiling on an improvised wire. I positioned Jitendka, the groom, on the top step and his bride, Priyanka, to his left one step down (she was a bit taller). They seemed hesitant but followed my instructions.

That's when the crowd started laughing and Pandey came running out to rearrange the pose, so that the bride sat in the highest position.

The couple finally left at 2:00 am; then the real party got going. The entire village was invited. Everyone came from miles around for the feeding frenzy. More than 300 guests feasted in one giant tent. In an adjacent, larger tent, local pop stars staged a rock concert that carried on 'till dawn. There wasn't any alcohol; but I was pretty stoned on bud.

At 4:00 am, when my camera batteries went kaput, I called it a night. When I woke, at noon, the last of the revelers was just leaving and the Pandey brothers were embroiled in a loud, angry argument, about money. The wedding hadn't brought in enough money to cover its costs and Pandey wanted to get additional contributions from his siblings; but they wanted no part of that; it wasn't *their* daughter's wedding, after all.

In the end, Pandey had to assume all the costs; he borrowed more money from Prem and paid him back by working as his servant for six years. Pawa gave me the financial *detailia* during the long drive to Srinagar; the whole arrangement appalled me; so much so that, when I got back to Vashon, I wired Pandey \$1,000, to pay Prem, buying him a year of freedom.

When I arrived back in New Delhi from Khumhati, Prem was there to pick me up at the station. We headed back to his home; it was in a tree-lined, residential area smack-dab in the middle of New Delhi. The neighborhood was like an Indian version of Vancouver's West End community.

Pawa's big and well-appointed apartment attested to his success as a businessman. His wife cooked a meal I'll always remember. His daughter was a sharp cookie, a college girl who spoke perfect English. The conversation around the table was lively and engaging; she—and her parents—were clearly part of a new Indian culture, breaking from past traditions.

The drive from New Delhi to Srinagar was around 600 miles [965.6 kilometers]. Under the best of circumstances, the trip would take about 20 hours; but there were always delays, some of them involving fatalities. The northern half of the trip traversed a narrow, ill-maintained, two-lane road that wound its way up and over some rugged mountains. There were plenty of "cliff-hangers," especially at night. But, once we were on that road, there were few exits and they were far from each other. Fuel stops were even scarcer and there was no place to stop between exits.

Prem had one music tape; it played on an endless loop throughout the three-day drive; it was like the theme music for a weird reality show we were taking part in.

Highlighting the drive north was a side-trip to Amritsar, to see the Golden Temple, the holiest Gurdwara [place] of Sikhism, where the Adi Granth [holiest scripture of Sikhism] is displayed and pilgrims line up hundreds deep to see it. The grounds of the Golden Temple didn't look like much from the outside; but when we entered the place my jaw dropped. There were so many photos to be taken, I didn't know where to begin. After the first three hours, Prem got tired of waiting for me; he didn't want to leave me; but I sent him away, asking him to return one-half hour after dark.



Golden Temple Pilgrims, 2008

The illustrations assembled from the frames shot at the Golden Temple were some of my most complicated Photoshop work. My favorite is *Golden Temple Pilgrims* (above), a panoramic-format, 360-degree view of the entire Gurdwara, with its central Golden Temple.

The Golden Temple is actually an island, in the center of a huge reflecting pool, where pilgrims like to “Baptise” themselves. The intricate artistry of the Golden Temple staggered me. For example, the text of the Koran is engraved into the marble walkway around the reflecting pool; enabling pilgrims to recite the Koran while circling the reflecting pool on their way to see the Adi Granth.

After a while, the gendarmerie of the Temple grounds took an interest in me; they wanted to know what I was doing, why I was there so long, and why so many pictures? They were colorfully clad in the costumes of Sikh warriors, replete with big swords. I won them over, asking them to pose for portraits; they complied and never even hinted for a tip (amazing but true).

We stayed at a first-class hotel in Amritsar; I was impressed with Prem’s choice. It was nice having unlimited hot water, a mini bar and a good restaurant to indulge in. I had Palak Gosht (lamb with spinach sauce) a favorite that is a pain in the butt to make (mine and the sheep’s). The dish I had in Amritsar was way different from the Rajasthani versions I was familiar with; it made me realize I was entering a new cultural zone. It was nice being a bit drunk for a change; but makes you think, booze gives you an excuse not to.

The next morning, our chauffeur met us with a friendly smile and a van so clean it looked like it just came from the dealership. Travelling in the van was super comfortable; I was certainly getting my money’s worth with Pawa. The service was as good as it could get wherever we went. Plus, Prem quickly learned how much I liked taking pictures; once clued in, he started recommending places.

We got to Srinagar in the late afternoon the next day; our destination was a guest home owned by Prem, a private resort for the Srinagar’s well healed. Originally, Pawa’s clientele had been the city’s plutocrats.

However, the territorial war(s) between Pakistan and Kashmir interrupted commerce. With regime changes came purges and with the capping of corruption, local officials and businessmen lacked the wherewithal to wine and dine at Pawa's high-end hotel. Thus, Prem pinned his hopes on tourists—like me—to shore-up his sagging sales.

We talked at length about that on the drive to Srinagar. Pawa was optimistic that Kashmir was on the road to peaceful coexistence; that the conflict of Sikh and Muslim civilizations was ending, once and for all; that a new era was beginning.

[Spoiler Alert: events since have dashed those dreams; between floods, earthquakes and the ongoing hostilities, I fear that Pawa's house may no longer exist.]

Prem hired Muneer Ahmad Jalla, the son of his cook, Sunhil Jalla, to be my guide in Srinagar. Pawa had too much to do, restoring his hacienda to its former glory; the house had been commandeered by the military and used as an officers' residence. They left the place in reasonable shape but the house—the entire city—needed a lot of work, to appeal to international tourists.

I gave Pawa my two cents worth—a recommendation to make the parlor into an exclusive restaurant, featuring the fabulous food prepared by Sunhil. Geez was he a good cook; I must have gained a stone during my week at Prem's place.

When we first arrived, I was a bit disappointed that Prem's house was located on the far outskirts of Srinagar, away from the action, downtown. Then I discovered that there was no "action," that the city was in a shamble and not the safest place either. A privileged few, like Prem, lived in communities protected by the military; the hoy polloi lived in ghettos, downtown.

The city of Srinagar lies between the banks of the Jhelum River and northeast shores of Lake Dal. Muneer was the perfect guide, a young man wise for his age; he knew all the ins and outs of Srinagar; but there wasn't much to see or do downtown.

Muneer took me to his favorite coffee shop, a peaceful sanctuary tucked away in the basement of a shopping plaza; I hadn't had a decent cup of coffee for weeks; we stayed for a second cup; the conversation turned personal. Muneer wanted to know my opinion of Prem Pawa; he hoped to follow in his father's footsteps, helping Pawa refurbish his guesthouse, rebuild his business. I encouraged Muneer but told him to set his own terms; I warned him about getting himself into situations like those of his father and Pandey, who were indentured to Pawa.

We wandered through the streets of Srinagar; I didn't take too many pictures, not only because there wasn't much to shoot, it was just too dangerous to walk around with expensive camera gear; I was glad to have Muneer at my side. More interesting to me was the sprawling houseboat community on Lake Dal, where half the population (~one million in 2008) lived in houseboats and got around in little boats, called shikaras—a thoroughly Venetian lifestyle.



Kashmir Dream, 2008

Muneer clued into my photo objectives and had the patience of a saint. One afternoon, we sat parked at on the eastern shores of Lake Dal for four hours, waiting for the sun to set behind the dramatic clouds of a thunderstorm, to capture the sky for my panoramic illustration, *Kashmir Dream* (above).

We hired private shikaras to taxi us all around the water world. Other boats pulled up next to ours, with goods to sell, including certain contraband intoxicants; I wanted to buy some for us, but Muneer warned that they might be police trying to entrap me, for a little baksheesh.

One afternoon we crossed the lake to Muneer's home. I met his mother, who served us tea. It was a unique glimpse into life in Srinagar. I was surprised to see a dishwasher in the kitchen, and most of the same modern conveniences that we enjoy in the West. Muneer explained that all was good, except for his grandmother's illness (cancer I think) for which there was no help available in Srinagar.

On my last day in Srinagar, Muneer took me to Ahsan Mountain Resort. To get there, we drove through dozens of settlements—I would call them towns, but they weren't; they were more like tin-shed outposts; each seemed grubbier than the last. Every place we went, the landscape was spoilt by plastic bags, caught-up in trees, fences, utility wires, just everywhere.

When we crossed the border between Jammu and Kashmir, I had one of the scariest moments of my life; the road crossed a military check point. Everything and everybody in every vehicle was searched. Yikes!

I hadn't considered the possibility of being searched. I had a film can full of weed in one pocket and cigarette papers in another. Muneer, the driver and I were asked to leave the van and report to the guard shack, while the vehicle was searched. At the guard shack, each of us was patted-down—they didn't have any electronic detection equipment (thank goodness), just a couple of guys with big guns.

Of course, because they had Indian papers, the driver and Muneer had no issues with the border police. On the other hand, I, wearing my usual multi-pocket photo attire, was more interesting (and probably rich).

As I am a white guy, prejudice worked in my favor; neither guard wanted to be the one to feel me up. Eventually one of them had to and did; as his hands slid down the pockets of my photo vest, I could feel him fingering the film canister; my heart skipped a beat despite my utmost efforts at self-control.

I normally had good self-control; I even passed a lie detector test once, as mentioned earlier. The investigating policeman stared me in the eyes throughout the pat-down; I stared right back.

Looking people in the eye was something I knew how to do; I learned the “technique” selling door-to-door when I was a kid and perfected it at Queens College, to impress my professors; later, I used the technique while delivering hundreds of presentations to all kinds of people and groups. The secret is to look through the other person’s eyes, to look at what is *behind* them.

Fortunately, the soldier got more interested in another pocket where he found a screwdriver and focused on it. That was odd, hadn’t he ever seen a Phillips screwdriver before? They let us go; I figure they just weren’t in the mood for trouble, as in foreign relations.

Little did those soldiers know that I had US\$500—a small fortune in local currency—tucked away in my wallet, for baksheesh.

On our way back to Srinagar, I gave Muneer the film can of weed, the cigarette papers and a small pipe. As I pulled them from my pocket, Muneer gasped and shook his head; I nodded in agreement—I had been pretty stupid to bring that stuff with me. I told him to save any seeds he found in the stash and plant them in his backyard garden. Ha!

Muneer came along when Prem drove me to the Srinagar International Airport [SXR] the next morning. I was a bit nervous about flying back to New Delhi; Indian airlines had the aviation industry’s worst safety record. However, the alternative was a two-day bus trip along the same dangerous road that Prem drove—no, thank you.

We hugged and said our farewells; it was the last time I ever heard from Prem. Muneer stayed in touch—sort of. Since then, I have gotten two emails from him; the last one was two years ago, when he wrote to say that his family was still living near the eastern shores of Lake Dal, and that he was working at the airport in Bangkok, selling Indian silks at a duty-free shop.

When I arrived back from Srinagar, Pandey met me at Indira Gandhi Airport [DEL]. He and his wife, Durga Devi, had returned from Khumhati right after the wedding, together with their teen-age son, Vinay. I had a twelve-hour layover in New Delhi; my flight back to Vancouver didn’t leave until 2:00 am.

Pandey drove me back to his apartment, to spend the afternoon and enjoy some home cooking; on the way, we passed through some of the worst parts of New Delhi; the traffic was horrendous; it took two hours; I started to think I should have waited at the airport.

There was much confusion when we arrived at Pandey’s housing complex; he couldn’t find a parking spot; I had to wait in the car while he disappeared down a darkened alleyway and returned with his son, Vinay, and another a man, presumably a neighbor, who kindly removed his car, allowing Pandey to park in his spot. I refused to leave my gear in the

car; with Vinay's help, we schlepped my heavy bags through a catacomb of narrow passageways, to the Pandeys' apartment.

The Pandeys lived in a concrete ghetto, a maze of six-story, walk-up, apartments. Their building, like others in the complex, was the next-best thing to a slum; the inhabitants were dirt poor, but did their best to keep their community habitable and civilized.

For example: although sewage openly flowed through the streets, it did so in purpose-built channels; although the walls of Pandey's apartment were bare, they were cleanly painted; although there were no carpets, the floor was well washed; although there was only a single electric circuit, they had a small fridge and an electric cookpot.

The Pandey's was a small flat, with just two rooms. Narbdeswar and Durga slept in the smallest room; their kids slept in the larger room, which also served as the living room. The apartment's single closet space served as the kitchen. The only running water came from a tap in their ~~bathroom~~ toilet (a closet). The apartment was lit by a single bare light bulb light dangling from the ceiling on a loose wire; it took my eyes a minute to adjust.

Durga emerged from the kitchen to smile hello—she spoke no English at all; neither did Vinay. Narbdeswar did his best to be an interpreter; he suggested that Vinay give me a tour of the ghetto; that was a welcomed relief from the strained conversation.

It was getting dark as we walked through the alleys, trying to avoid sewage splashed by passing cyclists. Vinay took me to the neighborhood temple, where a festival was underway. Fifty or so colorfully-dressed worshippers circulated around the perimeter of a large assembly hall, stopping to worship over-sized statuary depicting the Hindu gods, e.g., Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, et al. It was a rare photo op, but I had no camera and my presence was a gross distraction; a bunch of unabashed kids tugged at my photo vest and pockets, trying to get my attention. After Vinay made his rounds, we headed back to the apartment; time was beginning to get tight.

On the way back, Vinay bought some snacks from street vendors; God knows what was in them; but at least they were cooked. Durga served them together with an odd drink that Narbdeswar explained was only served on special occasions—a cloudy, gray-colored liquid with little bits of spongy white stuff floating on top. I thought it might be lemonade with mini marshmallows (it wasn't).

I didn't want to drink the stuff; it smelled nasty; I knew it was made with local water that had not been boiled; but I had no choice; not drinking it would have been a gross insult. Thus, when it came time to clink glasses and toast each other, it was bottoms up—even though I knew I would get the shits.

And get the shits I did, big time. I was OK during the long flight home. My stomach started gurgling while I was waiting, in a two-hour queue, to check-in at the airport; so, I avoided eating anything on the flight.

Back in Vancouver, that's when the shit hit the fan, so to speak. I became very ill; besides diarrhea, my entire body was covered with red pimples; the rash on my legs was unbearable; five sores stayed with me for three years before disappearing; one reappeared two years ago.

After that I came down with a mysterious series of urinary tract infections [UTIs]; they plagued me for nearly two years; I had all kinds of medical tests (including a cystoscopic examination of my bladder and urethra... ouch); but no cause could ever be found.

Pam generously offered to put together albums of the best wedding pictures, for Pandey and the newlyweds. She wanted to learn Adobe Photoshop, so it was a symbiotic project for both of us. There were a bazillion frames to sort through; I got it down to a couple of hundred and Pam got them together into picture albums, printed them out and bound them with nice jackets; she made a half-dozen copies on the understanding that I would pay for a new set of printer inks. Geez, I nearly crapped when she told me that ink set cost \$350. Whatever, the ink got covered and the albums got sent. I am grateful to Pam for those albums; their cost was inconsequential, compared to their value.

Having demonstrated her Photoshop abilities making the Pandey wedding-picture albums, Pam volunteered to help me produce a collection of skies that I had been photographing for some time. My ambition was to have a several hundred skies that could be used in my illustrations—good scenics usually feature dramatic skies.

In her spare time, after work, Pam assembled some three hundred skies for me. When I say, “assembled,” I mean that the skies were panoramic; each was composed of three or four sections that needed to be seamlessly blended together.

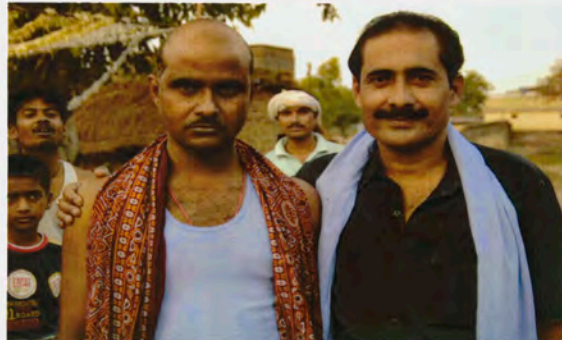
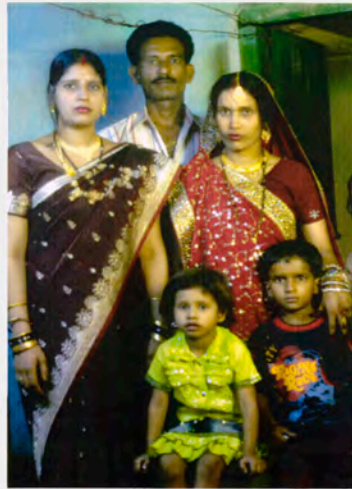
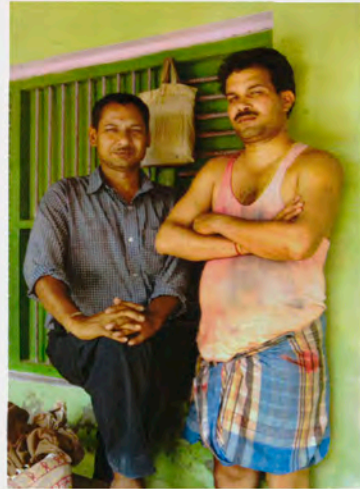


The skies she assembled were first featured in the 2008 *Bubble Memory* series (above).

Although it might seem easy to put together cloud pictures, it's actually a tricky business, especially using digital cameras which “adapt” the exposure and color balance to what they are pointed at. Learning how to subtly adjust the brightness, contrast, and color balance was a mega-tech exercise for Pam. Others might have thrown in the towel; but Pam excelled at it.

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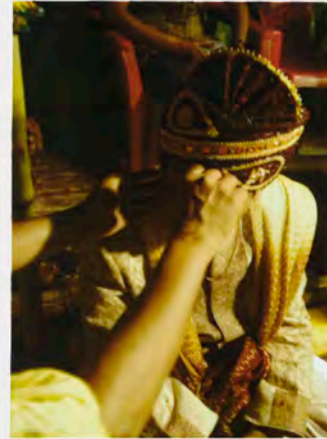


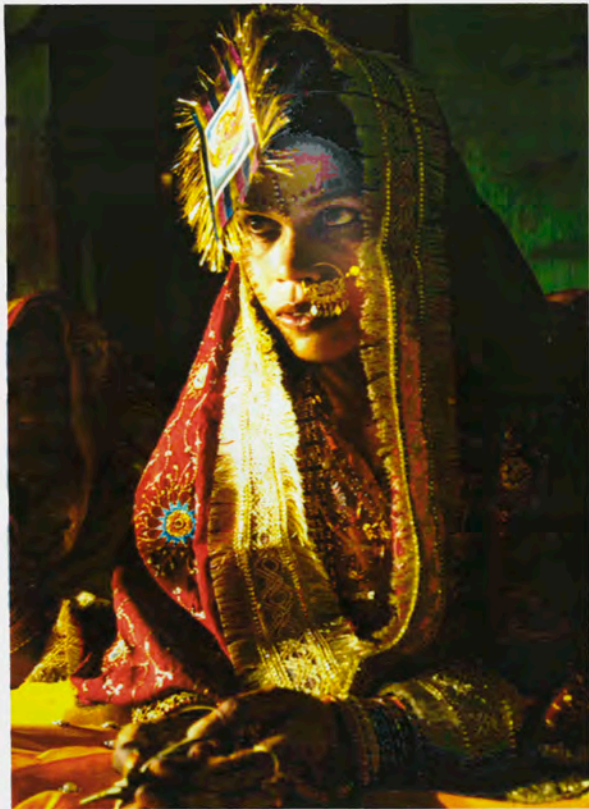
















2009 – Atlanta – CDC *Global Odyssey* Updates

By early 2009, the world's economy had collapsed. Except for The Cabin, in Revelstoke, every other gallery returned my canvases. My studio at Hempstead Manor was stuffed to the gills; even if there were a market for them, I couldn't have produced any new canvases, for lack of space.

Without income, my reserves were eroding; I was also facing some big expenses—the Vashon house needed a new roof. While I had theoretically given up audiovisual work, circumstances persuaded me to accept a job offer from Bob Ernsipker, at CED, in Louisville. The CDC's *Global Odyssey* show needed updating; new material needed to be added and other parts of the show tweaked. I got hired for a month, to work in Atlanta, at the CDC museum, where the show had been playing for five years. The new work provided the economic shot in the arm that I needed. Tim Creed wanted me to make the changes using Watchout V3 [a new version, re-written for PC computers]; V3 was said to run more smoothly and offered a few new features (which weren't needed for the CDC show). I told them I would be happy to, for twice my estimated fee. (Watchout updates weren't as bug-free as they might have been; things always took longer than planned.)

Bob and I got into an unfortunate tiff over a misunderstanding about my estimate; he assumed that my estimate was less than half of what it actually was; his error "cost" CED twice as much as they expected. Ernsipker was not a happy camper; he never trusted me again after that. If the CDC show wasn't so incredibly complicated, Bob would probably have tried to hire someone else, someone less expensive—but who? John Sacrenty died in 2007 and I was the only other programmer who worked on the original show.

With Jim Kellner's help, CED found a replacement for John Sacrenty—Alan Anderson, a dynamic young Medialon programmer who, together with Stephan Vilet, ran a show-control consultancy called Smart Monkeys. Anderson was a man of the times; he had every new tech toy; I felt like a dinosaur, using ~~old~~ "vintage" 2005 computers and CRT monitors, shipped at great expense from Vashon. By contrast, Alan worked from a single laptop with which he wirelessly monitored the Internet and watched feature films while amalgamating his algorithms. Schadenfreude notwithstanding, I was relieved that Allan was baffled by Sacrenty's coding; it gave me time to re-learn Watchout. Anderson got cross-eyed when he examined Sacrenty's work; that's when my impression of John was confirmed—he was a certified genius. It took Anderson the better part of a week just to de-construct what Sacrenty had done four years earlier; it took me that long to get back up to speed, as well.

Allan was so quick witted, I felt that perhaps I shouldn't be doing Watchout work anymore; that I didn't have the mental acuity; that my "processor" was slower than everyone else's. At the start of the CDC show update job, I couldn't remember how certain moves were made, what the code requirements were; that was frightening. Sacrenty was a mathematical wizard; when he was around, I relied on him. On more than one occasion he told me what to write (he was also a Watchout wizard); specific instructions had to be coded for Watchout to work with Medialon.

To stimulate my creativity, I ~~smuggled~~ brought some of my best bud in the leg of a tripod. Availing myself of said stimulant was trickier this time than it was during the build-up of the original show. Back then, before the museum was open to the public, there was minimal security and we had the place pretty much to ourselves. Now, the security was tight. In the four years since Global Odyssey was installed, the entire CDC campus had been “hardened;” huge boulders lined the perimeter, to keep errant vehicles off the property; swooping walls that looked like art installations were really there to deflect bomb blasts away from the buildings. The whole place was rigged with surveillance cameras... except the bathrooms where, hiding in a stall, away from mirrors (there might be cameras behind them), I found enough privacy to sneak a toke, as smokeless as possible (I could hold my breath a long time and exhaled through several layers of toilet paper). To get into the museum, everyone had to pass through airport-style security; the police were Federal cops. Getting my weed through security was the tricky part; the luggage scanner would surely “see” the film can inside the leg of my tripod. The solution was hiding my small wooden pipe and a plastic can of weed inside a Dell computer. I bought that computer along with my laptop, all my photo gear, and a briefcase rigged with a “red herring”—a big pair of scissors—put there to give the guards something to find; that did the trick.

For the month we were in Atlanta, our team (Tim, Riley, Cameron, Allan and I) were split up into a few different motels. They put me in a Marriott Residence Inn near the CDC, in North Druid Hills; the layout was a complex of duplexes laid out to afford each one maximum privacy. My suite was the bottom half of a detached two-family house; it was bigger and better than my Vancouver condo. Because I didn’t drink and preferred raw, vegetarian food, I seldom ate with the crew, or socialized with them after hours. I kept to myself, arriving to work before 11:00 am and working until 7:00 pm [19:00].



A highlight of the trip was being taken out to dinner by Bob Ernspiker, who apparently had gotten over our tussle about my rates.

We drove to Claudia Sanders Dinner House, (formerly The Colonel's Lady—she was the wife of Col. Harland Sanders, founder of KFC) in Bob’s Viper; that was exciting.

Ernspiker was a dyed-in-the-wool automobile aficionado; he bought and sold vintage cars; the Dodge Viper was his most recent prize.

The restaurant (seen in the picture), which was elegantly furnished and felt like a country club, featured Southern cuisine. Bob ordered a southern-cooking sampler—fried chicken (of course), black-eyed peas with bacon, collard greens, sweet-potato bake, okra, buttermilk biscuits, corn bread and two kinds of pie for desert (pecan pie and sour-cream peach). That was after a few rounds of Jack Daniels. I had a hard time pushing myself away from the table. It was nice to be back in Bob’s favor.

Before leaving, I made it a point to photograph the new Atlanta Aquarium, advertised as the largest in the world. After shooting at all the West Coast Aquaria, for the Oceano show, 5 years earlier, I was anxious to see if there was anything new that I could use to make additional illustrations, for the *Undercurrents* collection.

However, throngs of school children and strict security guards thwarted my ambitions; I ended up with a bunch of so-so material that never got used for anything.

2009 – Vashon Retreat – Starting Over

With enough money to have the Vashon house roof replaced—thank you CED—I hired Ted Alumbaugh to do the job, on the recommendation of my sister, Kathy. Alumbaugh’s crew did most the work while I was in Atlanta doing the CDC update job. The roof was “only” twenty years old; it probably would have been good for another ten years if I hadn’t messed with it.

However, in 2007, I erected a 40 X 20-foot [12 X 6 meter] hanging canopy over the pond, to keep out herons, kingfishers and other predatory birds. The pond canopy looked very Japanese; it had a frame built of lightweight, cedar, 1 X 2-inch [2.5 X 5 cm] stock, covered with deer netting.

The wood frame for the canopy (see arrow) was assembled in the field behind the house and pond. The roof-mounted suspension system can be seen in the foreground. The neighbors pitched in and helped lift the flimsy frame into position across the pond. I supervised from the roof, attached the five support lines and hoisted it up. The cable can be seen in the picture, spanning the pond, left to right, supporting the five connection ropes.



The canopy hung from a thin, high-tension, stainless-steel cable anchored to the roof peaks with 8-inch [20.3 cm] lag bolts. Those lag bolts were what caused the leakage problems that necessitated the re-roofing job.

When the new roof was complete, I hired a moving van from Island Lumber and headed to Vancouver, on a mission to move my operations back to Vashon. There was little to keep me in Vancouver; the galleries were gone. I came up with a new plan: to use my art-production and printing gear to make giclées for other artists. By 2009, most artists had heard about giclées, but few knew much about them or about the concept of making money selling limited editions instead of originals, earning income over time.

I reckoned that there was a business opportunity, publishing the work of Island artists; so, I opened a fine-art printing company, called Vashon Island Imaging, to develop that market. The fact that Vashon Island was known as an art colony gave me confidence. To generate enough business to sustain myself, all I needed was one or two successful artists. At the time, my all-in base costs were “only” \$50,000; thus, my plan seemed do-able.



I built a fancy sign at the foot of the driveway and sent out a news release announcing the new company; *voilà*, Vashon Island Imaging was in business.

The printing gear and my canvases fit nicely into the larger Vashon studio. I wondered how I had managed in the smaller Hempstead Manor studio.

The Epson 9880 was housed in the former dressing room. Canvas stretching and framing operations were set-up in the former photo studio. The lounge turned into a classroom and showroom.

Canvases of my work hung throughout the house. Excess work was stored in the former Watchout programming studio (the north wing of the house).

To promote Vashon Island Imaging, I started attending Vashon Town Council meetings, with the intention of getting involved in the local *Politik*, to get known by (and hopefully have my work hung in the homes and offices of) Vashon's movers and shakers. However, although each Council meeting started off on a civil note, the atmosphere soon degenerated into squabbles between factions; one meeting devolved into name calling and fisticuffs; the town leaders behaved like little children; I left, never to return.

Instead of local politics, I held weekly seminars about art printing, the educational program established me as an expert, more authoritative than the Island's high-profile photographer (and Blue Heron darling), Ray Pfortner; or the Island's other giclée printer, Harvey Bergman.

At my seminars, I taught advanced Photoshop. My students had to have a basic knowledge of that Adobe application. They brought pictures that were giving them problems; I showed them how to fix those problems using Photoshop.

At one seminar, David Lynch, a dedicated Hasselblad cameraman dismissive of all things digital, brought in a silver print along with a digital file of the same picture that was made from a high-quality drum scan of the picture's original film negative. His problem—with both the silver and giclée prints—was that an important person standing in the shadows could not be seen. When I fixed the problem, before his eyes, in less than five minutes, he started paying more attention to what I was saying.

He, and the few artists I initially printed for, spread the word, that Vashon Island Imaging was able to faithfully reproduce art, using the giclée process.

Before long, my sales pitch about limited-edition giclée prints gained traction. Local artists cottoned-on to the idea of selling “affordable art.” The collapse of the economy had morphed into a malaise that still exists to some extent. After the crash of 2008, expensive, original artworks weren’t selling; few people had enough “discretionary” cash. The arguments for giclée prints made economic sense, at least theoretically—since people had less money to spend, art prices had to come down. Giclée limited editions offered artists the opportunity to sell affordable art and still make money.

One of my success stories was “Kasdan the Great”—my nickname for Richard Kasdan. Richard came to Vashon Island Imaging to have prints made, which he intended to sell; he was gaga-eyed when he saw the canvases I was making.

Kasdan was a high-energy guy with a ton of questions; he made his money as a waiter, but was a wannabe photographer, a rank amateur; undaunted by ignorance. Richard had a vision of himself being famous; at times his outgoing optimism seemed somehow a performance.

Richard proudly showed me his portfolio on a laptop. He said he wanted to print 20 X 30 canvases of the lot—a couple dozen images. I sat him down and slipped on my mentor hat. In the old days, I might have taken advantage of Richard’s irrational exuberance, his naiveté. I could have made a fortune; but I would have been doing my client a disservice—Kasdan’s pictures weren’t good enough to make it, given the competition and sad state of the economy.

In my own mind I had come to the conclusion that pictures didn’t sell anymore; but I didn’t want to get into that with poor Richard. Instead, I recommended that he print a few, to test the market, gauge interest, discover pricing, make a business plan, run the numbers, and see if he had a business, or if he was supporting a hobby.

We compromised and printed a half dozen. If I remember correctly, they were stretched canvases, 18 X 12 inches [45.7 X 30.5 cm], finished with satin Clear Shield liquid laminate—the full-meal deal.

Lo and behold, Richard sold a couple of pictures—views of Mount Rainier, taken from the front deck of his pricey home in trendy Gold Beach (on the southwest corner of Maury Island). He promptly and confidently ordered another half dozen giclées; then I didn’t hear from him.

What Kasdan didn’t understand was that certain kinds of pictures are more likely to sell than others, that “scapes” (landscapes, seascapes, cityscapes) are the top sellers, especially sunset versions. He listened to my advice, but only heard half it. I’d suggested that he test a half dozen completely different pictures, choose the three best sellers and expand the range of those. For example, offer two alternative pictures of Mount Rainier, in different color ranges.

Bright colors were known to attract the eye (just ask the people who design laundry detergent containers). I found that scenes with a full blend of primary colors—a rainbow, as it were—got a lot of attention.

Kasdan presented such a variety that you'd never guess they were all made by the same guy; it looked like a dozen different photographers shot them; there was no "red thread," no distinct style; just a collection of his favorites, chosen willy-nilly. So be it; the giclées were made, Kasdan paid his bill, and off he went, ready to crack the art market and strike it rich.

I didn't hear from Richard for a while; summer turned to autumn, then winter. The next time I saw him, Kasdan was sadder but wiser (like most artists at the time).

The illusion clung to by neophyte artists is like the one that motivates wannabe restaurateurs. Running a restaurant looks easy from the outside, but it's a high-anxiety profession, one of the world's toughest jobs. Likewise, making art looks easy—and is easy (compared to so many other ways to make a living). However, making the right kind of art isn't easy—way less than 1% of all the art that gets made ever sells. The problem is that most artists make their favorite pictures; most cooks make their favorite dishes; each should be making what you want.

Today, with online shopping, folks are sure to find what they want; rarely must anyone compromise or settle for less than they want. When I grew up, competition was local; then it was national; now it is global.

Just when the American consumer got squeezed by the Crash of 2008, the market for giclées got flooded with cheap Asian art. Kasdan, like many others in his shoes, did not realize that he was competing with giclées made in China, sold at prices so low that few American artists could compete. Guys like Kasdan—and me—got squeezed out of the market. The upshot? People don't buy pictures any more.

[Spoiler Alert: Fast forward nearly ten years, I saw one of Kasdan's giclées for sale at Granny's Attic (a Vashon Island thrift shop, run by a charity) with a \$5 price tag—that's right, no zeros, just five bucks.]

Shortly after that, I saw one of my own giclées, *Crèche of Thunder* (see picture: *2003 – Yucatan – Illuminado Tours*), being readied for sale at Vashon Estate Sales, another Vashon thrift store, run by Mike & Catherine Urban. That tall, skinny giclée was at the front of a huge stack of about one hundred framed paintings and prints, all of them to be offered for sale at ridiculously low prices, compared to what the artists thought they were "worth."

To digress for a moment, on the subject of "worth:" The Urbans handled scores (hundreds?) of estate sales on Vashon Island; they understood where people were at; they knew what the prices should be—if one wanted to sell. That was the key—one's desire to sell. There was truth to the adage about charging "what the traffic will bear." For example, I asked Mike to help me sell one of my four panoramic, curved-screen, light-box pictures. Those turned out to be real "white elephants;" they were beautiful, but too big.¹⁷

¹⁷ The light box pictures are 48 inches [122 cm] wide, 9 inches [23 cm] high, 6 inches [15 cm] deep, with a curved profile that accentuates the panoramic effect. Call me if you want one.

If you recall, the lightbox pictures were made at the Westport studio, in 2007, with the help of Eliazar Adino (see pictures in previous section, *2005 – Epson 7600 – Phil Borges*).

The illuminated illustrations were offered for sale at Oh My Godard gallery, in Vancouver, with a hefty \$1200 price tag—about \$1450 today (2018)—but that was too much; there were no takers, which is why I still have them.

Mike acknowledged that the light box picture I brought him—*Lupin Lions*—was probably worth “a lot.” Reluctantly (he knew how hard it was to sell art), he said he would give it a shot at one of his weekend estate sales; that he’d offer it for sale at \$350 for the Saturday sale and cut that price in half for the Sunday sale; and that if it didn’t sell, it would be donated to Granny’s Attic.

It didn’t sell, but it didn’t go to Granny’s, either.

As Mike was loading it into his truck, to take it to Granny’s, a guy offered him \$100; my cut was 60%, so I got \$60—about 10% of what it cost to make. As for *Crèche of Thunder*, I suspect that one went to Granny’s Attic, because I never heard anything further from Mike about it. Existential, eh?

I still have the other three of those white elephants; there’s a night view of Victoria, BC—*Summer Moon*—that I am going to donate to the Victoria Chamber of Commerce; there’s one of *Summer Sunset* that will get donated to someone; and there’s *Flower Hat Jellies*, which I will keep; I want to light-up that one again someday, when I have room to display it; the light-box version of that picture is even more sensational than the Nite Lites version made for Ultra-Violet light.



Twilite Time (180), 2008

I have other white elephants, too: One is “*Twilight Time*” (above), a 15 X 1-foot [4.6 X 0.3-meter] ultra-panoramic, 270° view of Vancouver, the harbor and North Vancouver. That illustration—a realistic-looking collage made of more than 100 pictures—was one of my first major works. As a promotion, Kelly Arnold and Paige Tesluck made a deal with the Vancouver Board of Trade, to display the big giclée in their lobby. It hung there for a year; then the gallery went broke and all my work was returned. *Twilight Time* came back in two pieces—seriously; the long panorama wouldn’t fit in the gallery van, so the gals removed the canvas and cut the frame in half. Say what?!

I was furious; what were they thinking? It took considerable reinforcement to put the frame back together, a job I did on Vashon Island. After that, *Twilight Time* hung in my Vashon studio for another two years before that operation closed. When I moved it back to Vancouver, it wouldn’t fit in the elevators; Pam and I had to hoist it up to the third-floor balcony with ropes.

Then there were the four “Nite-Lites” samples I made to test market at Oh My Godard. They were 48 X 8-inch [122 X 20.3-cm] panoramas, mounted on Cintra; they had broad, five-inch-wide [12.7-cm-wide] black frames equipped with UV-light fixtures rigged with 12-foot [3.6-meter] extension cords.

In a word, the four Nite Lites pieces were deluxe. I tested them with a \$1,100 price tag; they didn't sell and got put into storage on Vashon Island; then they got hauled back to Vancouver, where they ended up being donated to Value Village, (Vancouver's version of Granny's Attic); I kissed them goodbye after loading them next to a huge pile of other assorted ~~junk~~ donations out in the alley (the loading dock was overflowing). As I drove away, I prayed that it wouldn't rain.

Back on Vashon....

Fortunately, my little printing company managed to eek out enough sales to survive the first year. But as the first decade of the new century neared an end, the economy devolved further. The previous autumn, I did reasonably well selling pictures during the Vashon Island Studio Art Tour; I sold a 12-foot [3.66 meter] version of *Olympic Mountains Vista*, a 10-foot [3.04 meter] canvas of *Paxos Sunrise* and a 4-footer [1.22 meter] of *Moon Jellies*. Other artists didn't fare as well. None of my customers were able to sell their "affordable" giclées. The average spend on the Vashon Island Art Studio Tour that year was less than \$100.

My printing sales deteriorated further when, one by one, my photographer clients, like the portrait studio run by Rebecca Douglas, started buying their own Epson printers and making their own giclées.

Ironically, Epson created a new business—professional art printing—and then destroyed it by selling their machines to the artists themselves; that put many professional printers out of business. However, economic doldrums were not the only reasons for my failing business; I reckon a lot had to do with my proclivity to be provocative, my risqué attire and my penchant for living as a nudist. Many of my female clients were offended. What was I thinking?

2009 – Strawberry Festival – Sour Grapes

There was an enormous inventory of canvases to be dealt with (there still is)—unmounted ones rolled up in a dozen banana boxes and about seventy stretched canvases that together occupied half of the 10 X 20-foot [3 X 6.1-meter] north-end office.

To boost sales, I reserved a 10 X 10-foot (3 X 3 meter) exhibition stand at the Vashon Island Strawberry Festival; it was the Island's biggest annual event, by far, attracting more off-Island tourists than any other event (that is, until the Vashon Sheepdog Classic began, in 2000).



Pam came down to help me build the stand, set it up at the fair, and man it during the three-day event.

We were given a terrific space by the Festival organizers.

Vashon Island Imaging had become a well-known business thanks to my publicity efforts and seminars.

Photo by Pamela Swanson

Vashon Island Imaging was also a legitimate Island business, one of a minority participating in the Strawberry Festival. In recent years the Strawberry Festival had become an Asian street market; most vendors were off-island hawkers of Asian clothes, trinkets, toys and other crap.

We had a clean, open stand displaying large-sized canvases.

The weather put a damper on our spirits; every morning it was cold and foggy.

At that time of year Vashon succumbed to a recurrent “marine layer,” low clouds that encroach over land from the sea in the night, and dissipate in the late afternoon, keeping Vashon dreary until late July, when the Canadian high kicks in and Vashon enjoys clear skies for the next three months.

Photo by Pamela Swanson



Island folks familiar with that weather pattern didn't show-up until late morning, when the main events began (parade, car show, etc.). However, exhibitors had to be up and running by 8:00 am, if only to protect their stuff. This being our first year at the Festival, we were nervous and brought all the artwork home every night; what a chore that was, hauling it back and forth. The stuff was too big for my cars; Kirk Beeler loaned us his old Toyota pick-up; it had a clutch problem that resulted in jerky driving—just what you don't want transporting fine art.

After rising at dawn and setting-up the stand, Pam and I would stand around drinking hot coffee and staring at each other. Pam got cold easily, it especially affected her extremities, sort of like Reynaud's syndrome. By the third morning, Pam couldn't take it and there was no point in her staying; so, I took her back to the house and manned the booth myself that day. Lots of people gawked but none bought. The only good that came of our efforts was the lineage we got in the local papers; we scored a front-page picture in the *Beachcomber* and a full page spread in the Island's alternate news source, the *Vashon Island Loop*

Later that year, I joined the Vashon Island Art Studio Tour (VIASST). I volunteered to help with publicity. On my own, I wrote a piece that was given a full page in the Arts section of the *Beachcomber*—a significant placement. VIASST's publicity director had never gotten such prominent ink. I think I embarrassed her; she accused me of going over her head. I was roundly criticized for not going through channels, i.e., having her ~~take credit for~~ approve my work. Ha!

I apologized profusely (you know what they say—it's easier to say you're sorry, than to ask permission). I never wrote another piece in VIASST's behalf; I had no time for teapot politics. Oh, and Sy Novak [Novak Creative], blackballed me; she sat on the VIASST board and did all the graphic design work for the Vashon Allied Arts (Blue Heron); her work on their monthly magazine was masterful.

When I opened Vashon Island Imaging, Novak was one of my first visitors; she wanted to know all about my plans; she was all smiles and told me not to hesitate asking for anything I needed from Novak Creative. A month later— after I pitched the Blue Heron Art Center for a piece of their printing business—I was on her shit list. I didn't actually pitch them, per se; they were part of a Vashon-wide promotion to all businesses, I dropped off an envelope containing an information sheet, price list (with way lower prices than Novak's), and a one-hundred-dollar bill (not a real one, a replica, bearing my profile instead of George Washington's) redeemable on their first job.

Sy thought I was trying to cut in on her territory; I was, with some good ol' competition. From then on, she did everything she could to trip me up. I'm sure she was either the source or a major conduit for much of the bad gossip and rumors about me that were circulating around the Island.

One rumor, a serious one that persisted, that was started by the Eriksons in 1995, claimed that I was a pedophile, that I had gone after their precocious, barely-underage (pun intended) daughter, Erica, using model-testing as a guise for "grooming" her. Other gossip, about my nudity, seemed to corroborate the Eriksons' story; as did the skimpy outfits I wore around town, especially during the summer (short shorts and bright colored tank tops). The net effect was that those who chose to believe the rumors—a sizeable slice of the art community—shunned me.

Erica was more than just a rumor for me; she was a nightmare come true. About a week after a photo-test session with Erica, a detective from the Seattle police department rang my doorbell; he wanted to hear my side of Erica's story—that I had touched her inappropriately, or as Donald Trump might say, I grabbed her in the pussy.

Fortunately, I had processed and printed the pictures of Erica; they were head shots, wearing various outfits; unremarkable stuff. The detective's conundrum was that it was a case of she says, he says. I was brought into the station house for more questioning; it was like you see on TV—a little room with a see-through mirror, a microphone, a camera and a table with three chairs, one on one side and two on the other.

When I got called in for questioning, I knew I was in potentially serious trouble. I asked Hita for her help; she referred me to attorney Mike Snow—to advise and possibly defend me in criminal court. Snow had an impressive office with a commanding view of Seattle's waterfront, Elliott Bay, the Kitsap Peninsula and the distant Olympic Mountains; considering the size of the retainer I paid him, he could afford the rent. He could have charged me anything—I was scared.

Snow arranged for me to take a lie-detector test; he said, if I pass, the police would bury my file in the dead-case cabinet.

I made it my job to clue-in to lie-detector technology and procedures. I spent about a week doing research at the Seattle Public Library; they had a dozen books on the subject—I wasn't the first person needing to pass a lie-detector test.

I learned that passing the test is about controlling bodily functions—breathing, heart rate, muscle tensing (detectable and undetectable)—being able to hold them steady when asked key questions, like "Did you touch Erica?" and spike them on "control" questions like, "What was your mother's name?"

To my great relief, the test was administered by a kindly gentleman—a retired cop, as it were—at his home office in Juanita Bay, a mile from my sister Kathy’s former condo. His was a comfortable home; we sat near the fireplace, overlooking Lake Washington, and talked about my case. I showed him the head shots of Erica, told him about my career, tried to get him on my side. We adjourned to his office, where he hooked me up and ran the test, stone-faced throughout. When the questions stopped and the machine was shut off, he finally cracked a smile; there was a smile on my face, too, when I whispered into Hita’s ear, “I passed.”

Hita suggested I celebrate by having Wynn “Kaj” Berry cleanse my house; she did not mean with a mop and scrub brush; she meant, spiritually. Hita was a very canny person, attuned to the Universe; her friend Kaj was a latter-day shaman, the daughter of a First Nations family, an American Indian, a poet and a calligrapher; she was also a spiritual advisor, a healer.

Kaj performed a ritual to rid my house of evil energies; the ceremony involved walking through all the rooms and smoking them with smoldering sage while beating a handmade Indian tom-tom drum. The magic worked, I felt comfortable in my studio again.

To digress for a moment, about Kaj “Wynn” Berry: Kaj (I called her Wynn) was also well-known on Vashon Island as a calligrapher and poet; you couldn’t miss seeing her work on your way to the ferry; just before leaving terra firma, you’d pass five slender signs, spaced about 10 feet [~3 meters] apart, at the right edge of the road; each, in succession, bore one line of a Haiku; she’d change the haikus monthly; she called them “Highway Haiku.”



Kaj Berry, 2011 (left) and 2002.



For a while, Wynn also made “greeting tags” called Wind Wishes (two can be seen at left).

They were strips of fine, colorful paper, about two inches wide and eight high [5 X 20 cm]; each side had a one-word wish, in bold calligraphy.

Wynn hung them with silk ribbons on trees, bushes, arches and doorways—anywhere they would be seen, fluttering in the breeze.

Wind Wishes were made on a special-order basis at first; they were popular for weddings and anniversaries; many people (myself included) encouraged her to take Wind Wishes farther.

One day, one of Wynn's sons had the same idea. He was a successful businessman who was a combination venture capitalist and entrepreneur extraordinaire—a guy who made money. He bankrolled the printing and promotion of *Wind Wishes* on a grand scale. Everything was super slick; I imagined *Wind Wishes* in blister packs, hanging on display racks at Walmart stores around the world; in many languages.

In my mind, *Wind Wishes* could never fail; so, I tried to get involved and was offered the opportunity to help with Web content, because I knew a thing or two about websites.

My help began with a studio shoot of Wynn wearing silky outfits provided by Vashon designer Dorothy Dunncliff [of *Dova Silks*].

Then, with the help of Felix Misch, Wynn was recorded reading a one-minute promotional piece that I wrote for her, introducing herself and explaining *Wind Wishes*. Getting Wynn to sound OK was a chore; we never got there, actually; in the finished version she sounded mechanical, despite Felix's best efforts.

As an aside, I later discovered that Felix, a Vashon architect of merit, was going out with Anne Gordon (Vashon Island Imaging's first customer); the two of them originally got together to make music. Anne was a talented pianist and Felix was a guitarist who had a sophisticated recording studio.

I surprised them both, and myself as well, when I rang Felix's doorbell on a Christmas-holiday evening and discovered Anne there, with him. But I was at the wrong house... I was supposed to be ringing Monica Steadman's doorbell. (Monica lived on a street with a similar name and was also a client of Vashon Island Imaging.). Felix and Anne didn't last long; he turned out to be an extreme narcissist prone to bipolarism.

If only Wynn could have cast a spell on the community. Unfortunately, the rumors persisted; I kept mum throughout; I never told anyone about what was going on, except Hita and Mike Snow. It wouldn't have done me any good to announce to the world that I passed a lie detector test; for many that would be proof that I was guilty, of something. Nobody else said anything or even hinted that they heard anything about the Eriksson affair; but the shunning continued and worsened.

Another reason for my collapsing sales was the fact that, aside from giclée prints, the Island didn't need another printing company. Vashon Print & Design had a handle on 99% of the business printing; they were conveniently located in town, whereas Vashon Island Imaging was off the beaten track. Plus, most businesses had their own printing set-ups.

I should have remembered a lesson learned at Fork Inn the Road—that Island life fostered self-sufficiency.

Despite the time and expense involved in personally delivering my promotion packages to each and every one of the 100 top Island businesses, I got only one job, from Bill Brown, who ran an insurance business and a popular local rock band, *Bill Brown's King Bees*; he hired me to design and print a commemorative flyer for a funeral. At the time, I failed to see the irony in that solitary order.

2009 – All India Café – A Flash in The Pan

I was about ready to give up trying to sell my pictures on Vashon Island, when Sam Rajarora agreed to give me a show at the All India Café. Local artists coveted having their work on display at All India Café. It was a large restaurant in the Vashon Landing building, at Vashon's main intersection—the Island's most prestigious location.

Yours Truly with Sam Rajarora and his mother, Divea.



Before pitching All India Café, I had dinner there three nights in a row, to get myself noticed. On the third night, Sam Rajarora came over to my table to thank me. "You must like the food?" he asked, rhetorically. "Wonderful stuff!" I replied, with gusto. "I have something for you," I continued. Sam asked what it was; "A surprise," I replied, and left it at that.

Sam Rajarora at work. Unfortunately, I discovered that most of the stuff he cooked was straight out of cans and boxes.

A couple of days later, I stopped by Sam's café one afternoon, before the restaurant got busy. I left a framed print of *Golden Temple Sunset*, with my card. When he called to say thanks, I invited Sam to my studio for a drink. The next afternoon, he dropped by. I gave him a tour and showed my Indian-themed illustrations; in the background, Indian pop singer Malkit Singh played his latest bhangra hits. We snacked on fresh papadums cooked with dry heat (not in oil as was Sam's style). Sam was impressed with my kitchen; it was better equipped than his own; he could see I was a serious cook as well as a good illustrator. Before he left, my show was booked.

I wanted to be on the walls of All India Café during the Vashon Strawberry Festival. My ambition was to have work on every available wall in the restaurant. There was a combo bar and lounge as well as three dining rooms, connected by a long, well-lit corridor, half of which served as an extension of the bar. After surveying the restaurant, I made two new illustrations, to fit two unusual spaces in the café; one was a 60 X 40-inch [152.4 X 101.6-centimeter] "Nite Lites" (UV-sensitive) picture, called *Taj Reflections* (see picture in previous section, *1994 – Indian Odyssey – Neoteric Perspectives*), that hung in the darkest dining room. Ultraviolet lighting made the huge picture glow in the dark; it looked cool at night, through the front window. The other new illustration was *Golden Temple Pilgrims*, a super-wide panorama—96 X 24 inches [243.8 X 60.9 centimeters]—meant to visually dominate a long, cavernous, brick-walled, room with an arched ceiling, like a wine cellar. [See picture: *2008 – Indian Odyssey – Pandey Wedding*.]

To promote the show, I printed a three-fold color pamphlet and put display racks at the Vashon Library, the Heron's Nest, Chase Bank, Café Luna and a few others. I sent out news releases to both local papers; they scored well, each paper published the picture I attached with the release: *Shikara Sunset* (see picture in previous section, 2008 – ☉
Godard Gone – Eye Candy Fails).



180-degree view of main dining room.

The display at All India Café looked smashing; more than two dozen works, many of them quite large, were hung with an eye towards interior decoration. Each picture was intentionally placed; there was nothing haphazard about the wall displays; the pictures looked like they had been made for the place (two of them were).

[Rant Alert: How many times have you gone into a restaurant or bar, and seen the place decorated with the work of some local artist(s)? I've been to a lot of them; usually the display is a hodgepodge of pictures that have nothing to do with the restaurant or bar, other than fill-up wall space that the owners would otherwise have to decorate. For the establishments who sponsor shows, it's a powerful grass-roots PR ploy. For artists, such shows look like they are begging for sales. I've never thought such places were good environments to sell pictures; people go to restaurants to eat, not shop for art. However, I've also been to restaurants displaying artworks that look like an interior decorator chose them—for example, my fish pictures at the Oceano, the Jamaica pictures at Montego Bay and India illustrations at All India Café. At such establishments, there aren't any price tags attached to the art; the artist's card is available upon request. That was how I ran the show at Sam's restaurant.]

Then came the much-anticipated Strawberry Festival; the streets filled with people; but only a few came to the café; all the action was across the street, on the south side of Bank Road. Over there, just a few yards away, the restaurants and bars were overflowing. Sam was exasperated, so was I; we couldn't figure out why nobody came our way.¹⁸

I sold just one piece during the big show; Greg Antoine fell in love with a Vancouver scene called *Mountain Lions*, one of the smallest, least expensive pieces at the show, hung near the rear exit, just across from the toilets.

¹⁸ After living a few more years on Vashon Island, I came to realize that Bank Road was a barrier; businesses north of Bank Road fared more poorly than those on the south side; it was because of the mix of businesses; north of Bank Road, there were no business attractions, nothing to draw people. For a while there was, back in the '90s, when there was a popular lounge in the Vashon Village mini-mall; that place—Vashon's den of iniquity—got a lot of traffic; when they closed, Vashon Village was never the same.

The café's clientele remained low during the length of my show. Sam got barely enough business to keep the place open. I came to learn that the food was part of the reason customers weren't coming back; Sam was using pre-pack foods, "instant" this and that; he wasn't making anything from scratch; the food tasted bland. In an effort to improve All India Café's business, I came to Sam with a rescue plan. Sam and I had gotten very close; I saw an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone—help Sam improve his business and fulfill my dream of running a lounge, like Claude Challe's famous Buddha Bar. All India Café had a room that was perfect for a chill lounge, built to resemble an Italian wine cellar; it had a broad, arched ceiling which, like the walls and floor, were made of red brick. Sam had the cellar room decorated with colorful silk saris; people sat at low tables, on red velvet cushions with gold brocade.

My plan was to convert the room into a club called Taj Bar, by adding a killer sound system and playing DJ on weekends, using my extensive collection of nearly 600 LP albums, 300 CDs, and hours of recorded NY disco music. Sam was keen on the idea.

However, before the plan got off the ground, one of Sam's young-stud waiters managed to get a local high school girl in trouble. Once the Vashon gossip mill got going, All India Café was toast.

I learned of Sam's demise when he appeared at my door one afternoon in August, during the last week of my show. He told me that the owner of Vashon Landing was about to put a lock on the door, for non-payment of rent; he advised me to remove my pictures from the café immediately. Yikes!



As if that wasn't surprise enough, Sam led me over to his van, which was filled with a ton of restaurant stuff; he asked me if he could leave the truck in my car port for a couple of days. I was concerned that I might be storing "stolen" goods; but I couldn't really say no to him; Sam and I were pretty tight. Just two weeks before, I had entertained Sam's family when his mother, Divea and cousin, Amir, visited from California. That was a lovely summer evening. Pam was visiting from Vancouver. I set-up dinner—raw food, Indian style—on the back deck. While everyone was getting seated, Amir, who must have weighed 30 stone (420 pounds [190.5 kg]), broke his chair. He went crashing to the deck floor with a terrific thud and some of the glasses on the table fell over. There was total silence for a second, before he picked himself up with a laugh.

Later that evening, Sam showed up with another load of stuff; his Mexican scullery man, Uno, accompanied him—a middle-aged man who spoke no English. Sam asked if I could put Uno up for the night. What? Sam explained that his house was overflowing; his family and staff were bivouacking there, preparing to leave town, imminently. I let the guy stay on the couch in the lounge; he was quiet as a mouse and never ate, drank, smoked or pee'd. The next morning, I drove him over to Sam's rental house, on Maury Island. There were a dozen people there; all their stuff was piled up on the front and side lawns, being loaded into two vans.

Sam emerged from the house and gave me a big box of food, as a thank you—five gallons [19 liters] of ice cream, and a gallon [3.75 liters] each of finely-chopped jalapeno peppers and mole sauce. Later, at the restaurant, while Pam and I were packing my paintings.

Sam gave us three red-velvet, gold brocade cushions, some pottery and lamps, and a half dozen exotic (expensive) Indian saris.

Pam took the cushions back to Vancouver and used the saris to decorate the studio lounge (left), office and bedroom of the Vashon house.

Together with pictures from the India Collection; the house could have been featured in the India edition of *House & Garden* magazine.

Photo by Pamela Swanson



The night they left, Pam and I drove down to Dockton Park, on Maury Island, to say a last goodbye to Sam and his tribe; then off they went, into the dark, heading south, to California.

Sam said he was going to start another restaurant in L.A.; that he was going to feature my kind of Indian-style raw food; that as soon as it was up and running, he wanted to decorate the new place with my pictures.

That was the last I heard from him.

2009 – Another Lucky Number – 09.09.09

Our lives were changing; now that I had moved back to Vashon and was running a business there, Pam was the one who was “commuting” between Vancouver and Vashon instead of me.

She would come down for two or three weeks, then feel the need to get back to Vancouver. Conversely, between her visits, I would make a trip to Vancouver at least once a month and feel the need to go back after just a day or two. We had become more than good friends by then; we were beginning to like living together.

I knew from previous experience that the frequency of our trips across the border would eventually arouse suspicion with the American border guards.

I suggested that we head off such border difficulties by getting married. Pam agreed; it seemed like the logical thing to do. We thought that, being married, we could go back and forth across the border as often as we wanted.

For symbolic reasons, we tied the knot 09.09.09, on the beach at English Bay across from the Sylvia Hotel. We chose that spot because when we met, on 07.07.07, we shared our first meeting on those sands, sitting on a log and conversing intently enough to take another step.



Left to right: Richard Legault, Doreen Jacklin, Pamela Swanson, Yours Truly and Alex Skibinski. Rev. Munna photo.

We hired a preacher (Reverend Munna) and held our nuptials at sunset.

Nature didn't cooperate with the sunset part.

Doreen Jacklin¹⁹ (left) witnessed for us, together with Pam's friend, Richard Legault (second from left, behind the preacher).

Photo by Alex Skibinski.



¹⁹ Doreen was Ron Jacklin's wife. She passed away five years later, at the young age of 44, a victim of colon cancer.

After nuptials on the beach, we went back to my studio at Hempstead Manor for champagne and a special wedding cake: pumpkin pie, Pam's favorite.

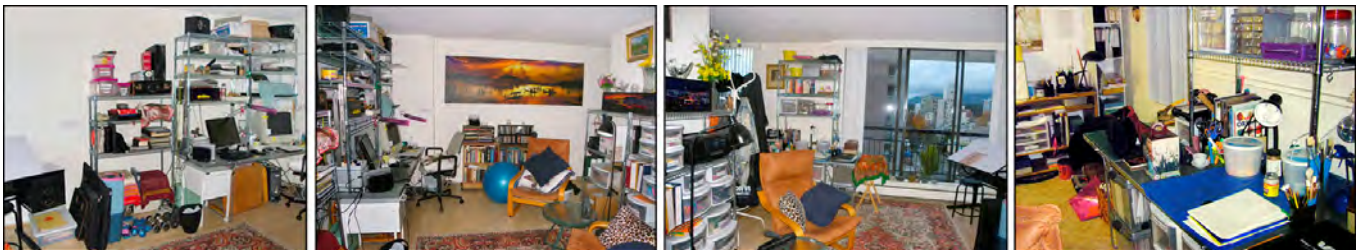
Once we were legal, Pam and I proceeded with a total reorganization in Vancouver.

It was crazy for her to spend almost a grand a month for her rental apartment; and even crazier for me to stay at Hempstead Manor, where I would soon be faced with hefty levies.²⁰



Photo by Doreen Jacklin.

We hired realtor Luise DiPetrantonio, put her in charge of selling the 880-square-foot [81.75 square meters] suite and finding us a smaller one. Pam oversaw working with Luise; it was important that she like the new place; she was less adaptable than me. I was thinking of an artist-style, live-work loft; or, maybe some light industrial space, in Gastown, that we could renovate into a studio. She liked the concept, but there were no flats available in neighborhoods she approved. The fact was, that there was only one neighborhood Pam wanted to be in: The West End, where we both currently lived. Pam wanted proximity to Lost Lagoon, in Stanley Park, the place where she enjoys moments of Zen.



Luck was on our side; Luise discovered suite 906 at Lancaster Gate; the building was even closer to Lost Lagoon and it met my investment criteria (concrete construction and no big levies on the horizon). When I learned the price, I figured there must be something wrong; the new place was a little over half what I expected to pay. That was because Lancaster Gate is a leasehold building.²¹ While that may bother some, I was perfectly OK with it; it's the same system they use in Sweden; there it is appropriately called *bostadsättigheter* [residence rights]. Thus, I made out particularly well on the sale of the Hempstead Manor condo, earning a six-figure profit.

²⁰ While serving on the Strata Council there I learned that major repairs and upgrades needed to be done; that meant special levies, I had already shelled out \$8,000 for a new-pipes levy that year; enough was enough, I wanted out. Besides, all my stuff had been moved down to Vashon, the big place was largely empty.

²¹ With a leasehold, you don't own your condo, you have no "real" property; what you own is the right to live in your unit.] Aha, that was why prices in the building were so low (and still are); the 99-year head lease runs out in 2079, so, every year we own a little less.

I was going to buy gold with the money we saved on the Lancaster Gate unit; but another condo, Suite 908, just two doors from ours, became available, at an even more affordable price. We snatched that one and fixed it up as a rental; I reckoned we could make a nice little income, if no big expenses or tax increases occurred. Ha! (See below.)

Our new digs were tops; from the 9th floor we had a peek-a-boo view of the mountains northwest of us. The place felt like a home, without all my tech and clutter (that had been moved to Vashon). Pam was happy; that made me happy.

I was on Vashon Island when the end of the month approached and it was time to vacate Pam's place on Haro Street, where she had lived for 13 years, and move her into the condo at Lancaster Gate. However, Pam's brother David was making his semi-annual visit from Winnipeg, Manitoba. He graciously volunteered to assist us in the move. By the time I arrived on the weekend to join the team, Pam and David had finished the job. That was no small feat; they did the whole job with only two hand-carts, going back and forth a hundred times, five long, bumpy blocks each way.

Our realtor, Luise, volunteered to help us find a renter for 908; she recruited a clean-cut young man, named John Pez; he was the first one to answer her ad for our rental. Pez gave us a credible accounting of himself and put up the first month and security deposit in cash (!), so, without a background check, we gave him a lease. That turned out to be a colossal error. For the first couple of months, things were hunky dory; John came to our door with an envelope of cash (!) on schedule, with a friendly smile. The third month, he was late with his rent payment, needed a shave and had a twinkle in his eye. Month four was like the last, but by now I was convinced he was stoned—the hallway fairly reeked of pot around the doorway to 908. Oh well, I thought, I smoke dope. After month five, we put Pez on notice, but to no avail.

One day, Luis Peres, the building manager, noticed an extension cord from the doorway of 908 to an electrical outlet in the hallway normally used by him when he vacuumed the carpets; that indicated that the power had been cut off in suite 908. When we tried calling Pez, we discovered that his telephone account was closed, too. By now, six months had passed with only three months rent in hand; we should have gone after him right then and there, but we let it slide because I had to be on Vashon and Pam didn't want to deal with Pez by herself.



Luis Peres with Yours Truly in 2018

Meanwhile, things started disappearing from the parkade under the building; Luis was getting regular complaints from the tenants. We both reckoned it was Pez. Luis took to hiding in the parkade, armed with a club, lying in wait for whomever was light fingered. Sure enough, one night he caught Pez in the act of stealing a bike. Luis confronted him, saying that if he heard of one more incident, that he was going to beat the daylights out of him. That took care of that; but our rents remained unpaid. On a more positive note, Pam and I became fast friends with Luis and his wife, Marcia.

As we couldn't contact Pez by any other means, and Pez refused to answer the door, Luise DiPetrantonio volunteered to go into 908 and have a look (I was still at the Vashon studio). She was aghast to find Pez going at it with another guy in the bedroom. (!) That was the last straw. We went to court to have him evicted; that cost serious money and took a few more weeks. However, John evacuated secretly one night, soon after the Notice of Eviction was taped to his door.

Some time later we received a hand-written, full-page letter from John; he apologized for messing up, inferred that he was on the mend and hoped we would forgive him. Pam and I appreciated his apology. Pam and I sussed that a divorce prompted his rental of 908 and that he subsequently fell apart. We chalked our losses up to "live and learn" and concluded that we were out of the rental business, once and for all.

2010 – *Giclée Prepress* – Book and Blog

As the economy languished, Vashon artists weren't making enough money.

First, they stopped buying my stretching and framing services. They did it themselves, to save money. Then it was the printing, too.

I knew the jig was up when Rebecca Douglas—one of my only remaining customers—got her own Epson 7900 printer (smaller than my 9889, but delivering equal results).

However, candidly speaking, I was getting a bit too far out for many of my customers and prospects, especially the ladies.



Even though I was 8 years sober, I was never more stoned.

Although I never sold any, I grew some of the best pot money couldn't buy.

After nearly twenty years of growing pot, my seed stock produced plants fully acclimatized to Vashon; ~100 of them thrived in two greenhouses.

The back deck was $\frac{3}{4}$ enclosed to create a 400-square-foot enclosure (37.1 square meters), and the old shed was enlarged with the addition of a smaller, 100-square-foot grow room (9.2 square meters), seen at left.

Photo by Pamela Swanson.

I was eating the stuff voraciously, in salads and baked goods, along with dozens of supplements; I felt like superman. Enhanced vigor empowered my libido; I dressed provocatively (and sometimes not at all); in so doing, I discovered that the Vashon art community was not as uninhibited as I hoped they might be.

Instead of being considered *avant garde*, they deemed me offensive. I never made a move on anyone (what is today called sexual assault); rather, I hoped to be “enticing.” Several of my female clients put up with my lewd behavior... until they didn’t.

Whether for reasons of etiquette or expense, the bottom line was that Vashon Island Imaging’s sales collapsed. By now, I also had zero AV income. Times were tight and a change was needed—but what?

I decided to write a book about printing. I reckoned that, if people were going to print their own stuff, they might want to learn about how to get the best results. My experiences running Vashon Island Imaging taught me that very few artists knew much about pre-press.

To digress for a moment: Prepress was the process of adapting artwork for specific types of output (printers or audiovisual displays), so that a reproduction looked like the original. For every type of reproduction, individual adjustments must be made to the artwork to compensate for the color biases of different repro machines.

Many folks thought that I simply pushed a button, that their giclées came out of my machine like a Xerox copy. No way José; I labored over each one, to get the best possible output from the Epson printing machine; adjustments were made to brightness, contrast, color, tint, tone and balance; multiple test strips were printed along the way, involving time and expense.

The whole idea of my seminars was to train people how to do their own prepress, so that their image files would arrive on my desk ready for printing. However, none of the jobs I did ever met that criteria, proving that people didn’t “get it.” Out of the 200 jobs I printed, 100% needed to have adjustments made, to print well.

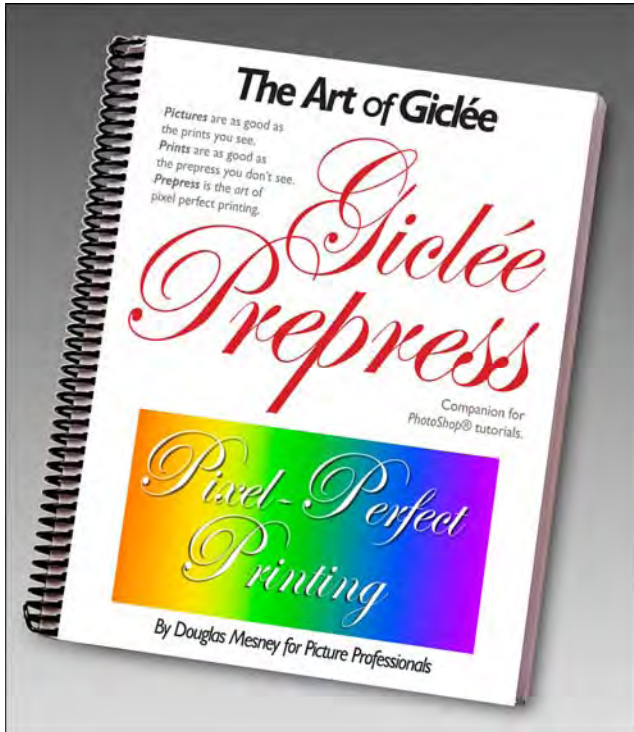
Attendance at the seminars dropped off; times were so tight that people wouldn’t pay \$15 for three hours of intensive Photoshop lessons. Heck, that was just \$5 per hour. From that fact, I deduced that there was a need for an educational book about pre-press.

The primary reason people had difficulty with color reproduction was caused by their computer monitors; a given picture would look different on my monitor than on yours and vice versa.

Standards were being developed that would solve most of those problems, but they weren’t there yet. The fact remained that, printing professionals still had to massage image files to get the colors right.

Getting the colors right was trickier than it may seem. Every printer had a color bias (or *blindness*) making it better or worse reproducing one or more colors; usually it was either a blue or red bias, while green was a problem for all forms of color reproduction.

In the old days, when printing was a profession, specialists working in the trade made the adjustments. Today, most printing shops are run by untrained staff; it is a DIY environment; artists must make their own adjustments (prepress) using Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator or InDesign—or they can pay someone else to do them. Thus, I reckoned that since Epson was selling so many printing machines, people might want to know how to get the best results using them.



I called the book Giclée Prepress; that was the first of several mistakes—nobody understood those two words, they were gobbledygook. “Art Printing for Dummies” would have been a far better title. Who knows, maybe I’ll revise the original edition and re-release the book with that catchy name... after I finish this tome. Ha!



Lord knows, I put enough work into Giclée Prepress; it explained a lot more than “just” how to prepress an image for printing. The book also explained how to photograph artwork as well as post printing procedures, like applying protective coatings and stretching canvases.

The book was a brain dump of just about everything I learned about repro in my fifty-year career. Besides the instructional text, there were well over 200 illustrations. Once I got going on the book, I was a man on a mission, spending 12 hours a day for six months.

As the book came together, I started looking for a publishing company. Amazon was my first choice; we’ve all heard their success stories about new authors making a killing. I made an appointment with a new-business rep and drove to Amazon’s Seattle HQ to find out more. On the ferry, I went over all the options I wanted to propose, but everything I thought turned out to be wrong.

Amazon controls everything; they print it, package it and ship it or course, but they also control the format and even have a say in the cover design, title and pricing.

In the case of my book, which was targeted at a small, niche-market, I might not make the minimums and could end up owing Amazon money. In the best case, I would garner five percent of the sale price. Oh, and they would retain full publishing rights in perpetuity; after signing with Amazon I could never back out and publish Giclée Prepress elsewhere or even self-publish the book. That gave me a lot to think about.

Talking with Amazon, I deduced that Giclée Prepress was such a specialized book, it was unlikely that a big publishing house would want to add my title to their portfolio. Besides that, accessibility was an issue; most publishers were located on the other side of the country, in New York.

The only other option was self-publishing, and that was the way I decided to go. The decision was largely inspired by the success of my lifelong friend Allan Seiden; he made enough money selling coffee table books about Hawaii, to afford a big house on the hills behind Waikiki.

Allan worked with printing companies located in Asia; he explained to me that finding a distributor was even more important than finding a printer; distributors took delivery of the print run and warehoused it; without a distributor, I would have to do my own warehousing—and storage space on Vashon Island cost a small fortune.

Nonetheless, I got in touch with one of the printers Allan recommended; their estimated printing and shipping costs were the *coups de grâce*; those combined costs would drive the book's selling price north of \$100—an impossible price that nobody would pay. There had to be a way, but what was it?

John Emms came up with the solution when he and his new partner visited me on their West Coast sightseeing trip. I hadn't seen John for a decade and wouldn't have recognized him; he was a skinny guy with a big mop of dark hair when we split up in Belgium and he moved to Minneapolis; since then he had become a big boy and was totally bald. (!)

Emms suggested that I print and market the book myself; I could sell it on the Internet and print copies on demand, order by order. Long ago I learned to listen when John spoke and this time was no exception; he made a strong case.

As soon as John left, I pow-wowed with Pam and she got started building a website for Giclée Prepress; she enjoyed the challenge of html and had become more proficient than I was at Web work. More importantly, it gave us a common purpose, an endeavor to share. I think she liked that; I certainly did.

To augment our Web presence, I created a Giclée Prepress blog. The idea was that the blog would obviate the need to update the book. The paper-printed volume would make the base case for prepress, while time-sensitive material, such as reviews of new gear or techniques were more appropriately published by electronic "media."

Contrary to the trends of the times, I refused to make an e-book of Giclée Prepress, even though I received quite a few requests. You can chalk that up to being old fashioned, or ego driven, take your choice. Lesson learned: if I ever remake the book, you can bet your sweet bippy that it will be available electronically.

While Pam was working on the website, I investigated printing machines. The world of LaserJet printing was entirely new to me. That was when my prepress skills stood me in good stead, comparing the various models. I knew what the results should look like and that I wanted the machine that reproduced the widest gamut. I looked at all the top brands available in Seattle: Xerox, Canon, HP, Epson and others; but, none of them produced acceptable color. I was used to giclée quality, i.e. high-end, inkjet printing, with a super-wide color gamut; the output of even the top-end LaserJet printing machines offered less than half as many colors.

Since my book was about improving the range of printed colors, especially subtle colors, I couldn't accept the hyped-up, contrasty colors that LaserJet's produced. Simply put, I would not be able to show examples of the very things I was writing about; it would be like showing a picture of an invisible man.

The color gamut I was after could be reproduced using the letter-press or offset printing process; however, those higher-quality presses cost a fortune, comparatively speaking. For an offset-printed book to be affordable, thousands of copies of Giclée Prepress would have to be printed in one go—which brought me back to the problem of warehousing.

Eventually, my search led to Pacific Office Automation, Seattle's biggest supplier of large-scale office machines. As serendipity would have it, they had just taken on a new line of "Biz Hub" laserjet printers from Konica-Minolta. (Who would have thought that when those two camera companies got married that their offspring would be a laserjet printer?)

Rich Uhrich, the chief technician, ran the machine through its paces for me and demo'd the color controls. I was impressed with the degree of color management possible with the Konica-Minolta. Uhrich printed some picture files I brought along; the results looked good, better than any other machine I was considering; so, we made a deal.

The Biz Hub line of machines utilized a new kind of ink that had a wax base. They claimed that waxy inks produced better colors because they "melted," thereby enlarging pixels (dots) enough to fill the (miniscule) white spaces normally found between printed pixels. Reducing white produced more saturated colors. (Pastels are made by adding white to a color).

Sure enough, Konica-Minolta machines did just that, providing a wider gamut, together with deeper blacks. Plus, the waxy inks printed with a sheen that further enhanced their color depth. (Glossy pictures show deeper colors than matte-finish prints.) From a printing-quality standpoint, the choice of a Biz Hub printer was a no-brainer—especially for the kind of black-on-black night scenes that were my favorites. However, there was more to it than met the eye.

Printing-machine makers are actually in the ink business; they sell you the printers for next to nothing (which can still be a lot) to get you hooked. You become their "ink junkie;" they make their money supplying your "fix." (I read that Epson *Ultra Chrome* inks cost on average \$16,000 per gallon [4.55 liters]. For my Epson 9900, the ten 700 ml ink cartridges cost about \$100 each—a full reload was nearly \$1,000. I had to sell a lot of prints to pay for that kind of habit.

Laserjet-printer manufacturers followed the same strategy; their inks came in proprietary cartridges, to prevent counterfeits. Cartridges came with computer chips embedded in them. The ink carts for Biz Hub machines ran about \$75; but, only four colors were needed (cyan, magenta, yellow and black—CMYK); a full reload therefore cost “only” \$300.

When you buy a big laser printer, like the \$18,000 Biz Hub 552 that I purchased from Pacific Office, they encourage you to purchase an ink-and-service plan. In Seattle, I had to accept the terms that Pacific Office offered because no other dealer in the area would service my printer if it wasn't one of “their” machines. There was obvious collusion between the dealers, but not much one could do about it.

The deal was, I reported machine readings every month and they shipped new ink carts based on my usage. Everything was good as far as ink was concerned, service was another matter. Buried in the fine print of the contract was a limit to the maximum number of copies per month included in the price, beyond which there were surcharges that amounted to 10¢ per letter-sized page [A4]. That got me into big trouble.

I was printing Giclée Prepress on 12 X 18 inch [27.94 X 45.72 cm] sheets for which the surcharge turned out to be nearly 25¢ per sheet, per side. As a result, I got killed the month that Pam and I printed the first sixty pre-release copies of Giclée Prepress, the ones to be distributed to magazine and newspaper editors for publicity and book-reviews. (I even sent a copy to Charlie Rose... with no reply.) We went so far over the monthly allowances that I got a bill for nearly \$8,000 in “service” fees. Yikes!

To digress for a moment: We printed thirty copies, but discovered a fatal flaw in them, requiring reprinting. The book's flaw was my character flaw—exhibitionism.



Thinking that I was particularly clever, I made a picture for the last page, to connote “the end.” It was a nude picture of my “end” that, although tastefully done, in an avante garde style (at least in my opinion), was frowned on (severely) by 9 out of 10 reviewers. I reckoned that only 10% of them had a sense of humor. But the joke was on me.

The book buyer at Glazer's Camera, for example, called me, in a distressed state, and demanded that I immediately remove the three test-market copies they had put on their shelves, after a female customer complained. I thought that was supremely ironic; the book had plenty of naked ladies between its 274 sheets. Lesson learned: some people can't take a joke. I quickly replaced my clever close with a fish photo (*Act Nonchalant*), and we printed a further thirty copies of the new version, bringing the month's total to sixty.

There was little I could do but plead my case with the powers that be at Pacific Office; I worked my way up to the branch manager, Russ Meyers; he knocked 20% off the bill and gave me a year to pay it off. From then on, we never printed more than a dozen copies a month—nor did we need to, as it turned out.



To promote the book, I did a few of shows. Glazer's offered me a table at their annual Summer Street Fair sales event, in June.

They put me right across from the Epson stand, which I thought was both appropriate and a nice gesture.

However, trying to be clever, I ingratiated myself with Epson when I showed an inquiring photographer a cheap solution to using Epson's rolled paper stock.

Photo by Bob Peterson.

The young woman in question had an Epson 2200 (I had two of them) and wanted to use long-roll stock for which there was no adapter (to use long rolls would require an upgrade to the new model, which she couldn't afford). I explained to her how I simply hung the roll above the printer, on a broomstick, and that worked just fine. The Epson sales reps quietly laughed between themselves and dismissed me.

I sent a copy of *Giclée Prepress* to John Lang, President of Epson USA, in hopes that Epson might incorporate the book into their promotional program and/or anoint me as one of their brand ambassadors; but I never got a reply. Was my free advice to that woman the reason for my rejection? I reckoned it was more likely the episode of *Flower Moon*—the faulty 9880 printer I had in Vancouver—that robbed me of an Epson-brand ambassadorship.

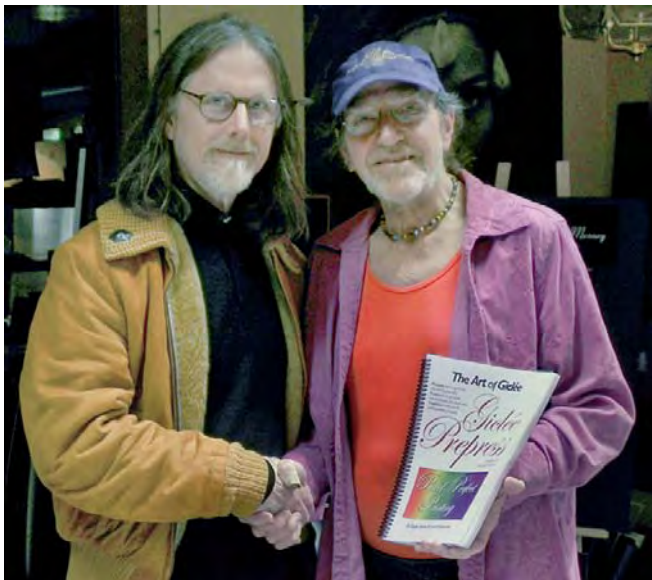
Later that year, in October, I promoted the book at the annual Digital Festival held by JVH Technical, Seattle's most prominent Epson dealer. I think it was there that I fully realized that my book was doomed.

Everyone attending the JVH Festival owned a big Epson printer; they were all qualified prospects for *Giclée Prepress*; half of them stumbled on my display and perused the book—but no sale.

I had the same result when asked to speak before a meeting of Seattle Color Management Users' Group, arranged for by Thom Schroeder; John Harrington was the principle speaker; I piggy-backed on his talk and raffled off a free copy of the book; but, again, there was little interest and no sales. In Vancouver, I sent a copy to the buyer at Kerisdale Camera, the city's only other dealer of Epson large-format printers (besides Tricera Imaging), but I never even got a reply. What was wrong? I reckoned that a.) folks thought they already knew it all, or b.) they were too lazy (or ignorant) to do prepress work, or c.) they were satisfied with the results produced by their printers' automatic settings (which were pretty good, actually).

Well, to be honest I did sell a couple of books.

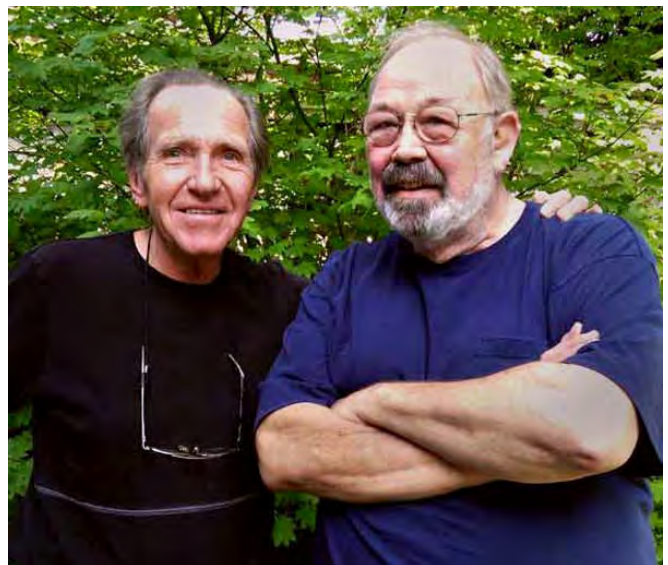
Photos by Pamela Swanson.



The first book sold was purchased by Robert Campbell, a Vashon resident and instructor of printing at Cornish College of the Arts.

Campbell was a colleague of my sister Kathy and her husband Lou, who also taught at Cornish. He read about the book in the Vashon Beachcomber; they published my news release about Giclée Prepress.

My good friend, colleague and former client Bob Peterson also bought a copy. He happened by my table at the Glazers event and likely felt sorry that my little book display wasn't getting much attention.



To this day, I wonder why Giclée Prepress never took off. Whatever the reason, it flopped and I was stuck with a printing business without any business.

After the JVH Digital Festival it was time for the holiday season Vashon Island Studio Art Tour. Pam was stuck in Vancouver having been banned from the US in August (as you'll read about, below); so, she wasn't able to help. I didn't like running the show by myself because it was too difficult to pay attention to shoppers and keep an eye out for shoplifters.

Giclée Prepress is reproduced in its entirety (272 pages) in Volume Twelve.

2010 – Pipe Dreams – Spinning Calendars

I realize now that months of living high were taking a toll; rational thinking succumbed to “pipe dreams.”

To digress for a moment, about those dreams: I was smoking and eating weed all day; there was so much of it; my skills as a grower were well-honed and I was getting bolder, growing more each year.

I started baking and cooking with weed—brownies and cookies at first, then exotic breads (my favorite was a cinnamon nut loaf, a dense, whole wheat loaf made with chopped pecans). I also made cannabis infused sauces, salads and potages; the various dishes were accomplished with derivatives I made from the plants. I used a Malaysian coconut press to squeeze the oil out of the parts of plants normally discarded—stems, branches and fan leaves.²²

Before the squeeze, I roughly chopped the plants and stewed them in a 10-liter pot over a slow stove (I used my wood stove) for two days. The braised plants were separated with a big pasta colander and the bright green water returned to the pot. After reheating the emerald-colored juice, two pounds of unsalted butter was thrown in the pot and that mixture was simmered for another two days, stirring vigorously every hour or so, during the day. While simmering, the colloidal THC oil in the green water was readily absorbed by the oils in the butter, which floated on top of the water. Finally, the mixture was cooled and refrigerated (I did this process in winter, and put the pot outside to chill). The result, after chilling, was a 12-inch-diameter pancake of green butter, about a half-inch thick.

The juice squeezed from the braised plants was bottled and used as a spice. Cannabis has a distinctive peppery flavor that goes well in the kinds of tomato sauces spiced with basil, oregano, thyme and marjoram.

For brownies and bread, I used finely ground flowers—dried flowers passed through a sieve (I used a rugged 12-inch strainer). My recipe called for one ounce of powder (about a cup full) in a three-loaf batch; I reckoned that was equal to about one joints worth of weed per generous slice of bread. [20 half-inch-thin slices per loaf = 30 slices = 1/2 gram per slice (1 ounce = 32 grams).

From the foregoing, I hope you'll appreciate how stoned I really was; I was operating in an altered state of mind—I thought I was brilliant. How could I fail?

I reckoned I was smart enough to adapt to the struggling economy. The paralysis of the economy, which started with the crash in 2008, was evident everywhere. The art market was paralyzed; nothing sold. A few successful artists and photographers were able to squeeze out living; they were the fortunate few with exposure to the top 1%.

²² Malaysians use such presses to squeeze milk from the ground-up flesh of coconuts. My press could handle two liters of ground-up coconut at a go; the grinds were placed into a perforated metal cylinder, then a plunger was screwed down to extract the liquid; 12 inches [30 cm] of coconut grinds were reduced to a 2-inch-thick [5 cm] pancake that looked like an oversized, white hockey puck.

The élites were the only ones still buying art; but they wanted originals—bona fide, certified ones. The lucky few artists who made it succeeded by cost cutting, by doing everything themselves.

As a DIY manual, Giclée Prepress was aimed at them; but they didn't buy; interest was there, but it wasn't genuine, at least not enough to translate into sales. The book was a bust.

The massive effort and cost put into Giclée Prepress ran the coffers almost dry; I needed capital, fast. With my fiscal situation becoming an existential threat, I turned to gimmickry for salvation and made a ~~delusion~~ decision that evolved into another boondoggle: *Spinning Calendars*.

Probably, I was watching too much late-night TV; but all those ads promoting gadgets inspired me to come up with an item of my own—a picture-based product.

Coming up with a new way to sell pictures was a challenge; pictures were already on everything—T-shirts, coffee cups, cars and busses, you name it. What else could be done?

The solution popped into my head while I took pictures of Chris Roberts latest offerings. Roberts was Vashon's top grower. He and I met and became friends (for a while) through Joan Kirshner, with whom he lived, in her house. Together, they supplemented Social Security selling art (Joan's) and cannabis (Roberts').

While she could still see (Joan went blind, of cataracts) Joan visited my studio during one of the Vashon Island Art Studio Tours. We discovered we were neighbors—she lived right around the corner, quite literally Joan and Chris were real stoners, like me. We got along quite well at the beginning; however, I was put off by the ramshackle nature of their abode (and lives).

Chris grew Indica in an upstairs bedroom that looked like a movie set for Ricky's grow room, in *Trailer Park Boys*. The walls and ceiling were totally covered in reflective tin foil and mylar; a brilliant 2K [200-watt] grow light hung from the center of the room; under that artificial sun grew the remnants of a two-year-old "mother" plant, and two dozen of her clones—6-inch-high [~5 centimeters] baby plants.²³

Chris was quite proud of his work, as evidenced by the artistic way he presented his products. (Chris was also a gifted artist who did portraits in oils and pastels—but his paintings didn't generate enough income, which is why he turned to growing weed.)

Chris brought out his latest crop to show us—a round basket nearly two feet [~61 centimeters] in diameter. It was quite a haul, worth a couple of thousand dollars, at \$100/oz [~30 grams].

²³ The cloning was done by slicing off a newly grown branch with a sharp razor, making a half-inch [1.25 cm] split in the base of the cut-off piece, then wetting the base, dusting it with a rooting powder, and planting it in a little peat-moss flower pot filled with enriched soil—Chris liked the kind with ground coconut husks. By manipulating the light-dark periods, Chris was able to speed-up the growing process; the clones took three months to complete their cycle, bearing flowering colas; that was about twice as fast as normal—in Nature, the plants have a 120-180-day cycle.



Chris Roberts and Joan Kirschner in happier days, 2010.

Roberts asked if I would please take a picture of him with the basket. I was happy to oblige; the basketful of beautiful buds was indeed “pretty as a picture.”

We took the shots in the backyard, where it was sunny. Joan worked her way into the shot; I could see that irked Chris; it was hard getting a shot without him smirking.

I also shot some close-ups of the basket because, while I was shooting, an idea clicked in my head: calendars for pot heads.

[Spoiler Alert: The shot of Chris and Joan holding the big basket of buds became the theme picture at Joan’s funeral, four years later. She died when a caretaker mixed up her meds and she accidentally (?) overdosed.]

After the photo session, we sampled the new crop and kicked around the calendar idea. Chris said he’d be happy to style new shots. As we smoked, the idea fed on itself and grew out of proportion. I was convinced that I was onto something big.

Did you every visit a so-called head shop? If so, you’ll recall that they sold all sorts of paraphernalia and clothing emblazoned with the iconic cannabis leaf. One of the most notorious head shops—Mark Emory’s *Cannabis Culture*—was located in Vancouver. I reckoned that I could sell the calendars there as well as advertise them in marijuana magazines and distribute them via the Poste; that was the way Emory sold seeds. Maybe I could partner with Emory and sell calendar-seed combos! And what about posters? Hmm. (I told you, Roberts grew potent pot.)

While I was mounting copies of the pictures for Chris and Joan, another idea hit me. Instead of mounting the circular basket in a square frame, why not a circular one? The cost of a circular frame, that’s why! Thus, I decided to flush-mount the circular pictures by gluing prints onto disks of thin plywood.

After successfully mounting a disk (it took a few tries to work out the bugs) came the challenge of how to hang it. I never did come up with an elegant solution to that problem; instead, I came up with another way to present them—horizontally, as “rolling tables.”

So-called rolling tables were pot-heads' versions of their parents' cocktail trays—used to prepare and serve stimulants. There was a good selection of them for sale at Cannabis Culture. To make mine cooler, I mounted them on “Lazy Susan” turntables, so they spun. What fun!

The hardest part was making a circular calendar. What I thought would be easy-peasy in Photoshop didn't work. I found it impossible to make a repeatable arc for all twelve months.

I asked Pam for her help; she was somewhat familiar with Adobe Illustrator; she thought she could work out a solution; but, in the end, she found another way to do it. The new way was so “easy” that Pam added an outer ring with an astrological calendar.

To add value, I decided to make Spinning Calendars limited editions; each was signed and numbered. Going that route, I hoped to command \$49.99 for 15-inch-diameter [~38 cm] tables, and \$29.99 for 10-inch-diameter ones [~30 cm].

Those prices were on the expensive side; people expected things to cost \$14.99—the price of late-night TV stuff.²⁴ However, even at those ambitious prices, I wasn't making a dime. The costs for the plywood disks and plastic turntables, together with printing and dry-mounting supplies, packaging costs, and retail mark-up, drove my profit margin down to less than 5%.

Optimistically, I reckoned I could make up for low margin with high volume, selling Spinning Calendars on the Internet. Visions of sugar plums were certainly dancing in my head as I dreamt of the size of that market.

While Pam put together a Spinning Calendars website, I expanded the product line with eleven more illustrations, bring the total to twelve. The new selections were based on marketing criteria refined at Oh My Godard, regarding subject genre and color.

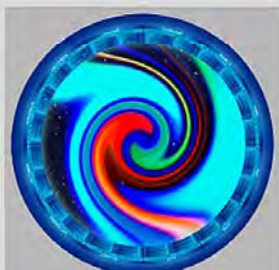
I chose—and in some cases made—circular pictures in a range of primary colors (red-yellow, blue-purple, and green-brown). The subjects of most were either florals or abstracts—two of IKEA's three best-selling genres. Three of them were downright naughty, to appeal to the tattooed-biker crowd. The most playful was a close-up of a vagina called *Hot Flash* (originally called *Nectarine Dream*).

I produced a half-dozen sets of each calendar, in both large and small sizes; that was 12 X 6 X 2 = 144 calendars; my investment was tipping the till to the tune of >\$5,000.

To launch *Spinning Calendars*, I approached the Marc Emory's *Cannabis Culture* shop, the original one, at 3421 West Hastings Street, in Vancouver. At the time, Jodi Emory, Marc's wife, was running the business. Marc was tied up in the USA, at a trial that resulted in a five-year prison term, for selling seeds through the mail—a Federal, interstate offense.

²⁴ Today (2017) the magic price is \$19.99.

Click selection to see enlarged view.



Twist of Fate



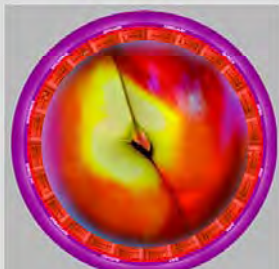
Blue Moon



Blue Mosque



Body Geometry No. 2



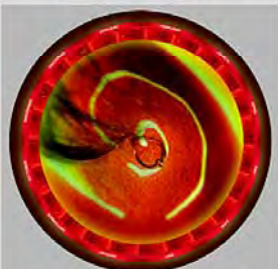
Hot Flash No. 1



Body Geometry No. 1



Illuminated Dancer No. 1



Illuminated Dancer No. 2



Orange Hibiscus



Pink Rose



Golden Harvest



Mary Jane Mandala No. 3

Buy Spinning Calendars Now

This site and all contents © Douglas Mesney 2010 | 604-683-6380 | douglas@mesney.com

I had called Jodi beforehand to book a meeting; over the phone she seemed enthusiastic. However maybe she was stoned the day Pam and I showed her Spinning Calendars because she was unimpressed with what we showed her. More precisely, while she agreed that Spinning Calendars were unique, she thought the price was too high for an item that was, essentially, a novelty.

After pleading my case, she reluctantly agreed to put three Spinning Calendars in the display case for a trimester trial. She wouldn't take more than that; she said the Calendars took up too much display space for their worth.

2010 | Spinning Calendars Showcase | Plates N^{os} 1-12

Plate N^o1: The spiraling design for Twist of Fate was made in Photoshop using the "Twirl" filter on a base image of colored strips. Stars were added to the black areas.

Plate N^o2: Pink Rose was a blossom purchased at Thriftway; an atomizer was used to spray water over it. It was photographed digitally with a Nikon D2 camera and a 55mm Micro-Nikkor lens using an ISO of 200 and a Kelvin setting of 7100, to warm the red colors.

Plate N^o3: Blue Mosque Ceiling was shot in Istanbul during my trip there with Anna Raus, in 2001. I used a 17-35 mm Nikkor zoom lens, racked wide. The exposure (at ISO 200) was f5.6 at 1/8th second. The camera was aimed straight up, hand-held, from a kneeling position. The natural colors were enhanced with Photoshop.

Plates N^{os}4-5: Body Geometry N^{os}1 & 2 imitate Robert Forest's mandala-like, step-and-repeat nudes, that he made back in the 1970s. What took him hours in the darkroom, I was able to do in minutes, using Photoshop. The model was Sol Diaz, lit with a video projection of colored lights at the Peppermill Casino, as part of the "Neon Nudes" series, photographed at the Nelson Street studio in Vancouver, 2004, with a Nikon D1 and a 35-70 mm Nikkor lens.

Plate N^o6: Orange Hibiscus started its life in Hawaii, where the blossom was photographed using a 55 mm Micro-Nikkor lens on a Nikon D2 camera during time off from a Nike show in Kauai.

Plate N^o7: Blue Moon was put together in Photoshop from a lunar picture taken from the deck of my studio on Vashon Island with a 600 mm Nikkor with a 2X tele extender, making it a 1200 mm lens. Using the D2 Nikon, which was not "full field" increased the nominal length of the lens to ~1600 mm. The exposure at ISO 800 was 1/30th-second at f4.

Plates N^{os}8-9: Two baskets of home grown weed, photographed with a 55 mm Micro-Nikkor using a D2 camera at ISO 200. Golden Harvest was my own crop. Mary Jane Mandala was dope grown by Chris Roberts, who inspired Spinning Calendars.

Plates N^{os}10-11: Illuminated Dancer N^{os}1 & 2 were modelled by Stephanie Parker. Her body was illuminated with images of fire-barrel designs shot at Burning Man in 2004 cast onto her body with a Sanyo 2K video projector.

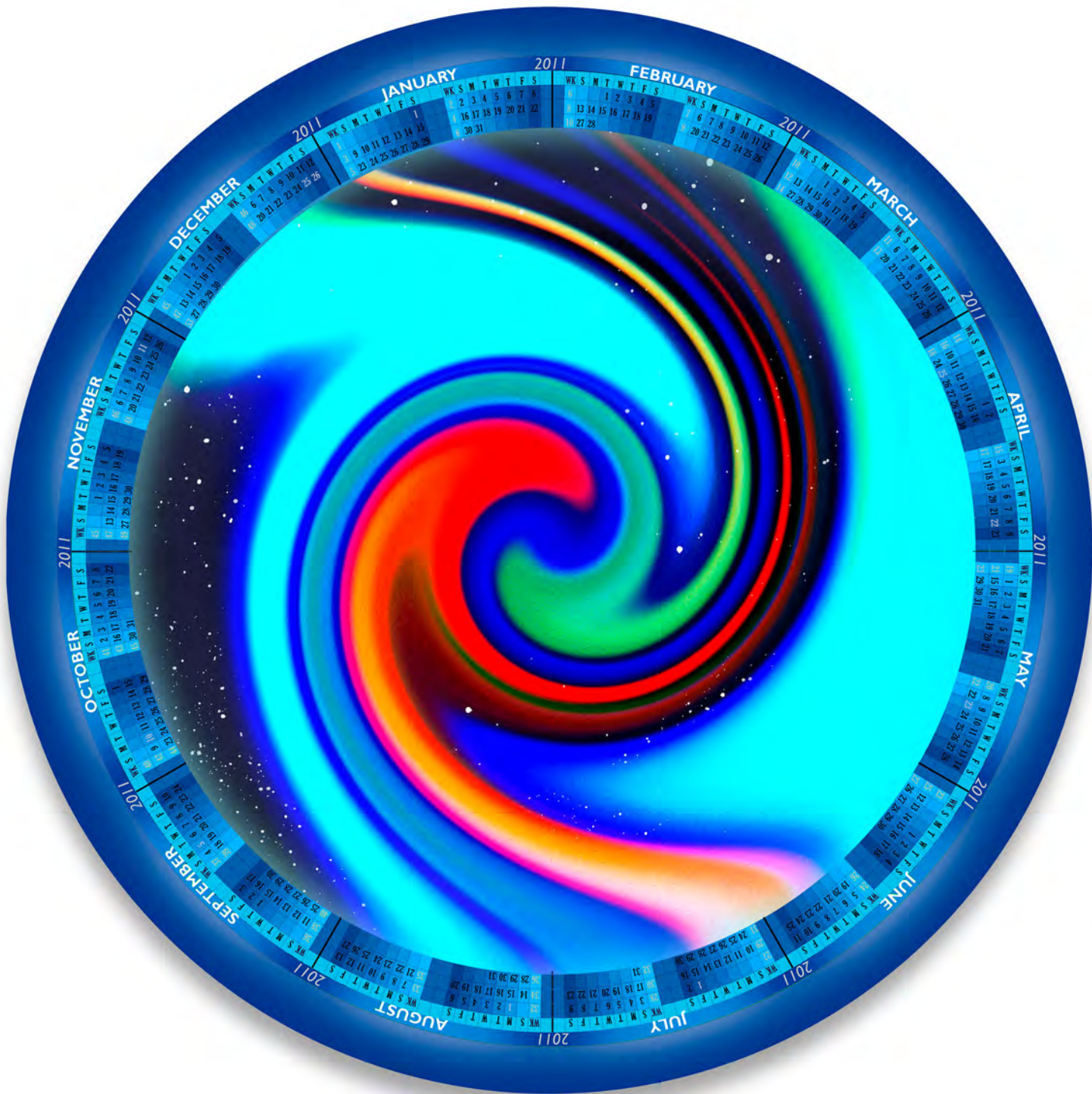
These two, Hot Flash and the cannabis pictures were chosen to appeal to the clientele of head shops like Marc Emery's Cannabis Culture, in Vancouver. The tamer pictures were included to disguise the others on Web presentations.

Plate N^o12: Hot Flash was originally titled Nectarine Dream. Jennifer Caldwell modelled for the picture. Colorful images were projected onto her well-oiled body. It was amusing watching peoples' various reactions to this one.



Underside of a large size Spinning Calendar. Super-thin (3mm) Baltic Birch plywood was used for the pedestal and table disks; they were glued to plastic lazy-susan turntables sourced from Mexico. Printed-giclée imaged were glued to the top and bottom, then coated with a protective, liquid-laminate coating (Clear Shield).

I was able to source pre-cut 12-inch plywood disks for the small size calendars. For the large ones, my neighbor, Steve Rubicz, routed 14-inch circles from 16-inch squares cut from 4 X 8-foot sheets specially-ordered from Island Lumbar at great expense. Despite his valiant efforts, Steve's disks had the wavy-cut look of a hand-made product. Maybe that was good, considering each was a signed original artwork.



2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 1
"Twist of Fate"



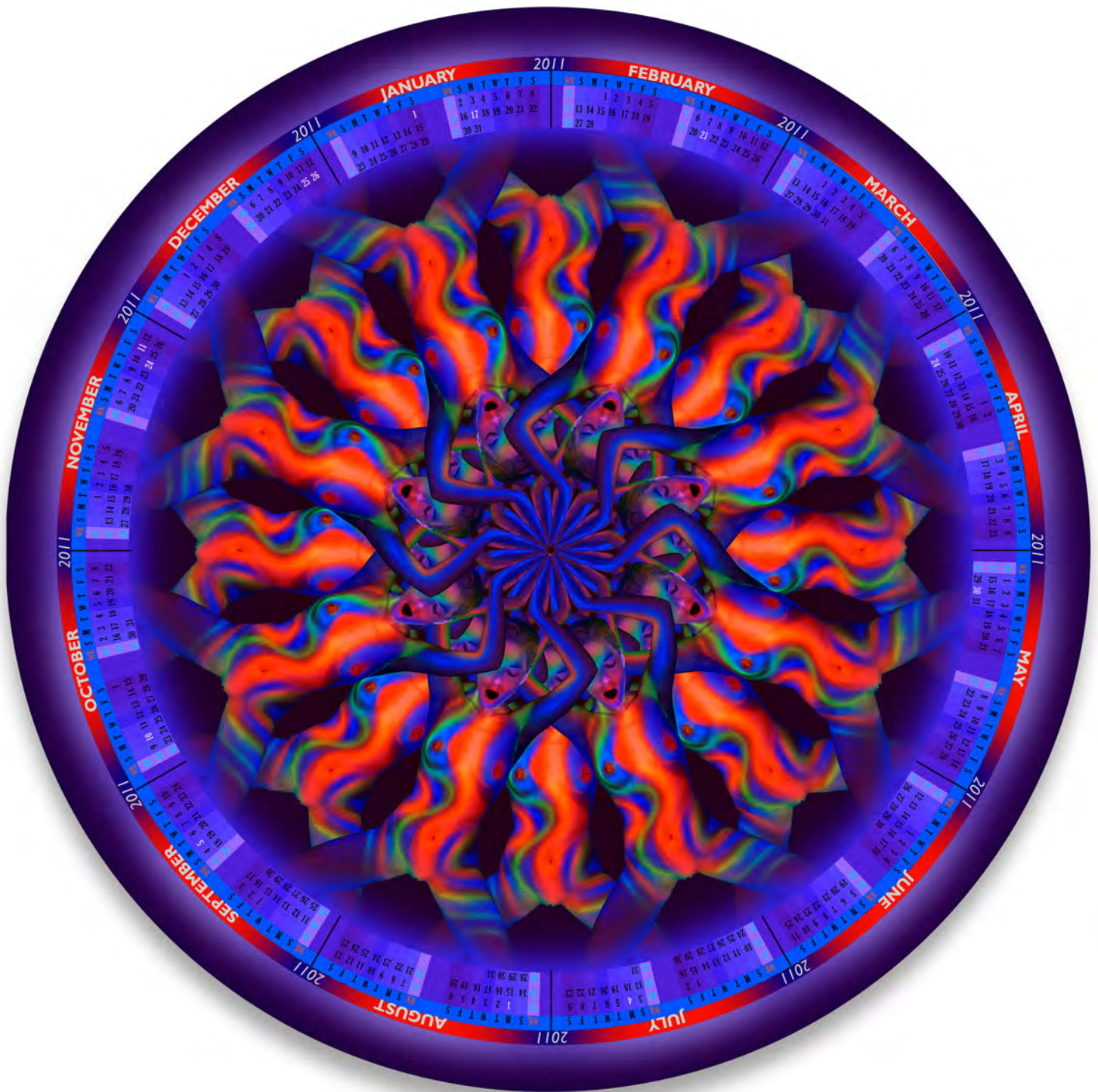
2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 2
“Pink Rose”



2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 3
“Blue Mosque”



2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 4
“Body Geometry N°1”



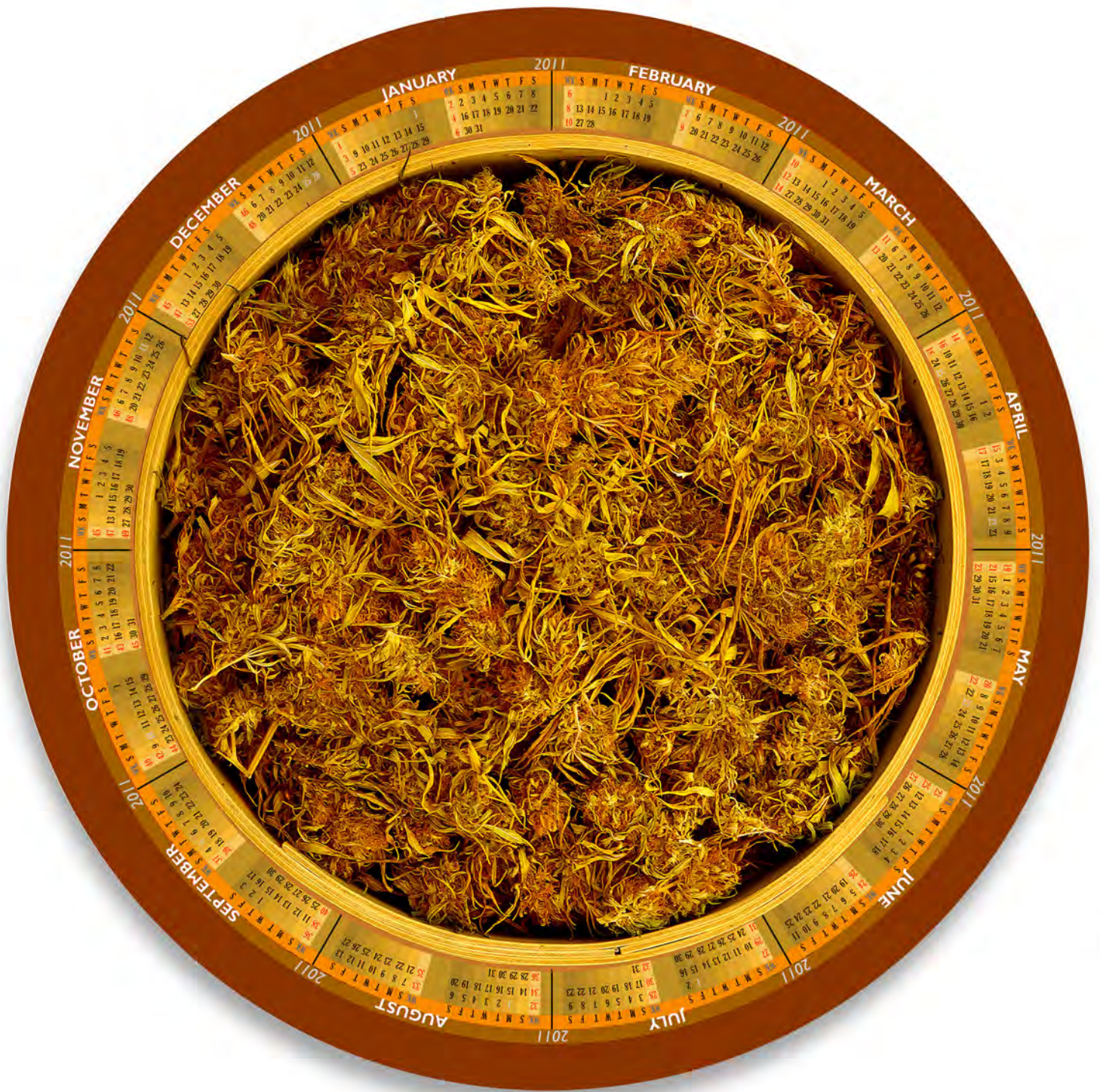
2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 5
“Body Geometry N°2”



2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 6
“Orange Hibiscus”



2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 7
“Blue Moon”



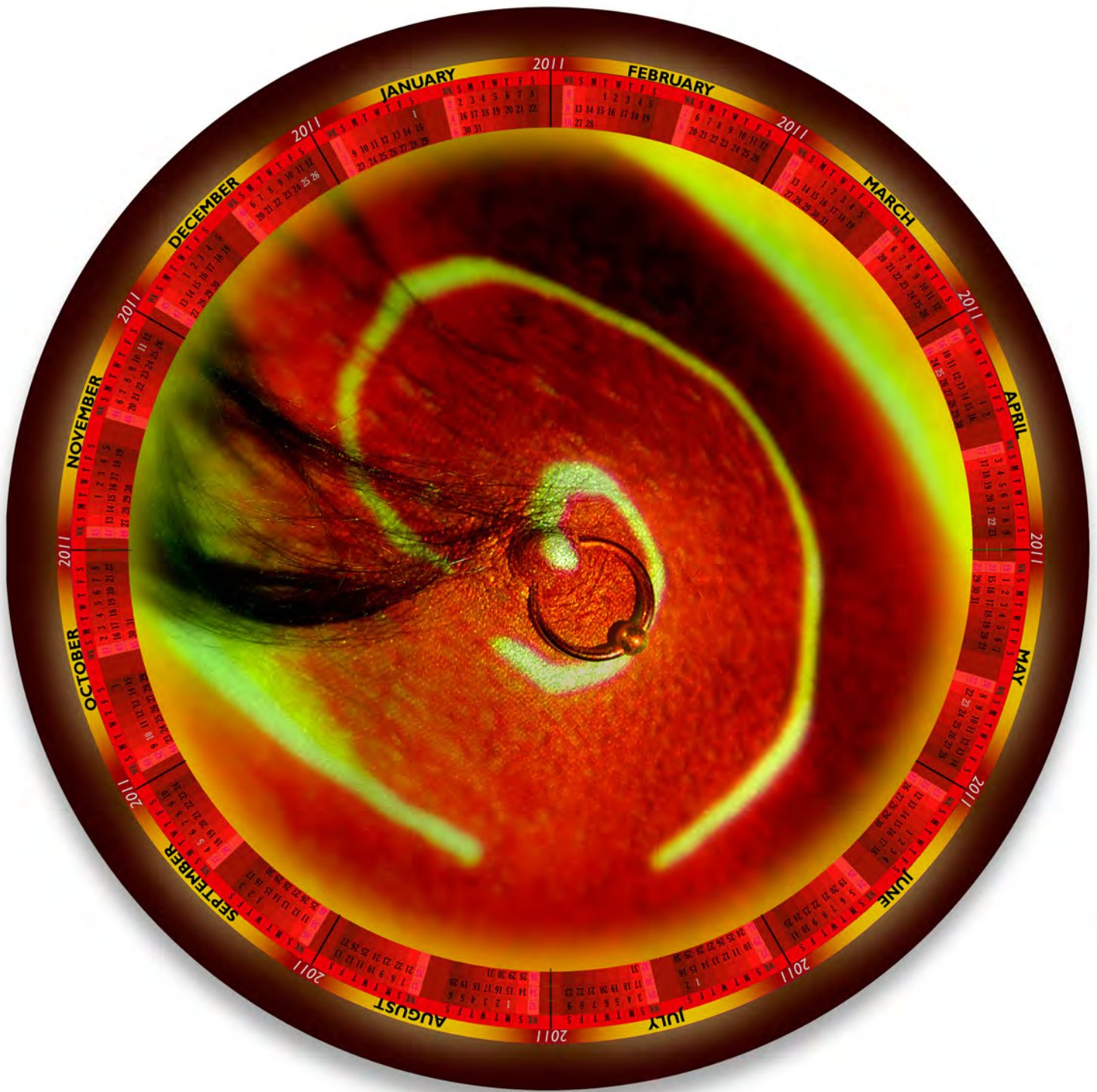
2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 8
“Golden Harvest”



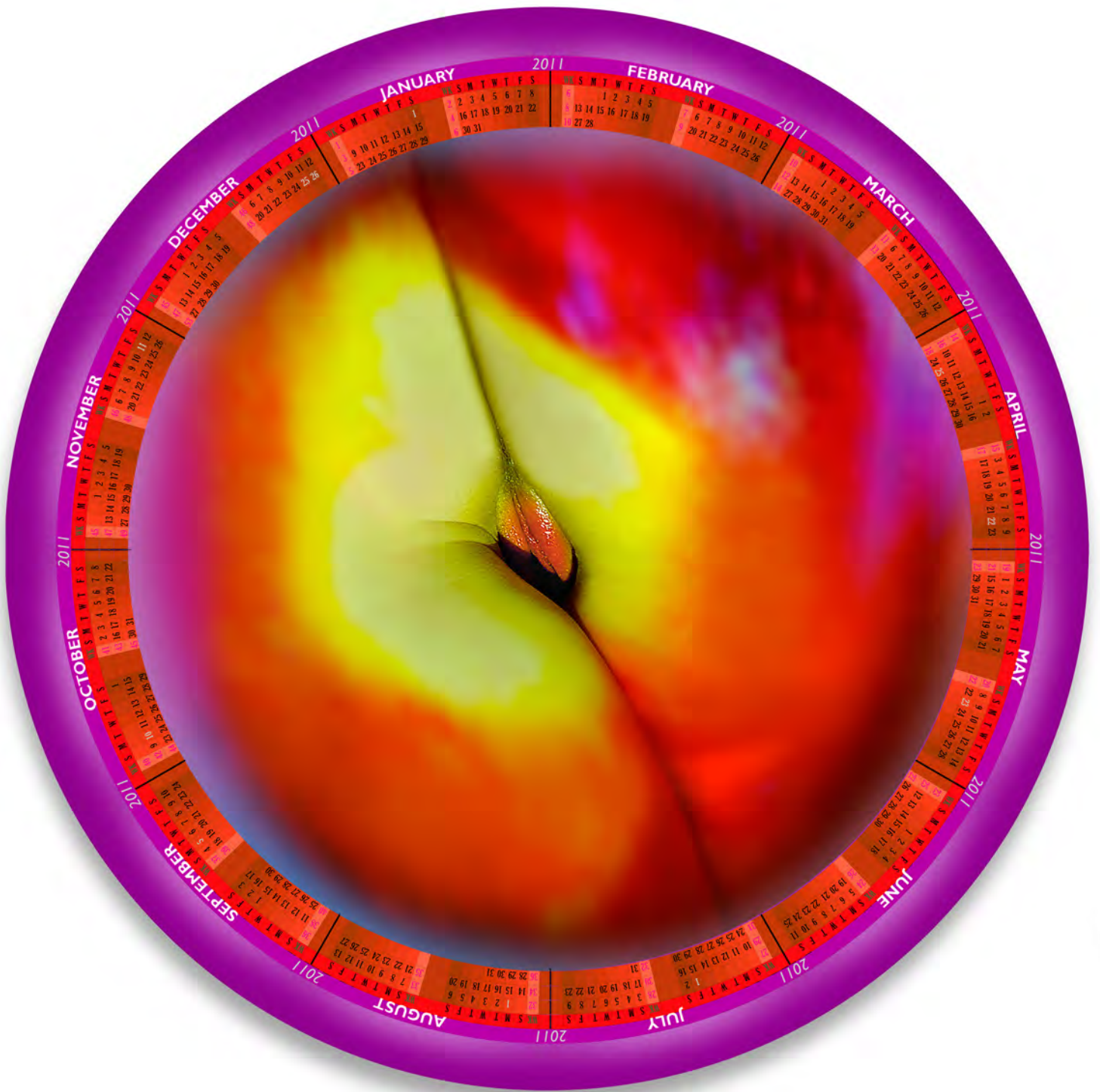
2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 9
“Mary Jane Mandala”



2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 10
“Illuminated Dancer N°1”



2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 11
“Illuminated Dancer N°2”



2010 | SPINNING CALENDARS | PLATE N° 12
“Hot Flash”

2010 – Spinning Calendars – No Turnover

Jodi was right; the Spinning Calendars languished in that display case. After three months, I got a call from Jodi asking me to come and pick the merchandise; the test marketing had failed. Back on Vashon, Marci Christopher agreed to let me set up a Spinning Calendars display in her curiosity and antiques shop, Treasure Island. She sort of snickered when I showed them to her, as if to say, “WTF?” Not one sold in more than six months, so I pulled them, at Marci’s request. When I picked them up, Marci told me that my two sisters had paid her a visit and leafed through the Spinning Calendars collection, disapprovingly. That was funny—Barbara never bothered to let me know she was on the Island. *Quel snob*. Spinning Calendars turned out to be yet another Mesney mistake, another boondoggle. The website was taken down (no sales there either) and the project abandoned in favor of yet another get-rich-quick scheme. Read on.... [Spoiler Alert: Chris Roberts has since gone on the wagon; I guess Joan’s death had a real impact on him. He’s as straight as an arrow now, getting back to his art and working as a line cook in an Island pizzeria. Pam and I saw him at Treasure Island last year (2017); he still called me “the fifth Beatle.”]

2010 – Departures & Losses – Cycles of Change

Pam’s father, Bill, and younger brother, David, visited us on Vashon Island. It was a remarkably short stay, considering how far they had driven. We gave them a tour of the house and studio, sat and chatted on the front porch, then went out for dinner at the Back Bay Inn where they had rooms for the night. The next morning, Pam and I joined them for breakfast, at their hotel, and then they were gone, back to Winnipeg, Manitoba via Kaslo, BC, to drop off Bill. Pam’s dad was quite a guy; he was an achiever, a self-made man with a strong ethic; Pam told me his life story; I found that I related to the old geezer. The strong bonding between Pam and David with their father was so unlike my family. Conversations never lagged; they always had something to talk about.

I was more or less permanently based on the Island. Pam still had her job at BC Children’s Hospital; she spent most of her time in Vancouver. We were both going back and forth between Vancouver and Vashon with frequent regularity. Everything was rolling along smoothly until Pam got a phone call from her sister Ann, in Kamloops with news that their Mom was in the hospital, suffering with a severe colon blockage; the situation was grim. Pam’s mother, Beverly Swanson, was an alcoholic trying (with some difficulty) to recover. She lived by herself, in a low-rent apartment in North Kamloops, on the banks of the Thompson River, just a few miles from Pam’s sister Ann’s trailer home.

Pam and Ann came to their mother’s rescue only in extreme cases. For example, one time their mom took a fall and that nobody found her for three days (OMG). Once that was fixed, Beverly was on her own again... until Pam got the call about her bowel blockage. Pam left for Kamloops immediately; she got there in time to say goodbye to her Mom, then returned to the Island, to help me with the Vashon Island Imaging stand, at the Vashon Strawberry Festival.



Left to right: Charity McCarthy; Pamela Swanson; Blaine, Travis & Ann Dempster; Bill Swanson (the great Progenitor); Tina, Tabatha & Conrad Swanson (Lloyd & Sabrena's kids); David Swanson (Pam's brother); Sabrena Swanson (Lloyd's wife); Tara Garioch holding baby Maggie; Mike O'Reilly (Charity's ex BF); Shannah Garioch; Kelly Garioch (behind Shanna); Lloyd Swanson (Pam's brother). Charity, Tara and Travis are Ann & Blaine's kids.

Earlier that summer, my sister Kathy left Vashon to go live with sister Barbara, in Los Angeles. I was disappointed (but not surprised) that she never even said goodbye to me; I heard that she left from a neighbor; our relationship had apparently sunk to new lows. Since her husband, Lou Hetler, died, in 2001, Kathy had been going through some deep-rooted changes. She became more spiritual, set-up an altar with Lou's picture and an "eternal flame" (candle). She told me that she and Lou still communicated with her; that he gave her "signs." Spooky. Kathy was a follower of the spirit guide called Seth.²⁵ She believed that like Seth's channeler, Jane Roberts, she could channel Lou. She claimed that the two were still in touch with each other. After Lou died and Anna left me, Kathy and I visited each other with fair regularity; we supported each other and, for a couple of years, were closer than ever. Then, as Kathy morphed into a new character, I saw less and less of her. My sister was a professional actress; she knew how to play roles. That ability—to become different people—combined with Seth's philosophy, that you are who and what you think you are, made it easy for her transform herself by taking on a permanent new identity. Kathy had her name legally changed to Patti Pimento. Seriously. That was just the start. Soon after, Patti got rid of nearly all Kathy's stuff, sold her house on Vashon Island and moved to LA, to live with Kathy's sister Barbara. I tried to brush off her snub but felt a sense of loss. My younger sister Barbara had already dissed me in Brussels, ten years earlier. Now, with Kathy gone, I felt abandoned again.

Soon after Bill Swanson's Vashon visit, he became ill, in August. He was 91 years old. At that age, the end could come at any time. So, it was with some urgency that Pam and I went to Kaslo to visit him. After their visit, Pam headed back to Vashon; she was spending the summer with me. Pam bought a one-way bus ticket from Vancouver to Seattle, knowing that I would be driving her back to Vancouver, eventually.

²⁵ Wikipedia: The Seth Material is a collection of writing dictated by Jane Roberts to her husband from late 1963 until her death in 1984. Roberts claimed the words were spoken by a discarnate entity named Seth.

The one-way ticket was cause for her to be interrogated at the US border. They presumed she might be a waif without the means or motivation to return to Canada. Truth told; Pam dresses a bit like a flower child. That was no help. The question dug deeper; they wanted to know about her job and residency. Unfortunately, Pam's answers confused the interrogator. She truthfully explained that she was a part-time worker, living in Douglas Mesney's Vancouver flat and that she was on her way to stay with him on Vashon Island. There was more, but the short version of the story is that Pam got sent back to Canada and was banned from the USA until she got a green card. What?!

Outraged, I went down to the Blaine border crossing to appeal Pam's case—that was despite having been told there was no appeal. Not a good idea. I explained to the *gendarmarie* that we were married, that Pam lived in my condo, that she didn't need a full-time job. The officers could have cared less about what I had to say; they explained that Pam would have to appear in person and that if she lost the (disallowed) appeal, she would be banned from the States for a further ten years. (A third denial would result in a lifetime ban.) So, that was the end of that; the time had come for Pam to get a green card.

The immigration process necessary for Pam to get a US green card was arduous and expensive. There were a lot of hoops to jump through. Pam and I postponed the inevitable as long as possible; we wanted to avoid any contact with the US government until we absolutely had to. Taxes were one reason to stay off the government's radar. According to a bilateral tax treaty, we would both have to file taxes in both countries. (I was already doing that.)

Another complication was all the paperwork I had to produce, to prove I was divorced from my previous three wives, was legally married to Pam and had the wherewithal to support her, i.e., she would not become a ward of the State.

However, with Pam banned, the time had come. So, in September, we presented ourselves to the US Consulate, in Vancouver. We were informed that immigration-visa processing would take up to a year, during which Pam would remain excluded from the US. Once her initial immigration status was granted, Pam would receive a "conditional" two-year green card. During those two years Pam could either live in the USA, unable to leave; or she could stay in Canada and not be able enter the States until her conditional status was removed. Ha!

So much for making our Vashon-Vancouver commuting easier, eh?

2010 – Faux Friends – False Hopes

A new art gallery opened in Vashon, called Sunshine and Ideas.

I stopped by to show my work and ask for wall space. The young man tending the store looked to be about 16 years old; but I sensed that he was old for his years.

He told me it was his gallery, that he ran it with his mom and that showing my work would be her decision. He suggested that I come back the next morning, when she would be there.

Just before lunchtime the next day, I returned to the Sunshine and Ideas gallery. There was a bright yellow VW clunker parked out front, with a sexy vixen sitting on it. I parked in the next space, said good morning in passing, and headed to the gallery entrance.

To my pleasant surprise, she followed me and introduced herself as the gallery co-owner, Heidi Stair. She explained that she was starting the business for herself and her son. (He had some severe physical challenges, having been born inside out, requiring major rounds of surgery to put his organs back inside his body.)



As explained by Heidi, the mission of Sunshine and Ideas was to be an alternative gallery, for artists dissed by the Blue Heron clique (that certainly included me).

There was a twinkle in Heidi's eye that I should have recognized as a sign of trouble.

Heidi's first and last show at Sunshine and Ideas featured the work of Tim Carney (right).

Heidi liked my work and agreed to show it. I invited her to my studio (heh heh) to help select the works that would be shown. I sussed that she was pretty stoned and offered some of my home-grown; after that we spent the entire afternoon chit-chatting. It was the beginning of an odd chapter of my life, in which I discovered what was important.

Through Heidi, I entered the sub-culture of Vashon Island; it felt like high school again. Back then, I lived two lives. I spent half of my time "underground," with my bud-smoking buddies, Mike Friedman and Steve Solomita. The other half was spent as a clean-cut, crew-cut varsity boy. The difference was that in high school I took the occasional weekend puff of shitty, seedy Mexican weed, whereas now I was stoned 24/7/365 on dynamite, home-grown grass.

Heidi was another full-fledged stoner. Although married, with grown children, she kept a "tight" relationship with her grower boyfriend Charlie.

She started showing up unexpectedly for coffee or cocktails; it became a regular thing. She was totally impressed with my audiovisual work; I screened the Oceano show for her; it blew her away, as did my art-printing studio. Being an artist herself (a painter), she grasped the concept of selling signed, limited edition giclée prints, instead of originals; she said it was a genius idea. Through our growing friendship, I became a "consultant" who Heidi relied on to verify the credentials of artists being considered for her gallery.

As soon as any new gallery opened on Vashon, every artist on the Island glommed onto them. Thus, Heidi had a lot of riff raff to sort through. She took me around with her, to interview the hopefuls. That was how I came to meet Tim Carney, one sunny, summer afternoon. Tim produced spacey scenes working with reflective, holographic foils on black canvases; they were very unique.

More unique was a collection of several dozen egg-sized river rocks made into little jewels by covering them with holographic in Arabian and Moorish patterns.

Heidi took Tim's work as well; she gave him a generous amount of wall and shelf space.

The little gems attracted an inordinate amount of attention on the First Friday Art Cruise.



Tim started visiting my studio now and then, for a smile and a smoke. He was an avid mushroom hunter and loved scouting my property. He found a bunch of edibles, but never the magic mushrooms we were hoping for.

Heidi knew the value of publicity and the impact of showmanship. When she debuted our work on the first-Friday Art Cruise, Heidi arranged to have a mobile pizza chef serving slices in the parking lot in front of Sunshine and Ideas. The pizza chef was a gorgeous blonde who caught my eye, Wendy-Jo Weston.

Wendy was Heidi's good friend; they were like sisters. It wasn't long before Heidi, Wendy-Jo and Tim became regulars at my studio. I felt like the host of an 18th century "salon," where friends got together and bounced ideas off each other.

I looked forwards to entertaining my new circle of friends and colleagues. Vashon could be a lonely place without friends. I tried to integrate Anne Gordon into the mix; she was another free thinker as well as my first printing customer, which is how we met; but she had better things to do; she wasn't much of a stoner.



Anne was Vashon Island Imaging's first customer. We met at Café Luna, a trendy coffee shop in Vashon town. The meeting was to give me image files for a picture of the Burton yacht harbor that she wanted printed, as a giclée, for the Vashon Art Auction.

Tall Ships, by Anne Gordon, was Vashon Island Imaging's first official job. I made a 20 X 16-inch [~51 X 40 cm] stretched-canvas giclée which she put in the Blue Heron Art Auction.

Anne became one of our closest friends; she is the only one of the Vashon Island bunch that Pam and I still see regularly and the only one holding the old bunch together. She organizes reunion potlucks; everyone brings a something for the table. Stas Kudla, Tim Carney and the Codd family are regulars; Rod Smith usually shows up too, with his partner Sally in tow. Rod is such a dominant character, I don't like him, even though he's clever—a lot like Ron Ada, who turns up at Thanksgiving time. Roxy Hathaway showed up occasionally.



Above: a toast to Anne Gordon (behind the camera) at her birthday party, July 14, 2013. I hosted the afternoon fête. Left to Right: Roxy Hathaway, Chelsea Gabriel, Stas Kudla, Yours Truly and Tim Carney. Pam Swanson was in Vancouver.

At the second and last Salon that Anne attended, Heidi and Wendy were particularly snobbish. Was it my imagination, or were Heidi and Wendy-Jo competing for my attention? I will never know; but when together, each seemed to be vying with the other. Then they each began visiting me individually.

I did my best to attract them both into my lair; their attention boosted my emaciated ego and, frankly, I wanted to get laid. I spent more time with Wendy-Jo, largely because Heidi's situation was more complicated and, as there were already two men in her life, getting involved with Heidi came with complications.

On the other hand, Wendy was on the rebound; she had broken up recently with her partner Dave Olson, a smart man with many talents.

Olson's specialty was building big industrial kilns; he was also a talented musician and knew what to do with a potter's wheel. Dave and Wendy-Jo ran a local hard-rock group, called The Four Horsemen, popular with local Harley bikers and their ilk, who hung out at the Eagle's hall or Bishop's Pub where the drinks were the cheapest and drunkenness was tolerated.

Wendy and Dave lived separately in two buildings on Wendy's property; she in the house and he in part of an extension that was also used as a studio, for band rehearsals and pottery work.

Theirs was an odd relationship, to say the least. Wendy feigned freedom, but that was belied whenever Dave had a problem. Nonetheless, I thought my chances were better with her than with Heidi, who clung to Charlie like a little girl to her father.

I was so stoned, so starved for attention, that I seriously considered the possibility of having two wives, Pam in Vancouver and Wendy-Jo on Vashon. To that end, I started getting involved in Wendy-Jo's life.

Wendy-Jo and Dave Olson were trying to start a business selling mobile pizza ovens that Dave built and Wendy decorated. Their mobile pizza oven provided a way for people to start a food-truck business and earn a living. I saw a huge opportunity in promoting that business—not because people liked pizza (although they do), but because people needed work.

After the Crash of 2008, a lot of people were still hurting economically. I reckoned their concept had tremendous potential; I was reminded of the *We've Got Jobs!* promotion, for World Book Encyclopedia, that Don O'Neill engineered in the 1974-75 recession.²⁶

I came up with a business concept, name and logo for Wendy-Jo and Dave's business—*Little Pizza Giant*. Wendy and Dave were receptive to my advances; they worked with me to develop the story and illustrations for a promotion program.

²⁶ That job was a graphic-design boondoggle for me, all about designing and producing POP [Point of Sale] materials, for World Book's recruitment campaign; their objective was to build their network of door-to-door salespeople; I produced a dozen pieces—posters, placards, banners, brochures, etc. Don should have used Burson-Marsteller's in-house art department; but he steered a lot of business my way; he thought my creative was better (and I worked weekends).

Everything seemed hunky dory until I explained to Wendy one morning that, because I was going to be investing the \$10,000 to start the company (she and Dave only had sweat equity), I expected to control the business, with a 51% interest, and reap half of the profits. Well, Wendy balked and walked. Once again, I was way over my skis.

Before it was over, I spent a lovely evening with Wendy in her hot tub. She had a marvelous full-body tattoo of a magic serpent that wrapped itself from ankle to shoulder. It was a titillating interlude but nothing came of it. We got so close that, for Christmas, I gave her one of my pair of Swarovski snowflake candle holders. That was the same kind of ploy I pulled on Carol Smit; sharing a pair of crystals to create a bond.

2011 – Green Card Arrives – Pam Moves to Vashon

In February, Pam flew to the US embassy in Montréal, for her immigration interview. We couldn't believe that the US only had one interview office in all of Canada, and that it was at the other end of the country. The travel costs added a couple of thousand bucks, doubling our green-card investment. Pam also had to get the seal of approval from a particular doctor, who was "approved" and who charged accordingly; we were up to nearly \$5,000 in fees and travel costs. Ah, well.... Her conditional green card arrived in March; we elected to live in the States. In May, she packed her art supplies and favorite books and moved down to Vashon, where she would presumably be living for the next two years, to satisfy immigration requirements. Up to that point, what with my commuting between Vashon and Vancouver, we had never spent more than three weeks with each other at any given time. That was about to change; our relationship was about to undergo a few stress tests. Pam and I are solitary creatures; we like to be alone. I figured that the Vashon house would work well because of its layout, with two wings—his & her studios—we could work at opposite ends of the house and meet in the middle for meals and entertainment. In the end, even being at opposite ends of the same house was too close for Pam; she couldn't find a place for herself; but it took us a while to realize that.



I reorganized the house in anticipation of Pam's arrival, to accommodate her with some privacy as best I could (it was the first of three reorganizations in two years—the layout of the house got flipped, then flopped, then re-flipped). In the flipped version, the bedroom was moved into the former north-end office and the former bedroom suite reorganized into twin offices, providing each of us a semi-private work space.

Pam's desk faced the pond, field & forest.; the shed can be seen in the background.

Pam said she wanted to paint, but complained that, even with the new layout, she couldn't find a place to do it; instead, she occupied herself taking pictures and writing poetry.

I carved out a corner of the north wing and organized a sound studio where Pam could recite her poetry, with musical accompaniment. The audio gear was antiquated, 30-year-old stuff from the Incredible Slidemakers studio; but the gear still worked, a testament to the quality of hard-wired, analog devices. (With today's digital devices, you're lucky to get three years service; they become technologically obsolete way before they conk out.) The old gear was kluged together with some of my Watchout computers, re-purposed to run a \$1,500 audio-software package called Steinberg. We both had dreams of making beautiful music together; those dreams turned into a nightmare of technological complexity. Steinberg was made for geeky, professional musicians; it took us a week just to get a sound out of the system; we never did make anything with it. Pam gave up on that project after just a couple of sessions. I think hearing herself made her realize that while she may be a good poet her narration skills weren't ready for prime time. Along those lines, Pam performed in the Poetry Festival at the Vashon Strawberry Festival. The event was held at Bishop's Pub, which was hugely ironical considering that the saloon's regulars were anything but erudite. A makeshift stage had been assembled and the barroom's seating rearranged for an audience of maybe 50 people. Unfortunately for Pam, she followed a *wunderkind* teen whose verse wowed the crowd.

Pam had problems adjusting to Vashon. She was landlocked because she didn't drive and, worse, couldn't find a corner in the house to call her own. If I knew then what I know now about my wife, I could have organized a better environment. Pam was such a "hybrid" that I couldn't imagine the kind of workspace that would appeal to her.

[Spoiler Alert: I discovered later, in our Vancouver condo, that Pam's workspace amounted to a collection of floor cushions in a secluded corner of the room—a kind of nest. I couldn't imagine the circumstances in her childhood that lead to such predilections. My inclinations were quite opposite. In fact, you couldn't find many couples as opposite to each other in temperament than Pam and I. Perhaps that's why we "work."]

In deference to Pam, although it was big, the Vashon house was stuffed to the gills. Between the printing studio, office, image archive, and projection room, every bit of space was filled. Pam nested in the corner of the couch in the lounge and resorted to activities she could do in that semi-public space. Pam reads a lot (a book a day) and her avocation at the time was origami; those activities fit her cozy corner; all was good, for a while.

To digress for a moment about Pam's origami: Pam has been folding paper ever since I met her.

Her hands are never idle, unless she's reading. Wherever she goes, she brings paper to fold; little Zip-Loc bags filled with different colors and patterns. The things she makes out of them are extraordinary. For a while, she got into exotic *Golden Venture* origami, aka Chinese Paper Folding.²⁷

²⁷ Golden Venture Folding, also known as Chinese Paper Folding or 3D origami, is a type of modular origami. Models are made by folding hundreds of small triangles from different colors of paper and interlocking them together. The wedges of paper grip each other to minimize the need for adhesive, although a small amount of glue is sometimes used. <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/3d-origami-art-2540685>



The Golden Venture Peacock (left) was one of Pam's crowning origami achievements. The piece has more than 1,500 individually-folded bits of colored paper.

Before our territorial tribulations evolved, things had gotten off to good start. Pam pitched right in on the home front. She got after the landscaping, which soon looked like a million bucks. She carved flower gardens out of the sod around the front porch and we planted five fruit trees nearby.

Pam also started a 20-foot-square [1.86 square meters] vegetable patch; I enjoyed pitching in. The idea was to be self-sufficient and save money. We grew tomatoes, peppers, beets, beans, zucchini, corn and sunflowers.



The soil was so poor that most of the veggies barely grew. However, the zucchini were so prolific that, to get rid of them, I drove around putting them in peoples' mailboxes. Ha!

There was so much keeping us busy that we didn't need time to ourselves... until we did. Over the course of the summer, we manned a stand together at the Vashon Strawberry Festival, then sawed and split 8 chords of firewood.

I entertained voraciously, as was my wont. On any given day, one or more of my stoner friends would stop by to hang for a while. Some of them became regulars; I found myself running a veritable salon. That complicated things.

Remember that saying, "Two's company and three's a crowd?" When Pam joined the salon, the dynamics shifted considerably; it worked when the crowd was big, when Anne Gordon, Tim Carney and Dave Olson were in attendance; but when it was me, Pam, Heidi and Wendy, the situation soured.

Pam wasn't a stoner, but everyone else was; the chemistry didn't work.

Pam felt lonely and missed her good friends, Richard Legault (left) and Alex Skibinski, in Vancouver.

She felt trapped in a new world that wasn't fulfilling any of her basic needs, one of which was hanging with the afternoon gang at Shenanigan's saloon and drinking beer with R&A.

Ironically, I didn't enjoy being in R&A's crowd. They were serious drinkers and we had absolutely nothing in common.

Photo by Pam Swanson



Pam was less and less happy living on the Island; but what did I know? She was stoic; she kept her feelings to herself; and I was preoccupied seeking solution for the economic storm I saw looming on the horizon.

2011 – Baby Bird – Last Hurrah

Vashon Island Imaging was barely profitable; in fact, if the costs of do-overs were factored in, the business was operating at a loss.

Neither was Giclée Prepress making money. *Au contraire*, if you divided the costs for the printing operation by the number of books sold, each would have had to garner north of \$400, just to break even.

Between the collapsing art-printing and book businesses, I was nearing the end of my rope. Although Social Security would be kicking in soon, the amount I would get was minimal because I lived overseas for so long and had so little US income.

I was fit to be tied and didn't know what to do. Then, Pete Bjordahl paid an infrequent visit to Vashon. We were both in a blue funk, for quite different reasons, his martial and mine financial. When I told him about my financial dilemma, Pete had an immediate answer; he said, "You should write children's' books."

Well, here's the thing: As Pete was speaking those words, even before he finished, I had written the first sentence of the first *Baby Bird* book, in my mind— "When Baby Bird woke up, his entire world had changed."

Simultaneously, I visualized a little green hummingbird perched on a snow-covered feeder, shivering. It was a picture I had recently made, the morning after an overnight snowstorm.

That morning, as I sat down at my desk with a mug of coffee, my eyes scanned the snowy pond and came to rest on that hummingbird; it was trying unsuccessfully to reach the feeder through six inches of snow. Even if it could, the syrup was frozen solid. Yea Gods!

The feeder hadn't been attended to since summer. Pam took care of it then. She hung it outside of her office window, to take pictures of the cute little birds. But Pam was in Vancouver—which is how I came to care for hummingbirds. My love affair with hummers started with that existential event.



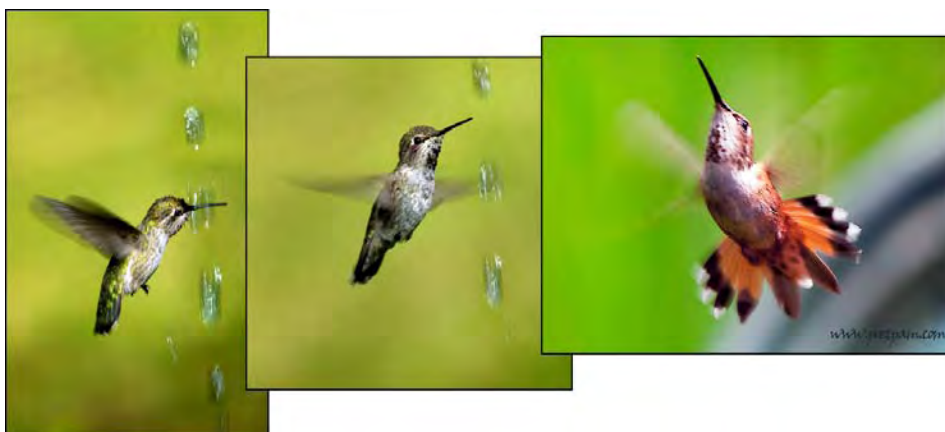
That little critter took me completely by surprise. I thought that hummingbirds migrated south for the winter.

He hadn't long for this world if I didn't do something, fast. (Hummers need to feed every twenty minutes or so.)

I serviced the feeder right away and was rewarded with a fabulous photo op of the hummer perched on a snowy bush at the edge of the pond, which became the illustration *Winter Green*.

A year later there were thirteen feeders, stationed all around the house. At the height of the season, in May and June, when the resident Anna hummingbirds bore offspring and the Rufus hummingbirds returned from Oregon and California, several dozens of them competed for time at the feeders. For a few weeks, we'd go through two quarts [1.9 liters] of syrup a day; I bought sugar in 50-pound sacks.

During the three years I cared for them, we started with one male Anna hummingbird—the one I rescued, who became the book character, Baby Bird—and ended up with four Annas (two pair) that made *Birdland* (the name I bestowed on my estate) their home. Each bird defended one feeder while also poaching from their neighbors'. Between the four of them, it was an all-day game of hide and seek as they chased each other around the house.



The hummingbirds provided endless photo opportunities. Some of the feeders were within inches of windows, providing stellar close-up views.

Right: Photo by Pam Swanson.

The birds became quite used to us peering at them; they went about their business as we went about ours. Between us, Pam and I shot at least 10,000 frames.

The hummingbirds moved so fast, it was hard to get good shots of them flying. The challenge was taking perfect pictures of hummingbirds flying—sharp as a tack and fully detailed.

To get better quality pictures, I built a photo studio around the feeder near Pam’s office window, rigged with strobes to provide fill lighting and “stop” their wings. (The duration of a strobe flash is only about 1/2000th of a second, faster than any camera shutter and useful for stopping fast action, like hummingbird wings, which beat 50 times per second.)

My goal was to capture super-closeups of the hummers that I could isolate and use as elements in illustrations.

I shot high-speed motor-drive sequences—to capture their wings in various positions—using tack-sharp Nikkor 400 mm and 600 mm lenses.

My Nikon D2 cameras had a radio-remote triggering system that synchronized with the strobes.



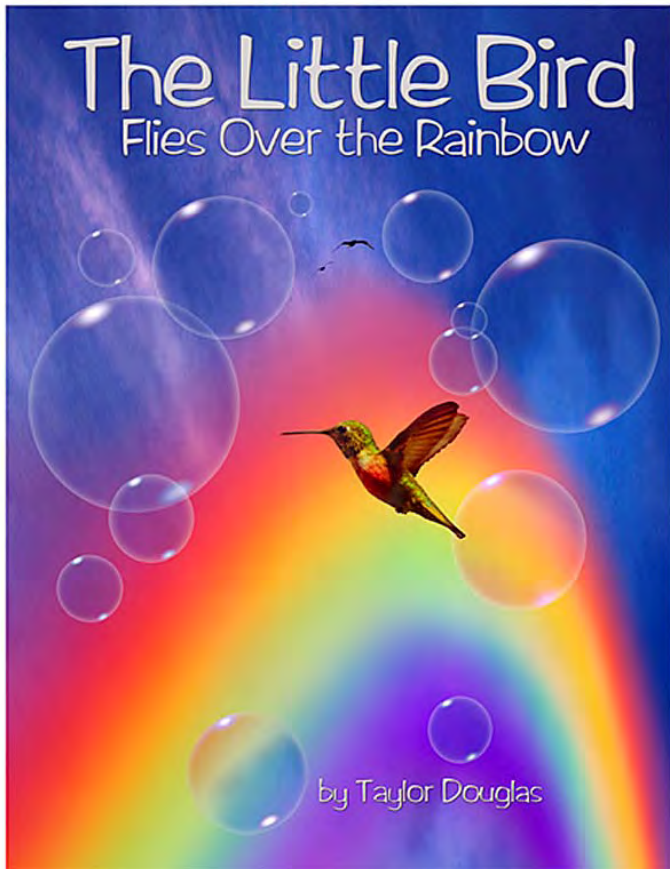
A background panel of black Coroplast[®] was placed behind the subject feeder, to provide a solid-color background that facilitated isolating the birds.

It was impossible to follow or focus on the quick little hummers. Instead, I pre-focused on specific zones around the feeders and waited until a hummingbird flew into those zones. I found that I couldn’t react fast enough when I looked through the lens; so, I marked the focus-zone borders on the black Coroplast[®] BG with white tape.

Standing back from the camera, I was able to see the hummingbirds approaching the zones; that allowed me to react fast enough to fire a frame as they sped through the targeted space.

I shot endless frames to get birds in as many different positions as possible; the wider the variety I had to work with, the easier it was to illustrate Baby Bird in any virtual situation.

But I am getting ahead of myself....



When Pete Bjordahl said, “You should write children’s’ books,” a chill went down my spine. Suddenly, everything clicked. I knew exactly what to do: write and illustrate a series of learn-to-read books for children, based on a heroic character— Little Bird.

Within a month, a prototype book was off the press and assembled for test marketing. I produced six copies and showed them around to trusted friends and colleagues; they generally gave the book thumbs up. (But, don’t friends always do that? Nobody will ever tell you if you look bad or your idea sucks.)

My neighbors, the Lorentzens, saw the book first. I valued their opinion; they had raised two boys and a girl to adulthood and both had school careers, Tom as a high school principal and Bea as a school nurse. I knew that they would tell it like it is. Thus, I was beaming when they both blessed my work.

Anne Gordon, a close Vashon friend and fellow artist, went gaga when she saw the book. I was chuffed, but the only person whose judgement I trusted implicitly was Pete Bjordahl, who had suggested that I write storybooks for kids, in the first place.

Bjordahl had a one-year-old son, Kai, and his wife, Chloe, had another (son, Bo Bjordahl) in the oven. Both parents worked in the tech sector; they lived in Burien, a yuppified community south of Seattle and directly east of Vashon (though separated by Puget Sound).

I gave Pete a copy of the first prototype book, to see what his two-year-old son, Kai, thought of it.

A couple of weeks later, Pete reported back to me that Little Bird was Kai’s favorite book. Not only that, the spiral binding was holding up well, surviving all sorts of mishaps.

Kai liked that the book opened flat on the floor, unlike normally-bound books that either flopped closed or split-apart. Pete’s news confirmed that I was onto something.

The name Little Bird was dropped after I discovered that there were a bazillion Internet references to *little bird*. Those would make our website more difficult to find. The name Baby Bird fared better with search engines; it also offered the kind of alliteration that has always appealed to me.

To digress for a moment, about Baby Bird books: In a nutshell, the Baby Bird concept was to combine verbal and visual information—pictures and books—to enhance learning.

I reckoned that the combination of art and literature had a synergistic effect; that the stories could be reinforced by hanging Baby Bird pictures around the house, particularly in kids' play areas and bedrooms.

The Baby Bird Promise Smarter Kids FasterSM Through Educational Synergism



Baby Bird Books are a series of adventure stories about Baby Bird and his friend who learn how things work while migrating around world. The stories blend practical information (how to tell time) with philosophy (what is time?).

As young readers progress through the series, their rate of learning increases because each subsequent book becomes more complex in language and thought.

Baby Bird Books all have accompanying art for decorating children's environments. It is the choice of pictures that determines the amount of educational synergism. Choosing the reader's favorites has the most stimulating effect.



People learn things from books and art. However, when the two are combined people learn more, and they learn faster, because of an effect called 'synergism'.

Although it has nothing to do with math, people compare the results of synergism as being like $2 + 2 = 5$.

$2 + 2$ will always equal 4. However, if synergism is involved the result will be enhanced so that 4 behaves more like 5.

Baby Bird educational synergism stimulates young minds to probe deeper and learn faster.



The Baby Bird concept involves three parts which work together. As more parts are combined, more and more synergism results.

- 1 Baby Bird Books
- 2 Baby Bird Pictures
- 3 Baby Bird Art

Baby Bird Pictures remind young readers of their favorite parts of the story. Every time the pictures are noticed, they have the chance to re-evaluate things learned from Baby Bird.

Books transmit information, ideas and feelings. Art symbolizes them conceptually, provoking deep thinking to resolve abstractions and find meaning. Intentionally combining art and books results in a faster and better learning experience.

Baby Bird Art adds more synergism to the total learning experience offering higher-level art and writing that stimulates even deeper thinking.

The pictures and objects in the Baby Bird Art collection intentionally challenge even the most gifted children to think about the meanings of life and their part in the Natural Order of the Universe.

Discover The Power of Educational Synergism

Baby Bird Art & Books

Learn more at www.babybirdbooks.com

Baby Bird promotional literature, 2011

How

To Choose The Right Picture

One

Watch your child discover their favorite part of the story.

Two

Decorate their space with pictures from those favorite parts.

Three

Notice the pictures stimulating thought whenever they are seen.

Deeper thinking is the educational synergism catalyzed by pictures and books that **work together**.

Parents (and teachers) were encouraged to clue-in on the parts of the story(s) their kids liked best, then decorate the house (or classroom) with the pictures that illustrated those parts.

Think about the pictures that decorate your home or office. You likely chose many of them because they illustrate or symbolize things that are important to you—things like family portraits, vacations, places you've lived or worked, etcetera. Likewise, kids have their own things that matter to them and their own deep thoughts about them. Baby Bird pictures and books offered the opportunity for parents to relate to their kids in subtle but significant ways.

[Spoiler Alert: While synergism of art and books reinforcing each other seemed like a no-brainer to me, I would soon discover that the concept proved difficult to explain.]

Encouraged by Kai Bjordahl's reactions, I went into hyperdrive. The Baby Bird story was expanded into a 12-book series—2 books each for ages three to eight.

Determined to have product to sell in the Christmas market—that was when most children's' books were sold. My plan was to introduce Baby Bird during the holiday Art Studio Tour on Vashon Island, in late November.

However, there was no way I could write and illustrate all twelve books in time for Christmas. Only five got produced before I ran out of time:

- Baby Bird—*Into the Rainbow* | 44 pages + poster
- Baby Bird—*Beyond the Pond* | 44 pages + poster
- Baby Bird—*Into Thin Air* | 44 pages + poster
- Baby Bird—*In the World of Possibilities* | 50 pages (fold-outs) + poster
- Baby Bird—*In the Land of Plenty* | 50 pages (fold-outs) + poster





Pam put together a Baby Bird web site while also helping me print and bind the books.

At the height of production, I was churning out a book a week, averaging better than seven pages a day, written and illustrated. In addition, two dozen pictures got prepped and printed in various sizes. I offered Baby Bird artwork as stretched-canvas giclées as well as paper prints laminated onto Gatorboard.²⁸

Canvas and paper prints were also sold rolled-up, in clear-plastic, watertight tubes, shown at right, floating in a swimming pool.

I demonstrated those by floating them in a pail of water). Folks were impressed by the idea—but were more interested in buying the watertight tubes than in the artwork they contained. Ha!

[I bought the tubes at Uline.]



²⁸ Wikipedia: Gatorboard (or gator board) is type of display board with a dense inner core made of foam and a rigid exterior made of wood-fiber veneer.

I was pushing too hard and way too fast; my editorial decisions were based on whether I had pictorial content; as a result, the storyline became complicated and convoluted; the “red thread” got entangled around readily-available pictures from my archive, instead of pictures purpose made to illustrate an uncompromised story.

For example, Baby Bird ended up flying across volcanic islands to odd places like India, learning how to read a clock at the Golden Temple, in Amritsar.

Pam tried to tell me that the stories were getting too Byzantine, but I brushed aside her comments; I thought she was being overly judgmental. Besides, there was no time to backtrack if we were going to make the Christmas market. Making that date was all-important—a one-a-year opportunity to do some market research.

Vashon was the perfect place to develop and test Baby Bird Pictures and Books; the Island was a microcosm of the USA; a bedroom community of (mostly) free-thinking, middle-class families, boasting one of the best school systems in the States.

I reckoned that the reactions of Vashonites to Baby Bird could be scaled up, to represent the entire US population. When I ran those numbers, the calculations made me a millionaire. Dollar signs danced in my dreams. And dreams they were. While just about everyone loved the stories, nobody bought any—they all wanted e-books. Ugh.

I was loath to publish Baby Bird as electronic books. E-books were an anathema, the very antithesis of my concept. Baby Bird books were meant to bring parent and child closer together, physically and emotionally. I ~~couldn't~~ wouldn't imagine a parent reading a bedtime story from a screen, like an iPad or smart phone; would you?

[I conceded earlier that not making Baby Bird available electronically was a mistake.]

For me, it was all about memory, what people remember, why they remember it.

Interpolating the test results with Kai Bjordahl, picture books won over normal ones. According to Pete, his son Kai was drawn-in by the full-page and double-page illustrations. That made sense; his parents, and their parents, appreciated picture publications like *Life*, *Look*, *National Geographic*, and so many more.

Convinced that it was the big beautiful pictures that captured the fancy of kids and adults, I added fold-out pages to the last two books after Pete told me that Kai always left the book open to a double-page picture. The fold-out pages were truly panoramic—twice as wide as double-page spreads, measuring 34 X 11 inches [86.4 X 28 centimeters]. People raved about them; but even the fold-outs couldn't find a buyer.

I couldn't help thinking that I was caught in a latter-day *Farm Facts* conundrum. As described earlier [see 1960s], that publication's popularity diminished as print quality increased; the better *Farm Facts* looked, the fewer the responses we received. But I was loath to cut back and even considered making the entire book giant fold-outs. The kids would certainly like that. But the production costs for such buxom books would likely make them unaffordable. People were already hung-up about the prices of Baby Bird books.

I concede that price was an issue. From my standpoint, I was delivering a book product with 44 pages of full-color illustrations for just twenty-five bucks (\$24.95). However, people were comparing Baby Bird books with competitive products printed in China that sold for as low as \$3.95.

Most folks seemed to reckon that all books were equally good; so, why pay \$25 when you could get one for \$5? Being thrifty was the new way of life, after the Crash of 2008.

Then I ran into another conceptual conundrum: Book stores were only interested in Baby Bird books, not the pictures—they had no wall space, their walls were lined with books. Likewise, art galleries were only interested in pictures, not books. And toy stores wanted neither pictures nor books.

As I said, people were having trouble with my basic concept, about reinforcing learning experiences by combining pictures and book. The key was finding a way to explain the *synergism*; but that was a bit like explaining Einstein's theory.

Instead, I should have been thinking about a new way to market Baby Bird pictures and books—to bypass the restrictive sales paradigms. Given today's hindsight, I should have started with the internet and work backwards from there; but that was not my *modus operandi* back then; it was just the dawn of e-Commerce.

On a more instructive note: During the holiday Art Studio Tour, I discovered that when I had the opportunity to personally explain to people the concept of Baby Bird Pictures & Books, they got it. I could see it in their eyes; the way they nodded their heads, in agreement.

I sold a few books and pictures that way, enough to convince me that the synergism concept required personal explanation at the point of purchase. That presented a new challenge: how to solve the POP (Point of Purchase) problem.

I needed to create a sales experience that facilitated interactive customer education—people talking to people. I fell back on a technique I knew well—door-to-door" selling—first learned peddling potholders and sea-shell jewelry in Douglaston, starting at age 9. Those experiences morphed into the plan for Baby Bird Book Clubs.

My idea was modelled after the original Tupperware party scheme, as modified by Mark Kay; mine and hers were essentially pyramid schemes.

To digress for a moment, about pyramid schemes: A Tupperware party was run by a Tupperware "consultant," for a host who invited their friends and neighbors into their home to see (and be sold) the Tupperware products.

Tupperware hosts were rewarded with free products based on the level of sales made at their party. Mary Kay took things a few steps further; she created a pyramid scheme whereby every consultant was encouraged to build a network of new consultants (housewives enlisting other housewives) each selling to friends and neighbors at social events.

Make Money at Home
Reward Yourself and Your Friends



Do The Math

You earn 25% of every sale... that's 25 cents out of every dollar.

Easy and Rewarding

Running a Baby Bird™ Book Club is as easy as having a tea party or other social event. There are no obligations and you can earn as much as you want.

Exclusively Yours

Your investment is protected because each Baby Bird™ Book Club territory is exclusive. Nobody else will be able to sell Baby Bird™ Pictures & Books in your Club's neighborhood. Ambitious people can have multiple Clubs in different areas.

Pictorial Adventures of Baby Bird™
Teach Advanced Children How Things Work

Big • Colorful • Modern



Book Number Five / The Lady of Purity
ISBN 978-0-9895791-6-7 / 66 Pages • Pocket
8.5 X 11 inches / Heavy Paper / Spiral Binding



Giant color pictures throughout with 4-page fold-outs that children love.



Decorative Art Works With Books:
Posters / Fine Art Prints / Canvases

Baby Bird™ Book Clubs
A Rewarding Way to Make Money at Home



Offered by Environmental Concept Learning Inc.
www.babybirdbooks.com / 206-567-5800

Squeezed for Cash?



Everyone is feeling financially pinched but now you can do something easy to make the extra cash you need.

Start your own Baby Bird™ Book Club and make money from home having fun.

Invite friends and colleagues to join your Club and show them Baby Bird™ Books & Pictures at parties and other social events.

Everyone Profits

Parents of advanced children will appreciate learning about the Baby Bird™ reading program that is exclusively offered by your Baby Bird™ Book Club. Their children will profit from educational synergism and you will profit helping their parents raise smarter kids, faster.

A Word from the Founder



You won't find the Baby Bird™ learn-to-read program in stores because our products would be too expensive there.

Instead, we protect the value of our books and artwork by making them exclusively available through Baby Bird™ Book Clubs owned and operated by people like you.

Social Marketing

Social marketing is a way of making money by selling things to friends and colleagues at social events and by social networking.

Baby Bird™ Book Clubs operate the same way as Amway®, Tupperware® and other successful social marketing organizations.

Our offer is simple. Baby Bird™ Book Club owners buy wholesale and sell retail. Club owners earn 25% of their sales.

Baby Bird™ Book Clubs have exclusive territories centered around school districts of up to 1,000 households with children.

Opportunities for Growth

Club Owners can operate multiple Clubs in different territories.

You may wish to become a Club Coordinator who has other Club Owners working for you.

With 100 or more Clubs you can become an Area Manager and buy Baby Bird™ products at our deepest discounts.

Internet Protection Policy

Every Baby Bird™ product you sell will be coded for Internet tracking purposes. If your customer shops at our Baby Bird™ Gallery on the internet, the code used by the customer for discounts identifies you for the sales commission.

Our Internet protection policy is designed so that you can confidently encourage your customers to shop online, making your job even easier and expanding your market.

Small Investment, Large Reward

Starting a Baby Bird™ Book Club requires \$300 for which you will receive everything you need to hold a Baby Bird™ Book Club social event:

- full set of books
- samples of artwork
- display materials

Joining Baby Bird's Flock

To start a Baby Bird™ Book Club please call me directly at 206-567-5800, email douglas@babybirdbooks.com, or visit us online at www.babybirdbooksclub.com

Content Rich Picture Books
Giant Color Pictures and Fold-Outs

Baby Bird™ Books invite conversations between children with their parents and teachers. Baby Bird™ stories have 'just enough' information to stimulate an eagerness to know more, and ask questions. The resulting conversational exchanges between children and adults promote bonding, which can stimulate empathy, contemplation and other high-level emotional development.



Decorative art extends learning long after the books are put away. Custom sizes and finishes.

Pictures & Books
Working Together for Better Learning

Baby Bird™ Books teach children life concepts while also explaining how things work. Afterwards, Baby Bird™ Pictures remind them of those things in the context of daily life.

Bigger and Better

Baby Bird™ Books are bigger, longer and more complex than most other books for the targeted age range (2-5). The entire series is intended to span two years (although some will make faster progress).

Art Available Three Ways

- Posters
- Fine Art Prints
- Canvases

Baby Bird™ Books & Pictures are published by Environmental Concept Learning Inc., Vancouver, BC, Canada. They are printed in the USA by Vashon Island Imaging, Vashon, Washington 98070 / (206)-567-5800.

Learn more at:

www.babybirdbooks.com
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www.mesney.com

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Tri-fold, 4-panel brochure for Baby Bird Book Clubs. The third panels to the right are the front (top) and back covers.

Like all Ponzi schemes, the most points were earned by bringing in new blood. If the name Bernie Madoff means anything to you, you know that bazillions of dollars can be made using the pyramid scheme (Ponzi) model.

Making Excel spreadsheets deep into the night, smoking reefer, I fairly drooled as I ran the numbers. Pyramid schemes are seductive; once the ball gets rolling millions can be made. Heck, Mary Kay gave out pink Cadillacs and trips to Hawaii as prizes; the business paid for her place on *Forbes* list of top-earning US corporations. Why not me?

The trick was getting the ball rolling.

2011 – Birdland – Baby Bird Galleries

After deciding to sell Baby Bird products directly (person-to-person), I put together starter kits—plastic tote boxes containing two copies of each book, a presentation catalogue of Baby Bird art, as well as brochures and posters.

I started spreading the word, ready to make deals; I was frank, explaining how pyramid systems work, how good it would be to be in at the beginning—the top of the pyramid. I just wanted to get the scheme rolling.

Luise DiPetrantonio, my Vancouver real estate agent, expressed interest. I invited her to a presentation in the new, empty apartment that she had just sold us (Hempstead Manor suite 908). I reckoned it was a good opportunity to practice my sales pitch, to get some input, some opinions.

For the pitch, I printed a half dozen 60 X 40-inch [101.6 X 152.4-centimeter] enlargements of the Baby Bird brochure and catalogue. The huge posters dominated three walls of the living room. Together with full sets of Baby Bird art and books, it was an impressive show. Luise brought a friend; they both took the time to read all the posters.

Luise bought a starter kit (I charged \$50, to partially offset costs). I thought we were on a roll; Luise was a good salesperson; but I never heard from her after that. I called her a few weeks later, to ask how it was going with the Baby Bird Book Club; she told me that she bought the starter kit to give to her young nieces, that she wasn't interested in selling Baby Bird stuff. It was cheaper buying a starter kit than purchasing the contents individually. Ha!

Recruiting consultants wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. I reckoned that Baby Bird Book Club was a natural, but nobody signed on. At that point, I began to think that I might take a page out of Lego's book; they had flagship stores in major cities and a park—Legoland—at their headquarters, in Denmark.

Following Lego's example, I came up with a plan to have Baby Bird Galleries in major markets—family-oriented, kid-friendly places, where people could see Baby Bird pictures and peruse the books.

I designed the galleries to fit into the boutique spaces offered at malls by “curatorial” stores like Nordstrom's or The Bay—a 10 X 20-foot (3.04 X 6.09 meter) space that was half art gallery and half a reading room.



I built a prototype for Baby Bird Galleries by renovating the old shed, behind the studio. The original shed was 10 X 12-feet (3.04 X 3.66 meters). I added a wood floor, lined the interior walls with 4 X 8-foot [1.22 X 2.44-meter] panels of white Coroplast® [corrugated plastic], and installed four kinds of lighting—UV [ultraviolet] and Solex® (full spectrum incandescent) to illuminate artwork, fluorescent work lights, and fairy lights, for decor.



Reading Room



Interior Gallery

A 10 X 10-foot [3.04 X 3.04-meter] extension was added, as a reading room. It was a “glass house,” made with 2 X 12-foot [0.6 X 3.66-meter] sheets of Suntuf® (corrugated PVC plastic roofing panels). Outside you could see into the comfortable reading room; inside you could see the forested surroundings.

A wood-burning stove; that made it warm and cozy, even in the dead of winter.

The re-purposed and renovated shed was christened Baby Bird Galleries and the whole estate named Birdland. I aimed to fashion Birdland into a kind of theme-park destination—a little “Legoland;” a place where parents could bring their kids to see Baby Bird, visit his pond, and stroll through the meadows and forests that Baby Bird called home—where the Baby Bird story began.

From late spring to early autumn, Pam and I worked hard to transform our untamed grounds into the mythical Birdland.



Dave Olson was hired to build a \$750 steel rebar frame for a Birdland sign that arched above the estate’s entrance, between two giant cedar trees; I got the idea from Roy Roger’s *Double-R-Bar* ranch sign and, more appropriately in my case, the monogrammed wrought-iron gates to Charles Foster (Citizen) Kane’s movie mansion, *Xanadu*.

Pam and I installed 600 feet [182.8 meters] of pathways winding in and around the house, the pond, the new gallery, and a forest glade; those walkways involved 40 tones of gray pea gravel and 300 red-colored, circular pavers; the idea was to, follow the *dotted line*, to discover Birdland. Cutting pathways through the tough field grasses was a real chore; on a good day, we'd advance maybe 12 feet [3.66 meters].



While Pam spruced up the landscaping and enlarged the gardens, I terraced the west slope; I had an idea to build a miniature golf course (more family fun) and two *party plateaus*, one of them equipped with a variety of BBQ stoves including the clay-pot Tandoor oven that I originally acquired from the Maharaja restaurant in West Seattle, and the Texas smoker inherited from Fork Inn the Road restaurant.



The thirteen terraces cascaded from the house down the west slope. It was one hell of an excavation job, done entirely by hand. Unless it rained, I was out there every day, all afternoon, sweating in the sun, wearing a little as possible. By the time I finished, I was never in better shape.

Excavating the 13 terraces unearthed a huge quantity of rounded stones; where did they all come from, I wondered; how did they get here, there were so many.



Pam had a great idea: she began outlining the garden patches with the stones.

Eventually there were so many more that she ended-up outlining 300 feet of pathways on the west slope.

Her bead-like decorations became a landscape feature—an added value.

Pam put in the front gardens; the path came later.

The terraces were planted with red clover with an eye towards a perennial cascade of lush, red-and-green ground cover, cascading down the west slope. Then deer ate most of seed-bearing clover flowers and the summer drought killed the rest. The slope ended up looking absolutely terrible, like some kind of parched, abandoned construction site. But I am getting ahead of myself again.

I also built a ceremonial fire pit, adjacent to the uppermost terraces. It was big one, 10-foot deep [3.09 meters] and nearly as wide. It was useful to burn brush cuttings, autumn leaves and other combustible waste, replacing the burn barrels I formerly used, before they were outlawed. (Burn barrels may have been *verboden*, but the law said nothing about fire holes. Ha!)

Eventually the fire pit was used to cremate artwork and other personal treasures that were too painful to toss with the trash. I was inspired to dig the hole when, deep in my mind I realized that, despite my optimism, there was a good chance I might fail; in that case, I would have a lot of stuff to dispose of, quickly.

[Spoiler Alert: My six months of manual labor sculpting the terraces was ploughed under in less than three hours when the west slope got bulldozed back to its original contour at the request of Birdland's new owner.]



Promotion picture with superimposed Baby Bird.

Birdland and Baby Bird Galleries were finished in time for the Holiday Art Tour. With 1,600 fairy lights decorating it, the gallery stood out like a jewel in the forest, especially in the dimly lit autumn/winter afternoons and evenings. Inside, the gallery room blazed with 2000 watts of Solex® lighting. There were two dozen pictures on display. A 24-inch-high [61 centimeters] cut-out picture of Baby Bird, embellished with holographic foil by Tim Carney, slowly rotated, spot-lit, in the rafters.

Pam and I were justly proud of ourselves. Besides the gallery, we had a dozen copies each of five books ready for sale, as well as two new brochures, and a picture catalogue. In addition, I worked out a deal with Folkmanis® and offered eighteen different finger puppets, of characters in the Baby Bird stories (frogs, lizards, squirrels, owls, skunks... you get the idea). Baby Bird Galleries was the cat's meow.

The US economy was still in the doldrums; folks didn't have much discretionary spending money. The turnout we had from the Art Studio Tour was mediocre. Despite a good-sized advertisement in the Vashon *Loop* (with a coupon offering a 20% discount to customers visiting Birdland), maybe two dozen people turned up. Those that did were blown away, I'd dare say.

More encouraging, one third of the visitors spent a lot of time in the gallery and perusing the books. One bright kid read all the books, straight through, with gusto, smiling the whole time. That kid's enthusiasm encouraged me, as did the in-depth conversations I had with a half-dozen mothers and grandmothers, explaining the educational synergism of book and art combos.

One grandma kept me in conversation for a half hour. She ended up buying a copy of *Baby Bird—Over the Rainbow*. That was my one and only sale during the event—and it almost wasn't made, for want of a credit card facility. Granny gave me the last cash she had, a twenty; I took it despite the fact she was short \$4.95.

To earn those twenty bucks, I spent >\$5,000 building the gallery, another \$1,200 for the entré sign, \$600 for Folkmanis puppets, and another \$800 for printing supplies—adding-up to a huge net loss of \$7,600.



Tri-fold, 4-panel "hang tag" for one of fourteen different Baby Bird Puppets.

I needed good sales numbers to get other galleries and stores interested; but I didn't get them. Nor was anyone interested in the Baby Bird Book Club sales scheme.

It was the day of the e-book. The demise of neighborhood book stores was predicted. iPads and smart phones became ubiquitous. Few wanted printed books anymore. Print was out, across the board; important newspapers—even Paper Zone stores—went out of business. Gutenberg must have been rolling in his grave.²⁹

Undaunted, I persevered; Anna used to say that my most dominant trait was tenacity, and this was one of those cases. Throughout all this, Pete Bjordahl periodically reported that Little Bird was still his son Kai's favorite book; that Kai kept it open all the time, on the floor of his play area, and frequently brought it to Pete, for his bedtime story.

²⁹ Fast forward one decade and today people have come to realize that there's no substitute for paper books. Thus, I am considering remaking Baby Bird, after I finish this book. It will be a complete do-over; the new books will be based on Pam's pictures, of the many creatures living in and around Lost Lagoon, in Vancouver's Stanley Park. The new Baby Bird adventures will most certainly be available electronically... I may be slow, but I eventually understand.

2012 – 🍀* Birdland Bust – Back to BC

The jig was up; I was out of money and turned to Plan B—selling assets.

Tallying up Birdland’s annual operating expenses and real estate taxes, I came up \$25,000 short.

There was roughly \$50,000 worth of stuff that could be sold right away, the low-hanging fruit, if you will. Those funds gave me a two-year reprieve, to plug the leaks in my financial dike or be forced to sell my beloved Birdland.

Having gone bankrupt twice before, I knew what needed doing and when it needed to be done if the unthinkable actually happened. Loath to lose the farm, I transformed myself into an eBay® expert. Soon enough, I learned two important lessons:

First, every eBay sale, no matter the financial value of the sale, takes roughly the same amount of time (about 6 hours). Whether you sell a \$5 spoon or a \$5,000 set of silverware, each of those transactions will eat-up 6 hours before the deal is done—answering questions from prospective buyers, fending off fraudsters, packing and shipping and the sales follow-up work.

Secondly, every tenth sale will fail; you will be screwed; people will rip you off and those losses will cut heavily into your profit. (I’m sure you’ve noticed that as least 10% of the people around you are weirdos, eh?)

Of course, it took me a few dozen transactions to realize that. Once I did, I started seeking alternate sales outlets. I chose Alkit Camera in New York to market a good chunk of the photo gear I chose to sell, especially film-camera gear. Alkit’s deal was clean and fast; instead of taking goods on consignment, they bought them outright, at 60% of the market value. That was a no-brainer, compared to the nominal 30% loss I encountered using eBay®. I reckoned that their additional commission was worth the aggravation of dealing with the public and the Post Office.

So began the devolution of another dream. It was “easy” in the beginning since most of the stuff I was selling wasn’t being used frequently enough to justify keeping it; either that, or I had duplicates. (I almost never had only one example of anything important.) Birdland was under siege, but I managed to hang on for another year, busying myself with eBay sales and praying for the Vashon real estate market to regain momentum. (Home prices continued to languish after the Crash and subsequent Great Recession.)

Selling stuff occupied about two thirds of my time; the rest was spent preparing the property for sale and enlarging the vegetable garden, to grow more food. The economy was on shaky ground; there were moments I reckoned we might be heading into a barter economy. (In that case, my weed might be *good as gold*.)

Preparing for the worst, the prototype Baby Bird Gallery was repurposed; it, together with the back-deck workshop, became greenhouses, for growing pot.

Even the darkroom was converted into mini-grow op for a cloning experiment that produced “bonsai” style plants (ideal for condo or apartment dwellers). The expanded grow op produced more than 100 plants yielding 12-pounds [5.44-kilos] of bud and 2 pounds [0.9 kilos] of seeds—from plants acclimatized to the Pacific Northwest over nearly twenty generations.

I figured that in an absolute worst-case scenario, I could sell or barter the bud, to survive. But it never came to that; I ended up giving the stuff away; I gave Tim eight pounds of the stuff—you should have seen the look on his face. I heard that he later earned a few thousand selling the seeds for a buck each.

[Spoiler Alert: there would be no salvation this time; my lucky star stopped shining.]

2012 – September Squabble – Decisive Decisions

As the demise of Vashon drew near, I began working-up different plans, about what to do, where to go next.

The other times I went bust turned out to be opportunities to start over, in a bigger, better way; I hoped this would be no exception.

The time seemed right to manifest another of my dreams, to live in the tropics again, preferably in Malaysian Borneo. I reckoned I had a chance of gaining legal residency there, since my great-grandfather served as the head master of the boy’s school in Kuching, married to a Malaysian-Chinese woman.

It was that or the Philippines, where Ma’an Hontiveros, Brian King’s well-connected ex wife, might be able to put in a good word for us with immigration authorities. Or, maybe back to Hawaii, although that would likely prove too pricey. Dollars still bought more in Asia (but less than they used to).

Pam and I got into a terrific fight over my Asian plans; she told me she couldn’t move somewhere without knowing more about it, maybe trying it out for size; but there was neither the time nor the money for Asian reconnaissance. I was hemorrhaging money, facing a deficit of \$25,000 (per year); an Asian excursion would cost thousands and a delayed departure from Birdland would result in extended carrying costs, further increasing the fiscal deficit.

However, no amount of “logic” could persuade Pam. She told me that she wanted out and asked me to take her to the ferry; she was going home to Vancouver. It was already 9:00 pm [21:00], the last bus to Vancouver was long gone; but she said she’d stay at the bus station and get the early-morning shuttle—and she did.

During the ride to the ferry dock, I realized my bull-headedness had been a mistake, that she was right. After leaving Pam at the ferry terminal, I couldn’t go home. I parked the car at the foot of the dock, across the street from La Playa (the restaurant that took over from Fork Inn the Road) and sobbed my heart out for a half-hour, watching the ferry disappear across Puget Sound, carrying Pam out of my life.

Why oh why couldn't I have taken back my angry words and conceded; not let her go?

It was a calm night, the water was like a mirror; the ferry shimmered on the black water; it was like a mirage, and so was my life, or so it seemed. Of course, it didn't seriously occur to me that consuming inordinate amounts of cannabis might be affecting my judgement.

You could call it capitulation, but I decided that Pam was more important than my Asian dream. Living alone on Vashon Island, with little social contact other than my weekly salon, I had plenty of time to stew in my own juice.

Pam asked to be left alone and I resisted calling her. I wanted her to come back, but that would never happen if I didn't respect her wishes.

In a bid to win her back, I sent Pam an invitation to visit Vashon for Thanksgiving, which she accepted. During her visit, we mended the tears in the fabric of our life. Pam acknowledged that she liked having me in her life; I told her those feelings were mutual, that I was ready to abandon my Asian plans, ready to move to Vancouver.

We decided to start over.

I met with Mike Urban and Marcie Christopher to get their opinions about how to run an estate sale at Birdland. At that point, those two still worked together; they helped my sister Kathy dispose of her worldly goods a year or so earlier, when she sold her house and went to live with sister Barbara, in California.

Marcie and Mike came over for a tour of the premises. I could tell that my techy palace was way out of their suburban league; Marcie seemed clueless and Mike was basically down on the deal; he said my stuff was too specialized for their Vashon clientele (he was right).

Still naive at this point, about the true cost of eBay selling, I duly took note and decided to sell everything myself, using eBay. Mike was kind enough to explain his basic eBay techniques. I figured, if he can do it so can I. Little did I know what lay ahead.

During the year (and the next), while I won and lost at eBay, Marcie and Mike split up. As time ran out, I realized that I needed help. The only rooms left to be cleared were the two kitchens. There was so much cooking gack [equipment] that I reckoned it would take me two months to hawk it on eBay. So much gear and so little time.

I called Mike Urban for help; he chuckled, hearing of my eBay foibles, and agreed to take on the sale. He and his wife Catherine hauled it all off and sold it later, over Thanksgiving weekend, as a pre-Christmas event.

Mine was their first off-premises estate sale and it turned out to be the sale that changed their business model. Mike realized that, instead of having one- or two-day estate sales at the estate(s), they were better off having their auctions (and retail sales) in a centrally store.

[Spoiler Alert: The Urbans ended up buying the old Sound Foods restaurant property at Center Island, converting it from a restaurant & bakery into an antiques store and auction space. They are having issues with King County; but I reckon that Mike will prevail, functionally if not administratively. (2018 update: Mike seems to have prevailed.)]

While Pam and I moved into a new paradigm, the wheels of government kept processing our old one. On December 22, 2011 Pam flew to Montréal for her first green card interview. I knew all would go well because 22 is my luckiest number.

We tried to keep in touch via email, but that was a chore. Internet cafés were a thing of the past and Pam, ever thrifty, was staying at a youth hostel, without Internet or wi-fi. She had to walk a country mile to find Internet access.

With the lifting of her conditional status Pam would be free to come and go across the US border at her whim and pleasure; but there were more hoops to jump through before that. After approving Pam, the Feds wanted to know more about me, her sponsor. Hmm.

[Spoiler Alert: In 2013, they called us in for another interview. They asked me to bring enough documentation (of my means and past economic affairs) as to justify my current circumstances, i.e., how did you pay for that house? The numbers didn't add up; my income didn't seem to justify my lifestyle. Well, the idea of the Feds parsing my past gave me the willies. I wondered if Anna had fingered me, when we got divorced, vis-à-vis my former Swiss bank accounts. That, plus the added tax burdens of dual citizenship (income tax returns would have to be filed in both Canada and the US) upset the risk-reward ratio.]

We backed out of the green card. Pam wrote a letter to the immigration authorities informing them that she had returned to Canada and no longer wanted to live in the States.

2012 – Broker Hired – Breakdown Begins

You die twice: once physically, again when the last person forgets you.

Anonymous

The time came to hire a real estate broker.

Hiring a broker manifested my worst fears. It was capitulation on one hand and commitment on another.

The jaws of defeat closed around me as the nightmare came true.

It was a cold day on May 20th, the morning I made the call to the broker. As I approached my desk to make the call, an owl stared me down from a perch above the pond outside my window. The big bird sat there close to ten minutes, focusing on me.

I couldn't take my eyes off the owl's; they beamed invisible energy; as if to curse me for what I was about to do; it sent a shiver down my spine (and still does, as I write).



During the twenty years I lived on Vashon Island, there was always an owl who lived in the forest behind the house.

I could hear the owl, but only saw it once—through a 1200 mm lens—and that was a long time ago. This owl was unfazed when aimed a 210 mm at him.

Why did the owl show up at that particular moment, as I was about to sign Birdland's death warrant? It was said that owls were omens of negative change and impending death. I can't disagree with that now, having lived through it.

That fateful morning, I called an elderly couple—Jeff and Mary Lewis—who were real estate brokers. I chose them for their gumption. The pair had come around to Birdland one afternoon about five years earlier, to introduce themselves and their company, Winterbrook Realty. I thought they were Mormons at first. But they were new to the Island and wanted folks to know that they were real-estate brokers. At the time, I kind of brushed them off. (Little did I know what their visit portended.)

I was convinced that Birdland would virtually sell itself; that it was such a unique estate, in such good shape, that it should sell instantly—and that worried me. Would I have enough time to get rid of everything?

The real estate market on Vashon was in limbo. The many foreclosures following the crash of 2008 offset any other gains. However, there weren't many big estates for sale, properties with a good-sized plot of land, like mine. The market was so bearish that nobody wanted to sell. Even so, ~~my ego told me~~ I reckoned that Birdland should fetch at least \$600,000, maybe even \$700,000.

Two brokers came over and had a look around Birdland. They remained poker faced throughout the tour and a depressing conversation followed. They disagreed with my assessments, vehemently. One of them priced the property at \$315,000 and the other said \$375,000. Say what?

Those were lose-money prices. I paid \$297,000 for the place 22 years earlier and sank another \$180,000 into renovations and maintenance, including a new roof in 2009. The agents explained that most families coming to Vashon Island couldn't get the kind of jumbo-loan mortgages needed a property like mine.

Fiddlesticks!

Thinking about the problem, I determined that I had to find an off-island buyer, maybe a European or Asian looking for a second home.

Today, (2018) such reasoning is a no-brainer; wealthy Asians, particularly Chinese, are snapping up properties in Canada and the USA, paying top dollar and paying cash in most cases. But I was two years too soon for that surging market.³⁰

I aimed for the exclusive end of the market—artists who wanted studio space, in particular, and young professionals who wanted a live-work, home-office combo, like I did—especially a person or couple who liked to cook.

To attract a rich foreign buyer, I hired the Kendra Todd Group (KTG), a subset of the giant, Keller-Williams real-estate agents' network. They put on a snazzy front with a big portfolio of exclusive urban residences and country estates all over King County [Washington]. I fairly drooled (while crying) thinking of Birdland being part of such a luxurious collection.

Just after Pam left (as above) KTG's managing partner, Douglas Chinn, arrived, to cut the deal. He was a young Asian man, maybe 30 years old at the most; he made me feel my age; I could have been his grandfather.

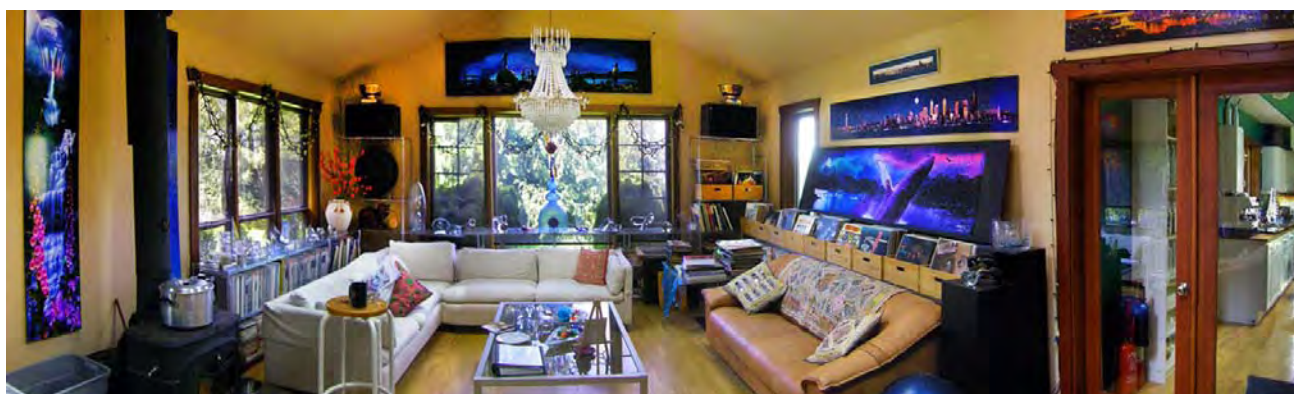
Ching was accompanied by Christian Codd (left), who was introduced as his Vashon agent.

Christian, who seemed like "the barefoot boy from Britany hills" was wide-eyed as I toured them through Birdland.

The twelve JBL-4311 loudspeakers distributed throughout the studio caught his eye—as a musician, he recognized the legendary studio monitors, he knew how rare they were; that raised my stature in his eyes, and his in mine.



Yours Truly with Christian Codd at Vashon's Dockton Park, 2016. Photo by Pamela Swanson.



Birdland lounge. Photo by Pamela Swanson.

³⁰ During the 36 months that I have been writing this book, top-market US real estate has appreciated nearly 50%; in Canada 125%.

When Ching and Codd saw it, Birdland was still intact. Between the video gear and artwork, it showed well. However, Chinn was recalcitrant; he thought Birdland was a bit of a white elephant, not the kind of place most were looking for.

He thought I should put back the walls I had taken out, re-creating the separate bedrooms, and repurpose the studio into a master bedroom. I countered by explaining that as far as I was concerned, the place was good as is and what was needed was a buyer whose profile matched mine.

[Spoiler Alert: I eventually learned my lesson from another agent, Nancy McAllister. She countered my argument, saying that, *of course* I thought my house had a good layout; after all, I built it. However, for 99% of population, my space was hard to “work with.” That’s fine, said I, then your job is to go find the other 1%.]

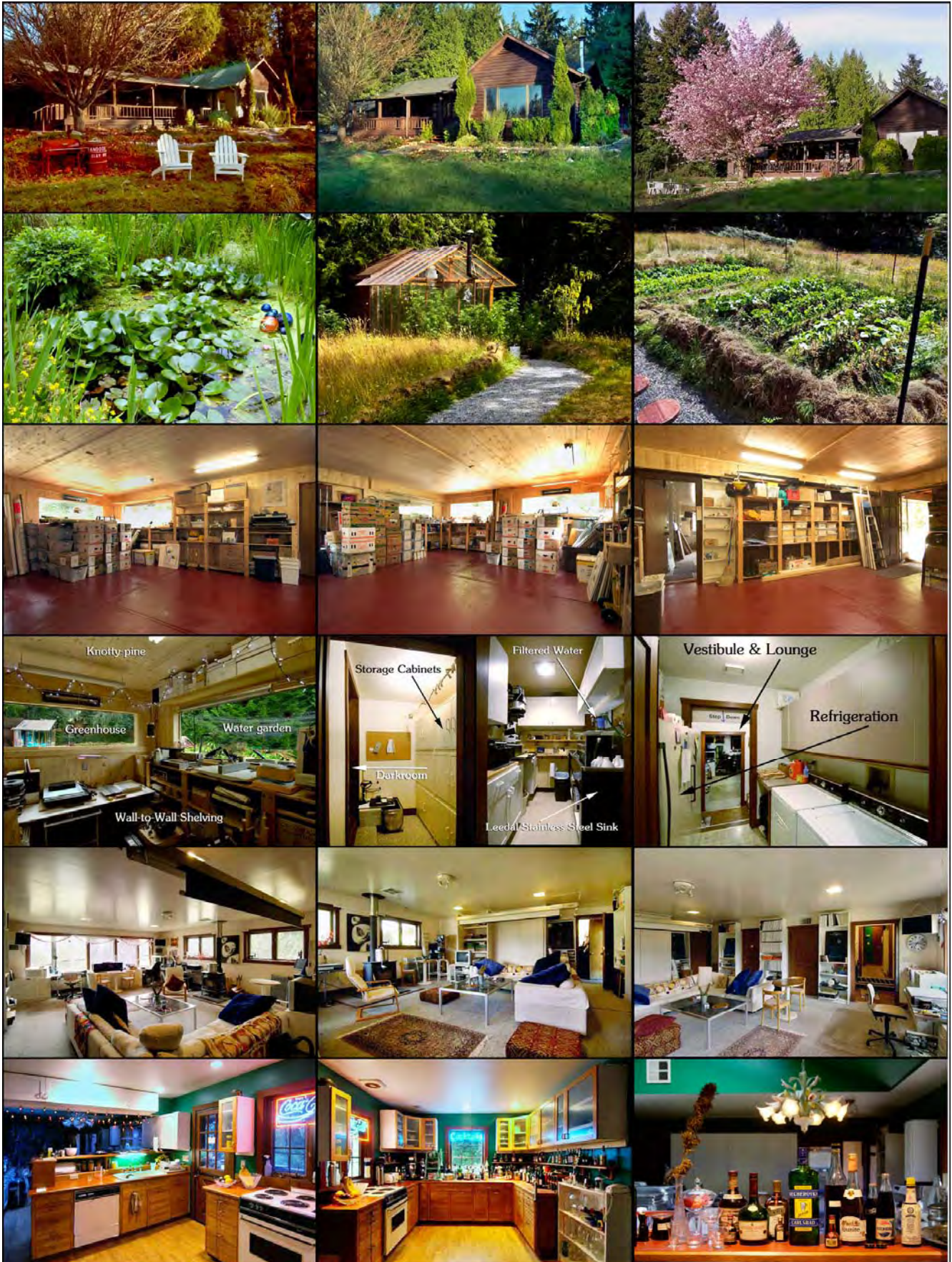
I had my own ideas about how to sell Birdland. Chinn nearly choked when I ~~asked~~ told him to list Birdland at \$750,000. He agreed to my plan when I reminded him that the price could always be lowered.

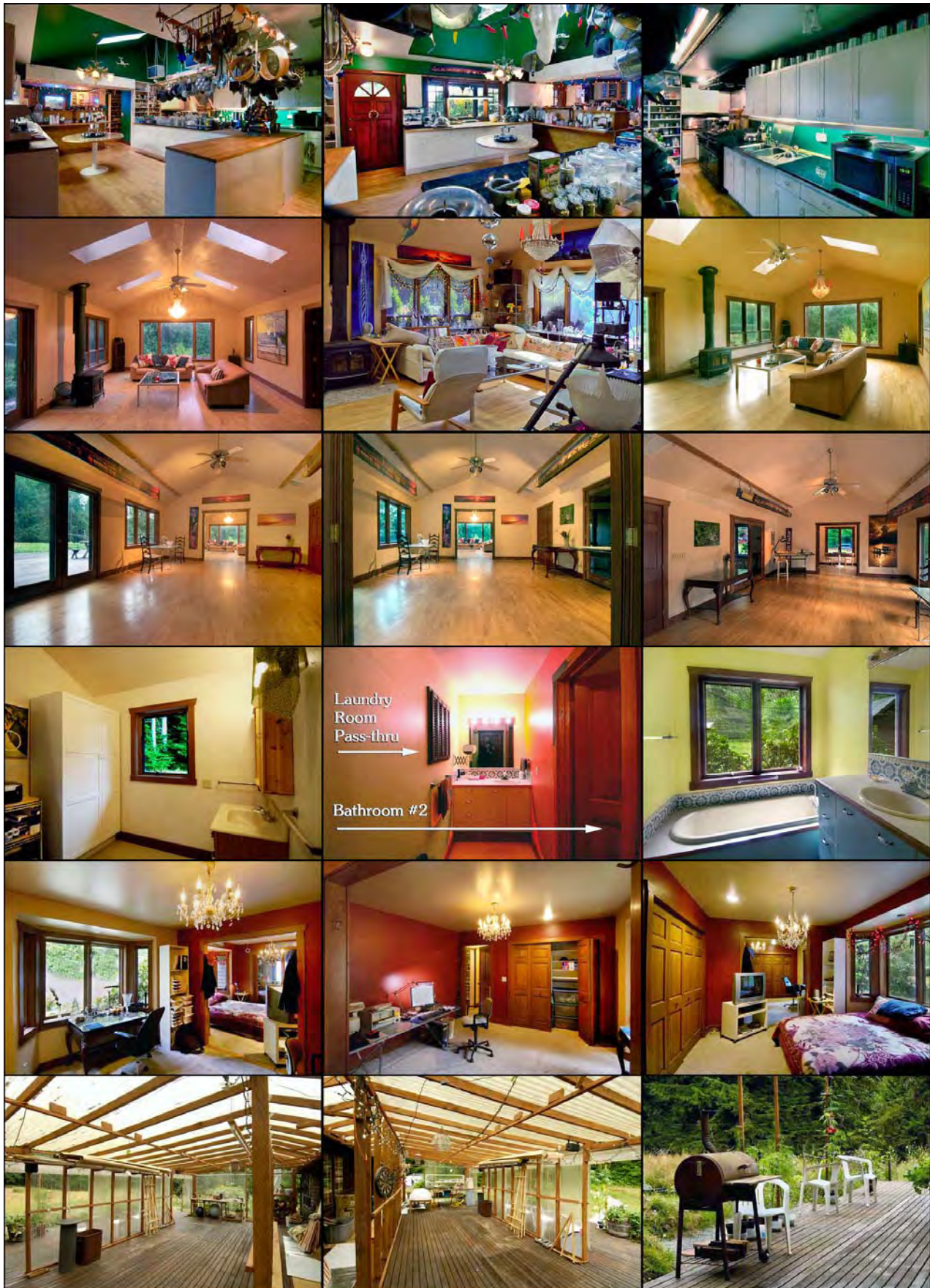


Christmas website promotion picture, 2012. The idea behind the circular red step stones was to “follow the dotted line.”

He wanted to send in KTG’s photo team, which would have cost me a small fortune. I explained that I would provide pictures as I was quite capable of that. (!)

Thus, I began photographing the house top to bottom and created an on-line picture gallery at a website put together by Pam at vashonhouseforsale.com. [See overleaf; note, pictures span several years.] Can you believe we got that website address? What luck!





Once the website was up, it was time to begin emptying Birdland. We could get a buyer at any time; I was convinced that it was a matter of days, not weeks; I was in a rush to get 'er done. Thus, began the saddest episode of my life; a two-year torture, killing the dream I manifested, with a thousand small cuts.

The dismantling of Birdland began with the return of Chris McDevitt's artwork. His big, beautiful canvases, that had decorated my studio for as long as 40 years, had become albatrosses of sizeable proportions.



I was downsizing from 3,200 square feet [297.28 square meters]—3,800 [~353 m²] if the outdoor workshop on the south deck were included—to a tiny, 550-square foot [51 square meters] condominium; there would be no space for McDevitt's pictures, or many of my own for that matter.

I had tried to sell McDevitt's paintings before, when my funds ran low during a dry spell. That was after Anna left and I got my first condo in Vancouver. Nearly two dozen of his drawings, acrylics and oil paintings got put on the block at a trendy West Seattle gallery, together with some of my crystal collection. Nothing sold; the gallery owner told me people thought McDevitt's pictures were weird (they were, some in a Daliesque way). Ha!

The lack of interest blew me away. I totally misjudged the market; West Seattle, although an affluent neighborhood, was not the right place to sell intellectual art or expensive, European art glass. If only I had contact with a New York gallery, I was sure McDevitt's stuff could have found new homes in Gotham. New York connoisseurs of fine art had deep enough pockets as well as an appreciation for the works of an artist like Chris McDevitt.

In retrospect, I should have contacted Monica Gripman, who had New York gallery connections. Monica was a stunning beauty; she could have been a cover model for *Cosmopolitan* [*Cosmo*] magazine. She was equally sophisticated and very cool. Monica brushed aside my eccentric attire; it was all about her.

I got to know Monica while printing a 96 X 24-inch collage [243.84 X 60.96 cm] of about two dozen 11 X 14-inch prints [27.94 X 35.56 cm] called *Severed Head*. All that printing added up to a hefty tab; but, her New York gallery intended to sell the piece for as much as \$12,000.

Aside from fantasizing about Monica, I could never get involved with her. For one thing, she had a big beau who was so strong and generous. For example, to kill time while I printed Monica's pictures, he split a chord of firewood for me.³¹

³¹ Wikipedia: A cord measures *four feet* high by *four feet* wide by *eight feet* long (4 ft. x 4 ft. x 8 ft.) and has a volume of 128 cubic feet. The amount of solid wood in a cord varies depending on the size of the pieces, but for firewood it averages about 85 cubic feet.

However, I didn't I think of the Monica connection when the time came to part with McDevitt's pictures. Instead, I concluded that, for the average artist, the art world is fucked up, and left it at that.

[Rant Alert: In my opinion; Art was a zero-sum game with one winner for every thousand losers. One's chances of making big money were about the same as investing in a gold prospector. There was so much art in the world, so many different kinds, that establishing values was difficult.

The easy money provided by years of QE [Quantitative Easing] and other forms of governmental largesse had bid-up the prices of everything, including fine art. However, only a few artists made top dollar; most suffered a long slow attrition, eventually going bust. It was rather like the 95% failure rate of restaurant businesses.]

Back on point, McDevitt's pictures were boat anchors weighing me down. They were occupying 10 square feet [0.9 square meters] of precious floor space that I wanted to use for a package-wrapping and shipping area. The studio needed to be converted into a warehouse. McDevitt's pictures had to go, and go fast; so, I decided to simply return them to Chris and walk away from the \$1,000s I paid for them.

McDevitt was understandably flabbergasted; it took him some time to get over feelings of rejection. But he appreciated that I didn't just put them in the thrift shops, where other artists would likely scavenge the canvases and paint over them.

I spent the better part of two weeks designing and building a container to safely ship McDevitt's fourteen big canvases and twelve lesser works. The stuff got sent to his nephew, Keith, who lived half a continent away, in Hudson, Ohio.³² Chris' older brother, Sterling McDevitt also spoke for the paintings; however, Chris didn't think that Sterling had enough respect for his work and decided that his work should go to his nephew, Keith.

Chris contributed 200 bucks to the cost of shipping, for crate lumber and hardware. Then, one fine autumn day, a couple of turbined East Indians drove up the driveway in a moving van that looked like it was salvaged from a junk yard. They hauled away the big rolling box as the sun sank slowly in the west. The truck left a proverbial "cloud of dust" as it bounced over the moguls, down my rutted driveway. I could hear the big box banging around inside the tinny truck; but there was nothing to do. I crossed my fingers knowing that, if my packaging survived the first 500 feet, the rest of the journey was an easy haul.

The truckers gave me carbon copy (remember those?) of a Bill of Lading illegibly filled out, by hand. There were no tracking numbers, to which we have become accustomed. I had built a pretty bullet-proof box for the artwork; but there were other perils when goods were in transit. For example, there was the time my \$20,000 laser machine was lost when a FedEx truck was stolen (see: *1977 – Magic Lasers – No Takers*).

³² Chris' older brother, Sterling McDevitt also spoke for the paintings; however, Chris didn't think that Sterling had enough "respect" for his work; in the end, he decided that his work should go to his nephew, Keith.

There was also the incident when a station wagon carrying parts of a big show burned up (see: *1975 – Show Burns – No Fatalities*). Shit happens, I knew that, and began worrying six weeks later, when I hadn't heard anything. Finally, Chris's nephew called to report that the box had arrived, in near perfect condition.

I kept one big piece called *Revelation* (left). It was my first McDevitt, that I bought from Chris in 1975, in New York.

But in the end there was no space in the Vancouver condo; so, I built another crate and sent it off to another nephew, in Massachusetts—Tracy Waugh, Sterling McDevitt's daughter. She had just moved into a big house with a lot of wall space; she and her husband, Andy, looked forward enthusiastically to receiving the big canvas.

I wish I had sent them the stuff I sent Keith; I suspect the artworks would have gotten more respect with the Waughs.



With McDevitt's artwork out of the way, I took apart the printing factory, prepared the gear for sale, and reassembled the furniture into a wrapping and shipping room. The adjacent lounge room was stripped of its furniture and became a photo studio for producing product shots for eBay®. The dining room set and cocktail tables were given to the Codd family.

The first big item to go was my precious Epson 9900 printer, the one I had fought so hard to get, together with a full load of ink; it was scooped up by one of my printing clients—Kassana Holden, the owner of Bergamot Studio—for whom I printed original fabric designs on silk fabrics that she sold at Nordstrom's trendy department store in Seattle.³³

The morning after the printer was sold, three dead birds appeared beneath the print-room window.

It spooked me then, and it spooks me now. I did not alter the birds for this picture.

Dead birds were said to be an omen of change; of metaphysical death.



Kassana paid \$4,000 for the printer (essentially a brand-new machine) and ink—a \$9000 value. I insisted on cash, which put her off initially; but I gave her a copy of my book, *Giclée Prepress*, and we eventually became friends, of a sort.

³³ As described in the *Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber*: "Bergamot Studio created custom light fixtures, upholstery fabric and wallpaper using a unique combination of traditional textiles with photographic images. Prior to starting her business on Vashon, Holden held the position of design director for Eddie Bauer Home from 2000 to 2010."

(I felt that Holden looked down on me; I was too much of a Hippie to hang with her ilk; she preferred the blue-blooded gang that supported the Blue Heron Art Center.)

When Eric Heffelfinger closed his gallery in 2012, Holden took over the big space. The former Masonic Temple hall, located in Burton, was a prestigious address with problems.

The gallery (and Bergamot Studio) was located about 4 miles [6.4 kilometers] south of Vashon town—a bit too far off the beaten track to attract enough business.

When Kassana took over the space—I learned about it when she bought the printer—I worried for her. I reckoned that the last thing Vashon needed was an expensive, up-market home-furnishings store. Sure enough, only 17 months later, her business went bust and she moved back to Indiana, where she grew up.

I had to laugh; she thought I was a loser when I closed Vashon Island Imaging at the end of 2013; then, less than a year later, her business was *finito*.

David Lynch ended up scoring the Epson 9900 and all that ink for just \$1000. Ironically, he used the 9900—known to have the widest color gamut of any printer—for black and white work. Ha!

Getting rid of all the photo studio and darkroom gear were the next big items. There wasn't enough time to sell the stuff—as earlier described, each eBay sale took about 6 hours. Nor would the gack [equipment] get the return needed to justify the time required to find buyers; why spend a few hours on a \$25 item? So, I decided to give the stuff to schools.

Terry Swift at Vashon High School got all my canvas stretchers and related stuff.



Douglas Urner, a photography teacher at Seattle's Rainier High School, who I met through ASMP [American Society of Media Photographers], got all the darkroom and studio gear, including two Nikon scanners.

Photo by Pamela Swanson

It felt pathetically sad, giving away the Omega D2 enlarger that I bought when I was 15 years old, with the money I earned as a messenger for Peterson Color Lab; that enlarger helped me build my career as a professional photographer. Although it hadn't been used in a long time and had no place in my present or future life, it was nonetheless hard to say goodbye. Symbolically, it was the end of an era for me. My only consolation was thinking about all the new pictures my old friend would help create, all the new friends it would make at the school.

Urner was more than appreciative; he easily signed off for my \$15,000-dollar, equivalent-value donation. He told me, that his students were clamoring to learn what they called *real* photography; they wanted more than their fully-automated digital cameras offered; they wanted the hands-on experience—the alchemy—of silver-based photography. I found that particularly encouraging.

My AV shows and picture library were the hardest to dispatch. They were the most precious to me, but they occupied the most space. I had hoped to digitize all those images; but there was neither world enough nor time, quoting Andrew Marvel.



Recognize the purple and yellow Incredible banner? It was my flag, that once proudly hung from the Brussels studio.

Dealing with the slide trays was another matter. Who in their right mind wanted slide trays in 2012? It turns out that there was, in fact, a market for slide trays in Asia and South America; but there was quite a cost to send them there; it wasn't worth the time to make a \$2.00 sale for each tray. In the end, a fellow in Florida, Bill Riggins, ended up buying nearly 400 emptied slide trays from me for a buck each. That was one of the luckiest days of my life.



When it came to the slide shows, Pam and I emptied the slide trays into plastic bags and stored them in banker's boxes.

Pam couldn't believe what we were doing. She reminded me that nobody could ever see them again.

But I wasn't ready to trash them yet. I had hopes of holding onto them and maybe someday restoring the shows digitally.

Such a dreamer, I was.

Can you imagine how much space 400 slide trays occupied? Here's a clue, they shipped in 22 large cartons.

Wherever possible I returned the slides and audio tapes to the original clients. There was nothing they could do with those slides, no possible way to ever play the show again; but I couldn't bring myself to destroy that possibility forever, by trashing them—that, I would leave to them.

Thus, I sent the *DHL* show to Arthur Havers, the *Bumbles* show to Pat Shipps and all the Scania & Saab stuff back to the Scania Museum in Södertälje, Sweden. All these shipments cost valuable time and generated no income; their only benefit was emptying the house in a morally correct way, not simply sending everything to the trash heap of history.

Somehow, I managed to convince Pete Bjordahl to take the image library, which (still, in 2018) occupies a hefty 7 X 10 foot [2.13 X 3.048 meter] double-layered shelf space in his studio. Someday, (I will be dead before then), certain original pictures in my 500,000-image film archive will be worth a fortune. Until then, they are worth nothing, thanks to the free pictures available on the Internet.

Despite the emotional stress, the heaviness of the situation, there were some lighter moments during the purge. For example, one of my first eBay® sales turned into a serendipitous bonanza that skewed my impression of the online auction house. It was one of those stories you hear about but figure, that would never happen to me.



I listed an unusual piece of antique audio gear—a Roger Mayer model RM58 noise gate—that I purchased from Tom Lannick, at Martin Audio, in New York, more than 30 years earlier. It was a top-of-the-line, professional audio component; however, this one was showing its age.³⁴

³⁴ Noise gates "corral" sound, they limit the output; imagine driving 60 mph [90 kmh] and wanting to go faster, however as hard as you push the pedal to the metal, an equivalent braking limits you to a specific top-end speed; or, in this case, sound level. Noise gates could also be set to "duck" one sound under another, for example, to automatically suppress background music while an announcer is speaking; the Roger Mayer unit was unsurpassed for its "sensitivity," detecting the sounds that would trigger (or release) suppression.

I followed Mike Urban's advice and started the auction at \$9.99. I was hoping that, with some luck, someone would bid it up to \$50. Writing the blurb for the eBay listing was a tricky business; I couldn't say for sure that the thing worked; I had no way to test it. The "on" light lit, but you could hear something rattling around inside, all of which I noted in the item description. I gave a full disclosure; I didn't want it returned. An hour after the listing went live, I got a call from a guy on the east coast that asked me to delist the noise gate and sell it to him for \$1,100. What?! It seemed awfully suspicious, like a scam, and I told the guy so. He told me the money would be in my PayPal account within five minutes of the delisting; that I should give him the benefit of the doubt and try it; that in the worst case, I could list it again, eh? So, I delisted the item and, lo and behold, \$1,100 instantly landed in my PayPal account. I had an extra cocktail that evening but didn't sleep well worrying if the deal would go south when the guy got the package; most deals got scammed after the items in question were delivered—buyers would complain that the items weren't as advertised or were broken or damaged. In those cases, PayPal was predisposed to favor buyers at the expense of sellers. It's been six years now, and I never heard another word from him. What an oddball transaction; I never had another one like it, not even close. Soon after that, I made another eBay sale that was an utter disaster, in every way—financial and emotional. This time, the item was a collection of tape-recorded New York radio stations playing disco-music.

There were more than one hundred 10-inch [25.4-cm] reels of audio tape in that archive, each one containing 4 hours of stereo disco music. How do you put a price on that sort of thing? I figured it was worth at least a thousand bucks.



Once again, I followed Mike Urban's advice and started the auction at \$9.99. Only a few people followed my listing; in the auction's final moments it got bid up... to \$15. What? Yep, I got only fifteen dollars for that vast collection. But a deal is a deal, especially on eBay. I spent two valuable days packaging the tapes and dealing with the Post Office, all for naught. When I lamented my tale to Mike Urban, he changed his tune. (Ha!) His new advice? I should ask the price I want for any item that is unique or has limited appeal; that the \$9.99 rule only applied to items with wide audience appeal, when many people would be interested and get into a bidding war.

TEAC tape decks drew a response that was somewhat similar the Roger Mayer noise gate episode. Gary Word called me from Houston, Texas; he asked me to delist and sell directly to him. I explained that I didn't want to get a history of delisting with eBay. I asked him to buy the deck listed and promised to sell him my other four directly, for the price he offered, which was generous. It turned out that Gary restores TEAC gear, then resells it to elite audio aficionados and collectors. Gary was interested in all things TEAC, so in one fell swoop I was able to ditch a huge chunk of gear. He was so appreciative, he offered to buy me dinner if I ever touch down in Houston. Hmm... they BBQ some tasty steaks in Texas!

And, there's a chance I will be able to take Gary up on his offer because I may be invited back to consult on a new project for the San Jacinto Museum of History; Larry Spasic hinted at such during a phone call last spring (2017). Time will tell.

Another amusing serendipity was a response I got on eBay for KitchenAid stand-mixer parts (grain mill, pasta-making attachment, meat grinder, and juicer); the buyer was Terrie Zanotti; she was a colleague of Rick Sorgel [ex Sorgel-Lee], at DCI Marketing, in Seal Beach, California.

As you can imagine, disposing of sentimental memorabilia was the most difficult part of downsizing. I'm a "pack rat" (aka "hoarder"). I saved an enormous quantity of artwork, videos of shows, awards, press clippings, and editorial pieces. I was a sought-after writer and wrote op-ed pieces for AMI's *Multi-Images* magazine as well as *PMI* [Photo Methods for Industry], the American *Audio Visual* magazine published by Ziff-Davis, the British *Audiovisual* magazine edited by Peter Lloyd, Dataton's house organ, *News & Views* and others. I kept that stuff not just for posterity; but also, as source material for a history of multi-image slide shows. I began such a treatise in Australia, in 1982; it was called *Confessions of a Multi-Image Maestro*; after 500-plus pages, I set the project aside when Sandra and I moved back to Hawaii; it ended up in deep storage and I forgot about it until its rediscovery about a year ago. In all, I had about 20 boxes of that sort of historically significant stuff; but I only had space for about 10% of that material in my Canadian condo; 90% had to go.

To accomplish that disassembly, I began sending former Incredible staffers "time capsules"—boxes filled with nostalgic stuff. I sent the Swedish memorabilia to John Emms together with the original artwork and transparencies for most of his best effects work. I sent Rocky Graziano a 60-pound box [27.2 kg] filled with many of the audio tapes he had put together at Incredible Slidemakers, decades earlier, together with some trinkets and trash from our days on 73rd Street. I made a similar package for Fred Cannizzaro; his contained the actual portfolio he had used to sell Incredible's special effects, a collection of about two dozen 11 X 14-inch display prints [27.9 X 35.6 cm] and a dozen or so of the awards Incredible had received for work done by the Forox department.



L to R: Chris Hoina (behind camera), John "OC" O'Connell, Rocky Graziano, Jim Casey and OC, shoot Incredible doco video.

Unfortunately, I also included the master library of Beta-Max video tapes of the shows produced by Incredible Slidemakers, as well as a one-hour documentary of Incredible Slidemakers put together by a collaboration of Jim Casey, Rocky Graziano, Chris Hoina and John O'Connell (see photo).

I had no way of digitizing Beta Max, I could only process VHS; so I was hoping that Fred would be inspired to transfer the analogue tapes into digital masters that could be shared with others on *YouTube*. But my hunch was wrong and Fred ditched the tapes.

How could he do that?

It was a huge disappointment for me, as was the run-in I had with Rocky that basically ended our relationship. Rocky and I had stayed in touch with each other through the years. He would call me every year on my birthday and I would periodically call him to ask advice about the stock market.

After Incredible, Rocky staged audiovisual content at corporate meetings and events. In the beginning, I thought he might give me some show design or Watchout programming work. I thought the same about Doug Sloan; he was running a film production house (Icon Pictures), but still doing corporate shows. Neither of them threw me a bone, ever. I find that odd and a bit hypocritical, considering the heaps of praise they threw at me. But that was before the kerfuffle over the time capsules that I sent to Rocky. Apparently, Rocky's UPS [United Parcel Service] driver complained about the 60-pound [27.2 kg] package I sent Rocky. Then, a few days later, the driver got an 80-pounder [36.3 kg], sent to Fred, c/o Rocky. (I had lost contact with Fred and hoped that Rocky would find him and give him the package.) Well, after receiving Fred's package, Rocky actually called me, long distance, to bitch at me. He told me to stop sending stuff and warned that anything else I sent would go to the dump, with the other stuff. The dump?

What sheer disrespect, on so many levels. I was astounded.

99% of the time I am a reasonable and composed man; but I have hot buttons. Rocky pushed one of those when he disclosed that he had trashed the time capsule I sent him—a package put together with such love, containing memorabilia saved for nearly four decades—sent to the trash heap of history. What a tragedy. Incredibly, Rocky had no words of gratitude whatsoever. That blew my mind and I blew up at him. In less-than-polite terms; I let him know that I was utterly disappointed by his shallowness and callousness. Graziano showed me a side of himself that I had never seen before; I didn't like the new Rocky and told him, in no uncertain terms, that he was an asshole. Then, two days later, Sloan called to tell me that I was the asshole, for lecturing Rocky; he said he was disappointed in me, that I wasn't the noble character he thought I was; that I was just full of shit, like everyone else. Wow. What an irony, taking all that emotional abuse just for trying to be Mr. Nice Guy; for trying to preserve Incredible Slidemakers' history. ³⁵

³⁵ After reading a snippet of *An Incredible Epic* sent to him by Jim Casey, Rocky Graziano lashed out at me by email on December 2, 2020: "Sounds like you need to revise your memoir with the real truth, in black and white. If you are going to write a memoir it is important that you remember things as "They Were," not convolute them. [As stated more than once at the beginning of every volume, my memoir is a *confabulation*.] "Too many omissions, time to revise with "What Was". Rocky goes on to say: "Seems you were the one who initiated dumping Incredible stuff, and I do not know what "Time Capsule" you are referring to." [Had Rocky read more than the snippet, he'd know what I meant by "time capsule", and

The weeks slipped by. All I did was advertise stuff and find new homes for it. My days were spent packing and shipping packages. Pam spent most of her time in Vancouver; there wasn't much she could do to help me, and I was no fun to be around. She came down periodically and helped with the gardens; I appreciated her company and wished we could have made something work at Birdland.



For entertainment, on a whim, I built a giant whirl-a-gig, as a lawn decoration, to help sell the estate.

The contraption was an eight-foot [2.43 meter] swallowtail butterfly, with animated wings, propelled by a 4-foot-diameter [1.22-meter] daisy flower whose petals were the propellers.

It took many rounds of model-making and testing to get the contraption to work; but I finally got the wings to flap.

For nearly four months, the whirl-a-gig entertained me and got plenty of admiring chuckles from visitors. I was still convinced that Birdland would sell itself; all it needed was a little dressing-up. Ha!

John Emms visited in November; he was on his way back to Minneapolis from Germany, where he staged a trade show exhibition. Emms detoured through Seattle to check out my crystal collection; he made me an offer for the whole lot.

My collection was well known and dear to him, as I collected most of it during the years we worked together in Sweden. He made me an offer I couldn't refuse; it was a lot of money, but he was getting an exceptional deal—and I was getting rid of a big bunch of stuff in one fell swoop. It would have taken weeks to sell the crystal collection on eBay®, even if that were possible (which was doubtful).

that I sent him two of them. To quote page 1704: "*I began sending former Incredible staffers "time capsules"—boxes filled with nostalgic stuff. ... I sent Rocky Graziano a 60-pound box [27.2 kg] filled with many of the audio tapes he had put together at Incredible Slidemakers, decades earlier, together with some trinkets and trash from our days on 73rd Street. I made a similar package for Fred Cannizzaro; his contained the actual portfolio he had used to sell Incredible's special effects, a collection of about two dozen 11 X 14-inch display prints [27.9 X 35.6 cm] and a dozen or so of the awards Incredible had received for work done by the Forox department.*" I was passing-on precious relics that were part of The Incredible Slidemakers' legacy; I wasn't "dumping" them. I felt that Rocky and Fred would be the best custodians of those precious items; things that I would have no room for in the future. Rocky goes on: "I took everything of sentimental value to me and that I wanted to keep when you were closing Incredible. Sounds like the Time Capsule was probably addressed to Fred. In care of me." [See above.] "And don't forget, I drove in to the city and personally delivered the boxes to Fred... that never made it in your memoir. [Rocky never told me that.] "I also did try and get you on one of my projects that was interested in using Watchout, you even gave me an estimate, but my client decided not to use Watchout." [Hmm. Only one chance? In all those years?] The upshot of all this? I stand my what I wrote; and I hope Rocky reads more than the snippet from Volume Seven. Volume Two is about our days working together at The Incredible Slidemakers.

Tragically, there was an inadvertent screw-up during shipping, that was ultimately my fault, due to my ignorance of how the UPS tagging system worked.



I spent considerable time and care packing the crystal collection in the same Pelican cases I used to ship photo lenses and electronics (right); they couldn't have been more safely packed. However, along with the crystals, I also shipped some heavy goods including books and furniture (left). I gave John the details for each of the ten cases—dimensions, weight, contents and values; he dealt with UPS and organized the shipment.

Without realizing that UPS had issued specific labels for each of the seven cases, I affixed the shipping labels in random order. Thus, cases marked as one weight were dealt with as if they were another; light weight cases were mixed with heavy ones resulting in some breakage. John had to fight to get a dime out of UPS; but I believe that, in the end, he got a fair-value settlement.

Today, the surviving crystal collection decorates John's new digs in Minneapolis, lit by special LED lights, he tells me.



John Emms photo, 2018

2013 – William Swanson Dies – Fateful Trip for Pam



Photo by Pam Swanson, 2013.

Pam's father, William "Bill" Swanson, died in August.

Swanson died with dignity, refusing treatment for a cancer. He hung on until every member of the family who wanted to have some time with him, could.

Pam had been up to visit him when she first learned of his condition. She returned, saying that she felt her father wouldn't be with us much longer, that he had decided to go.

Bill Swanson was a rugged man, righteous and tenacious; his decision(s) made sense to me. Her father was Pam's hero; she idolized him; his death was a big loss for her.



The Swanson clan gathered on the Red Bridge in Kaslo, B.C., to spread their father, William Swanson's ashes.

Left to right: David Swanson; Sabrina Swanson (Lloyd's wife); Pamela Swanson; Lloyd Swanson; Anne Swanson Dempster; Blaine Dempster (Anne's husband).

Mystery photographer.

Swanson family commemorative plaques on Red Bridge in Kaslo, B.C.

Left to right: Beverly Swanson, Elaine Swanson, William Swanson, John "Johnny" Swanson.



Photo by Pam Swanson.

To digress for a moment, about the Swanson family: From an early age, Pamela Swanson became well acquainted with the vagaries and injustice of Fate. Her older brother Johnny and younger sister Elaine were mentally challenged, institutionalized and died young.

The dual tragedies had a profound and lasting effect on the family. Her mom, Beverly, became an alcoholic; Pam became the default mom for her younger sibling's—Anne, David and Lloyd. As soon as she could, Pam had her tubes tied and sought refuge in flight, from inner demons that still torment her. More than anyone else I know, Pam focuses on the simple joys and miracles of life; she accentuates the positive, eliminates the negative. Unsurprisingly, she has also come to terms with death. Today, Pam is the defacto matriarch of the Swanson family, from afar.

Bill Swanson's passing came as no surprise. As mentioned, all his children came to say goodbye. There was a family powwow in Kaslo, BC, where Bill had been a resident in assisted-living quarters; Pam and her younger brothers, Dave and Lloyd finalized their father's affairs and a week later Pam returned to Vashon.

Whether the frequencies of Pam's trips to Canada made US Immigration become suspicious of her, we will never know. However, shortly after Pam's last trip I received a letter from DHS [Department of Homeland Security]; they had some questions regarding my sponsorship of Pam; more specifically about my financial situation. Oh boy.

Whatever the trigger, I knew what was coming next: an investigation about where my funds came from. According to my income tax statements it must have seemed odd to the IRS that I had enough wherewithal to support residences in both Vancouver and Vashon; it didn't add up.

It would have been impossible for me to justify Birdland without incriminating myself. The story itself was complex and convoluted because I intermingled personal and business funds in off shore banks. Worse, furnishing support documents was impossible at that point. As part of the purge, Pam and I trashed thirty years of tax-file support documents that were stored in the rafters of the Vashon house; they were among the first things to go because there was no way to store them in my downsized new set-up. Plus, Pam's green card seemed like a shoe-in, so I didn't think I needed the stuff any longer.

With no hard-copy evidence at my disposal, I could find myself guilty unless proven innocent of various financial crimes. Even if I survived, without a substantial haircut, the ordeal of it all would have been shattering and financially lethal, to say nothing of the impact it might have on my Canadian residency.

Continuing our pursuit of Pam's green card would be like sailing a ship onto a reef. The only thing to do was to abandon ship; quit while we were ahead; above all, avoid interrogation at all cost.

We sent a well composed letter to the Department of Homeland Security that explained, in the simplest of terms, that we decided to live in Canada and would not be needing the green card, thank you very much.

For nearly a half year we heard nothing. Just as we were getting apprehensive, a reply came and we breathed a sigh of relief. DHS acknowledged Pam's letter, rescinded her resident alien status and, get this, said that since she was already out of the country, they wouldn't have to physically remove her. Ha!

Today, Pam carries a copy of that DHS letter with her every time we cross the border into the USA; every so often, we get pulled-in for further interviews; presenting them with that letter works like a Get Out of Jail Free card in a Monopoly® game... at least so far.

Back on Vashon...

During the time he represented Birdland, Christian Codd had befriended me. Our friendship continued despite my pulling the plug on KTG [Kendra Todd Group], his employer, when I let their contract expire and hired Bill Chun as the estate agent for Birdland.



Thanksgiving 2016. Left, Christian and Yours Truly. Center, Axel & Eden Codd. Right, Anne Gordon (left) & Kerri Codd.

I got to know the entire Codd family. Christian turned out to be a gentle soul with a passion for music; he felt like a son. He and his wife Kerri moved to Vashon Island from Florida, where they grew up. I laughed when I heard that they came from the Sunshine State; most people I knew were moving the other way; but they had that pilgrim spirit, the gumption to start over in a new and different place. I admired them for that; I spent my life doing the same thing.

Kerri and Christian have two brilliant and beautiful kids, Eden and Axel, then (2013) aged five and three. Precocious is too small an adjective to describe the Codd's kids; a lot of that had to do with the way these two latter-day hippies were raising their kids. Family came first for Christian and Kerri; if something interfered with the welfare of the family, it was changed. I thought to myself: if I had a family that is how I would raise them.

Over the dreary winter, the Codds and I got to know each other well. I got over my initial "crush" on Kerri. (She was the spitting image of Andréa Lawrence, and shared her warm, innocent personality; it was as if Fawn had been born into a new body.) I could tell that she and Christian really liked me, as did their kids. Not many people seemed to like me anymore, so their kinship was valued. Thus, I was put into a quandary when Christian announced to me one day that he and Kerri wanted to buy Birdland; I knew they loved the place, but never expected them to make an offer.

A month earlier, Christian delivered the only prospective buyer that KTG ever produced, or so I thought; then I learned that the prospect was a friend of Christian's, from California, who ran a big grow-op in northern California (on Federal land...ha!). Codd thought the buyer might want to expand his operations into Washington State, given that pot was on the verge of being legalized.

(If legalization happened two years earlier, I would still be living on Vashon, as a grower. That income, possibly in combination with Airbnb, could have plugged the hole in my dollar dike.)

The prospective buyer, Christian and I spent the entire afternoon going over the property, discussing details. I produced some of my own pot for everyone to sample; they all agreed that the property produced some good bud. However, in the end, water became deal killer. In the late summer, before the autumnal rains, there were nearly always severe drought conditions on Vashon. While pot plants like dry conditions, they can die quickly and suddenly of thirst if the soil gets too dry.³⁶

Water had never been an issue for me; but I was only dealing with 100 plants. The prospect was talking about growing 1,000 of them; that meant watering the entire terraced slope. However, it was doubtful that the current well could support such massive volumes of water being pumped from it and the neighbors were sure to nix any alteration of usage, for commercial purposes.

It was an amazing conversation, as much about the grass business as my property; about how the two could complement each other; in other words, how to make Birdland into a grow op. For example, they reconfigured parts of the house into indoor grow rooms. By the time Codd and his buyer left, my head was spinning, more from numbers than the plenitude of pot we had puffed through the afternoon.

The numbers were so compelling that I asked Christian if I could somehow participate in the deal he and his friend was concocting. I didn't need much to keep Birdland running back then, just \$50,000 or so per year; that *value* could serve as my investment in a possible "joint" venture (hahaha).

It was a thrill to momentarily live the dream, concocting a get-rich-quick scheme, and to dream of its implications at night. In the end, the climate killed that deal; but Christian carried on with his personal crusade to buy Birdland; that made me wonder, was that the reason other people weren't shown Birdland when KTG repped the estate?

As Christmas approached, Christian's father visited Vashon from Florida. We had a discussion that turned into a showdown—the son was trying to get a mortgage from the Bank of Dad. Embarrassingly for Christian, his father lacked the confidence in his son to pay for a "jumbo" \$600,000 mortgage. Actually, I think it was more the father's lack of trust in Christian. Confidence and/or trust, whatever, the Bank of Dad didn't come through, and that was that.

³⁶ I found that they liked it best if you waited until their leaves just started to wilt, then give them a good drink of chicken shit tea (10 pounds of shit fermenting in 10 gallons of water).

I wasn't surprised; it confirmed my assessment of the gap between Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers. Boomers made plans and stuck by them; Xers' plans were more "fluid."

Morality breathed its last gasp with my generation; the new generations live life on an amoral (not immoral) basis; for them, there simply aren't any morals; that is hard for an old timer to deal with, when nobody plays by the rules.

2013 – Lightning Strikes – Laser Repairs

Lightning struck one September afternoon, under a clear blue sky.

I was up to my neck emptying Birdland, in purging mode—"everything's got to go."



Scene from Birdland web and Powerpoint slide show reveals extent of the terracing project. I shoveled a lot of shit!

Simultaneously, I was rushing to finish my pet landscaping project—the terraced-hillside miniature golf course—before the winter rains. The idea was that you'd pitch and put up and down the west slope, from terrace to terrace.

That amenity was conceived to add \$50,000 to the value of Birdland. But it was a lot of work, carving thirteen terraces from the top half of the western slope, by hand, using a mattock, pick and shovel.

With all that exercise, most of it done in the summer, in the nude,³⁷ I was in the best shape of my life—totally tanned and totally sober. (I hadn't had a drink for ten years, since Anna left).

That afternoon, while chiseling-out the 13th terrace, I saw lighting flashes in the blue sky. The flashes weren't in the sky, they were in my left eye and they persisted for the rest of the day. If I jerked my head, or bumped it, even slightly, I saw lightning. The effect was especially pronounced at night.

I called Pam; she was in Vancouver. (It was shortly after her father died; she went back to deal with his things.) Pam made a big deal of it, told me to see a doctor immediately, as in right now. Whew!

I had my doubts it was anything serious and decided to sleep on it. When I awoke the next morning, a giant *floater* obscured the vision of my left eye.³⁸

Long story short, Group Health referred me to their eye clinic in Seattle. The examining physician—a white-haired, white jacketed, professorial gent who could look like Sigmund Freud's twin brother—informed me that I had a tear in my retina.

"Aha," I replied, "shall I make a new appointment?" "No," the doctor replied, "the surgery should be done right now." He went on to explain that I could go blind if the retinal tear got bigger (and all the eye fluid leaked out).

That put the fear of God into me. I excused myself to call Pam, to ask her what I should do. But she was out and didn't answer. So, I took Pam's original advice—do something—and signed the release papers for the laser "stitching" operation. I reckoned they'd give me a zap or two and that would be that. *Mais non*.

They zapped me maybe forty times—zap zap zap zap zap; I lost count when the supposedly painless operation became anything but that. Every laser burst produced a stab of pain from deep inside my eye. It was torture; the worst part being that I had to hold my head perfectly still and stifle my body response to flinch at the pain. Fortunately, there was no perceivable pattern to the zapping; it wasn't a constant repetition, like a pile driver; I couldn't accurately anticipate the next zap; that's why I lost count, probably.

The speed of the whole deal, from discovery to surgery, seemed surreal. One minute I was good to go; not so a minute later. I never used to factor-in such flukes of Fate; but I do now. Inevitably, something will happen.

Being at the eye clinic was especially surreal.

³⁷ I was a sun worshipper; it started in Hawaii and continued while I was living in Sweden; there I sunbathed in the nude on Långholmen (a small island just a short walk from my Hornsgatan studio) and bleaching my short-cropped public hair to white blonde, using hydrogen peroxide; I was mimicking the Nordic blondes, trying to attract a blondie gal; however, the fair-haired Swedes seemed to fall for "dark" guys, from southern Europe, Arabia and north Africa.

³⁸ Floaters are black blobs; they are the shadows cast by tiny bits of shed body cells, floating in the fluid that fills our eye balls. Apparently, as we age, that liquid congeals; as it does, the shape of the eye ball elongates into an oval as they top collapses from diminishing fluid pressure; the structural stresses of elongation break-off cells, which become floaters. Eventually, floaters are reabsorbed by the body; but that takes a long time.

I walked in thinking I was going to have an eye exam, walked out two hours later, with a patch over my left eye, and a cheap pair of cardboard sunglasses. I had to lie about how I was going to get home; I wasn't supposed to drive, but I did, and got a speeding ticket issued by a robot camera at a school crossing.³⁹

The laser surgery did the trick; it's been five years and although I still have a lot of floaters, there's no lightning, touch wood. Although the vision in my left eye never returned to 100%, I don't notice that as much as the deterioration caused by a slowly advancing case of cataracts. I've been to see two specialist doctors who both want to operate; however, I reckon that as long as I can see "enough," I don't want the surgery—things can and do go wrong.

For example, just a while ago, at the grocery market, an older fellow asked me to read a label for him. He explained that he'd had surgery for cataracts and had vision problems as a result. It sounded to me like the wrong lens was inserted, or the old one incompletely removed. Of course, I asked, who was the doctor? He said, Jesse Chew. OMG! He's my doctor, too.

My eyesight is deteriorating; but mine are still *my* eyes and I support them nutritionally. I read that anise seeds were good for the eyes; true? I don't know; I am an experiment in progress. Since I read that article, from the book, *Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit*, by Adelle Davis, I have eaten a half-teaspoon of anise seeds every day. The rate of visual deterioration seems to have slowed, considerably; it seems to be in a kind of stasis. Is it the anise seed? I've since read articles that debunk Adelle Davis; but in these days of Fake News, who knows?

More likely, the result is from the mélange of ingredients, more than two dozen of them, in my porridge, my fuel. [There's a recipe for my cereal in the Appendix.] I also protect my eyes from UV radiation by wearing sunglasses nearly everywhere outdoors. I like the polarized kind that saturate the colors of everything.

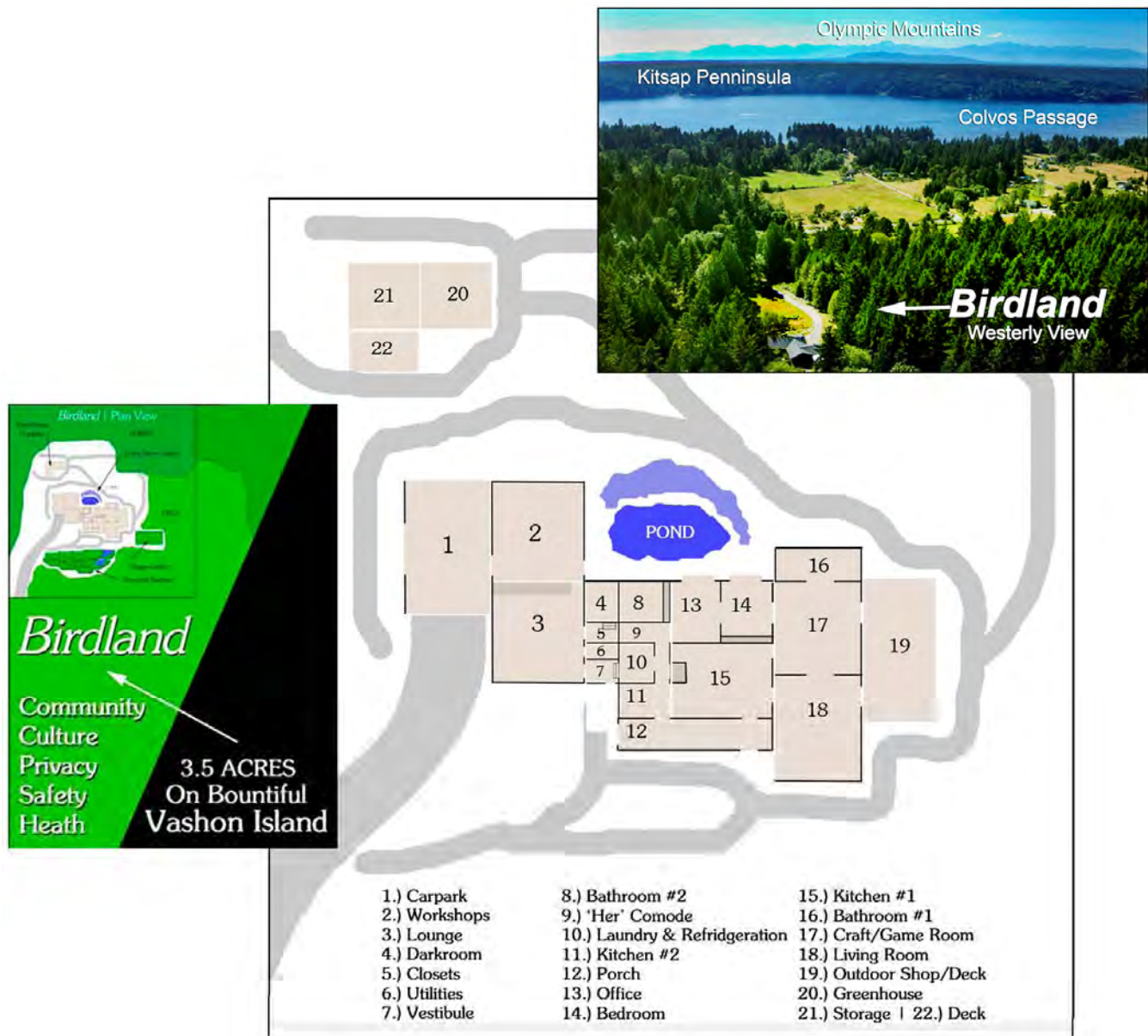
2013 – New Real Estate Agents – Miss and Hit

Every month or so Kendra Todd Group [KTG] would send me fancy colored charts and graphs about the real estate market in King County, detailing other sales in the area that compared to Birdland.

They still send them, now five years after the property was sold, which shows you how often they update their mailing lists—is it any wonder why I dropped them?

KTG's charts didn't adequately compare Vashon properties—that was part of their problem, selling my estate.

³⁹ The ticket was mailed to my Vancouver address; it featured a picture of my car in the crossing zone. I fought the ticket—I have always fought every traffic ticket and have always had the fine reduced—on the basis that I had dilated pupils (from the laser surgery) and was distracted by big floater; the judge was kind enough to offer me a choice, between speeding in a school zone or impaired driving, that meant a much heavier fine and more points.



Birdland was too unique, it was literally “beyond comparison.” Think about it, a big 3,200 square foot [975.36 sq. meters] house with only one bedroom? That was weird. And a 600-square-foot [182.88 square meters] kitchen? That was weirder. Oh, did you say there were two kitchens?

Despite their high-class optics, the fact was that KTG was not driving any sales; nobody was coming to see the place. I had to wonder; whose fault was that? KTG or their man Codd? That didn't matter, the results were the same: *nada*.

I don't blame papa Codd for chickening out; he risked losing his life's savings and retirement funds, if Christian defaulted. I would have made the same decision. However, when Christian backed out, it put me back at square one in terms of selling Birdland.

By that time, I had a firmer grasp of the how the real estate business on Vashon Island worked, or, more accurately, didn't. I realized that Birdland was such a white elephant that KTG was likely using my property as a foil against which to sell others. Birdland was positioned on the lower end of their prestigious-property portfolio; their top agents didn't pay attention to Birdland; I never heard from Chinn again.

As for Christian Codd, although eager and able he was nonetheless a neophyte; he hadn't built a client base; Birdland was his first "big one" on Vashon Island. I decided to make a break from the Kendra Todd Group, to let their contract lapse; then I hired Bill Chun.



Bill Chun (right) was the antithetical opposite of the up-market Kendra Todd Group or their even larger parent company, Keller Williams.

Compared to hipsters like Douglas Ching, Kendra Todd or even Christian Codd, Bill was an old country bumkin.

Bill was past retirement, he just wanted to keep on working, a bit.

Deal sealed at a Vashon studio dinner party. L2R: Yours Truly, Pam Swanson, Bill Chun. Photo and effects by Anne Gordon

His company, Vashon Island Realty, sold only three or four properties per year, and that was enough for Bill. He was rarely in his office because he took time to smell the roses. His wife was the award-winning manager of the local branch of Wells Fargo Bank (one of America's largest TBTF banks); between the two of them they did just fine.

Whenever he visited, Bill always liked to chat for a while. I loved those afternoons; nobody knew the history of the Island better than Bill; he could spin yarns that went on for hours.

I learned that he had been through a lot; he even had the same eye problem that I had been recently treated for (torn retina), except his had been far worse.⁴⁰ I took a liking to Bill; I reckoned his laid-back lifestyle was cool, that he'd find the right buyer (a person like me); but, I had more to learn about selling real estate.

⁴⁰ I had a torn retina which was "simply" stapled back together with a laser (ouch). Bill's eyeball had to be collapsed for surgery to fix his tear; it took a few months Bill's body to refill the eyeball with fluid; until it was filled, everything that eye saw looked upside down. The same thing happened to Pam's cousin in Oregon, Derrick Swanson.

While Bill did bring prospects, they were always the wrong buyers—people with kids looking for a three or four-bedroom place. Bill's prospects walked around with calculators trying to figure out how much the renovations would cost; none of them appreciated the space for what it was: 3,200 square feet [297.29 square meters] of open studio space; a flow-through layout with optional doors. They wanted to replace the walls I removed. Ha!

Fortunately, when we made the deal, I told Bill that I would give him six months; when that time expired, I moved on. Bill and I parted on good terms; I gave him all my fishing gear, including some nice surf-casting rigs; he told me so many stories about fishing Vashon, when he was a kid, what it was like in the old days; he told me that he still stopped to fish on occasional afternoons when his work, showing properties, brought him near the Island's best fishing holes. I like to imagine Bill catching the salmon I never did; I felt good for the gear, finally rid of its cobwebs.

At a loss for what to do, I decided to consult one of the Island's most reputable builders to ask which agents were getting results. Trace Baron started his home-building career working for Dave Nestor (Nestor Construction); he helped build my house and went on to build his own company, Baron Construction.

Baron Construction was given the Vashon seal of approval when the company won the contract to refurbish the Vashon Island Museum. Trace was in demand; he had his pick of the prize jobs, high-end residential construction and (especially) renovations.

Trace replied almost instantly to my query; he recommended Nancy McAllister. She returned my call right away and explained that her plate was full. I fast-talked her into a face-to-face at Birdland. She showed up for the tour and instead of being impressed she wouldn't take the job. Pressed, she explained that she didn't think I would be willing to do what she thought was necessary to sell Birdland. "First," she said, "stop calling it Birdland." I said, "Try me."

I reckoned that I finally got it. If I wanted to sell, I had to give prospects something they could work with, not something "finished." My home was, well, my home, adapted to my likes and dislikes; those were not like most other peoples; they didn't need a few big rooms, most preferred a lot of little ones. What do they say: "The customer is always right?" If I really wanted to sell my property, I would have to convert Birdland into a normal hacienda, one that could house a family, not a studio.

Nancy McAllister had a 100% success rate selling Vashon properties. She accomplished that feat by re-creating properties into her own vision. Her properties were staged to levels seldom seen; she transformed each into a *McAllister house*.

When McAllister toured my house, it was 80% empty—an 18-month accomplishment that amazed even me. However, there was still a ton of stuff—more than four hundred moving boxes and tagged freight amidst a myriad of goods still to be sold, including all the kitchen gear.

Nancy wanted changes made in the kitchen, big ones; she redesigned the whole room; great swathes of cabinetry and shelving were swept away.

Mike and Catherine Urban came and carted all the kitchen gear away; it would be a year before they sold it; but now that it was gone, the kitchen and house alterations could begin.

Nancy had me demolish the enclosure for the south deck work space; she said it took down the value of the property because the standard of my work wasn't as good as the original builders, Shane Carlson and Dave Nestor.



McAllister was right; so, I didn't argue. I set-to and dismantled the 50 X 20 foot [15.24 X 6.09 meters] outdoor workshop that I built just three years earlier.

It served me so well when I was framing art—building stretchers for large-sized canvases and spray-coating them with liquid laminates—things I couldn't do indoors—and later for growing weed.

Photo by Pam Swanson.

But the days of art were over; gone too were the days of growing dope; so down it came.

Amazingly, I had no problem disposing of the components; several Vashon scavengers arrived and even waited while I dismantled my dream, to collect the parts. Without the big green house, the south deck returned to a marvellously big, 600-square foot [55.74 square meters] deck, open to the heavens, like when I built it, in 1997, just before Anna arrived on the scene.

The house unquestionably gained value when my funky stuff was removed. McAllister's principle was, less is more. As I took apart the place, and stewed in my own juice, I came to see what Nancy was doing. Once I understood that, I did the best I could to manifest her version of ~~Birdland~~ the property.

What got my attention, what made me listen to her? Nancy put her own money in the game; she paid for a significant part of the demolition and renovations work that she deemed necessary. By November the new ~~Birdland~~ estate was ready to show. By then, the entire south wing, bedroom suite and kitchen were essentially empty, decorated with a few largely symbolic pictures and pieces of furniture. Everything else was stuffed into the north wing.

I lived in the former office; goods going to Vancouver were warehoused in the adjoining storage room—which was refurbished by yours truly into a knotty-pine-paneled studio workshop.⁴¹

It was Thanksgiving when Nancy first started showing the house. She began with a private shindig for Island agents; I cooked some treats to show-off the kitchen and we invested in a case of wine. During early December, a steady stream of prospects cased Birdland, calculators in hand. Once again it was all the wrong people. Christmas came and went.

Heading into the post-holiday doldrums, I was depressed; Then came a call for a repeat inspection by, of all things, a Canadian (!) seeking a US property. How ironic, the seller goes to Canada and the buyer comes from there. Ha!

Just as I had predicted, Birdland's buyer was foreigner—Jennifer Myrans, from the upmarket Oakville section of Toronto. The Canadian dollar was strong at the time, almost on par with the greenback; Myrans wanted to cash out of Canada before the volatile USD:CAD exchange rate turned less favorable.

[Spoiler Alert: Myrans made a good decision; the Loonie is now worth less than US 75¢.]

Myrans had relatives living around Seattle, including a cousin on Vashon Island, Judith Lawrence; thus, Jennifer had already visited Vashon several times over the years. She first toured Birdland when Heather Brynn showed her the property while I was in Vancouver. Now, here was Jennifer taking a second look. If opportunity ever knocked, this was it.

I got the house totally prepped for Jennifer's visit. The propane furnace was fired up four hours ahead to fully heat the house (I tried to avoid using that heater; it cost \$50 a day to run it); the lights were set; some fresh-baked cookies and a thermos of expensive coffee sat ready on the kitchen counter; and fires flickered in both wood stoves.

Five minutes before Heather and Jennifer arrived, I disappeared—those were the rules; the buyer and seller were never supposed to meet. (Talk about paranoia, eh?). During showings, I'd usually head for Café Luna, grab a coffee and hang for an hour, until I got the all clear signal from the agent.

It was about 9:00 am when I arrived at Café Luna and 4:00 pm [16:00] when Heather called to say I could go home. Jennifer had taken the entire day, measuring every room and examining everything in great detail. Heather said that, apparently, Jennifer had a plan that involved a lot of furniture.

As positive as that lengthy inspection was, Myrans next sent a team of professional inspectors that went through the house with a fine-tooth comb. Those two guys put on quite a show, dressed up in hazmat suits, with the latest electronic detection gear. They looked like stepped out of a *Ghost Busters* movie.

⁴¹ I spent a half year finishing that space, insulating and paneling it, all with a goal of adding value to the property; I reckoned that I could generate \$10,000 in value for \$5,000 in expenses and a few months part-time labor.

The inspectors recommended some remedial work; but Nancy said it was minimal; she was pleased that the building passed an important test.

[Spoiler Alert: Rather than do the remedial work, I gave Myrans concessions by lowering the price of the estate by the fair-market value of the repairs, as estimated by Trace Baron, who I recommended for the work.]

2014 – Exodus – *Adieu Vashon*

Jennifer Myrans, through her agent, Heather Brynn, countered my asking price of \$535,000 with an offer of \$495,000; a ridiculous price; but it was the bottom of the market. [Within a month of the sale, the market turned up dramatically and reached new highs four years later.] Both Nancy and Linda felt my asking price was way too high—they wanted to list Birdland at \$485,000. We settled on \$515,000, splitting the difference right down the middle.

As for the repairs and renovations demanded as part of the purchase and sale agreement, I offered concessions that eventually brought the amount received down to \$495,000.

The biggest concession was for my prized Garland stove; it caused an insurance problem for Jennifer. She was dealing with a Canadian insurer for whom she listed contents that came with the house, i.e. the chandelier and appliances, including the two stoves—they were the tip-off, I reckon—who has two stoves, and why?

In Canada, due diligence is done right. Myrans' insurance company discovered that my Garland was a professional, restaurant stove and, guess what, it wasn't approved for home use. I didn't believe them until they told me where to look, inside the stove, for the manufacturer's disclaimer. Lo and behold, there was a little engraved plate on the edge of the oven servicing panel, that stated, "Not for Home Installation." That came as a total surprise to me; I mean, who would have thought a professional stove wasn't OK to use in a house?

That issue probably could have voided my own home-insurance policy with Amica, had they known about the stove. To remedy the situation, I got an estimate from Trace Baron for the removal of the Garland stove and replacement with a standard, home-kitchen stove and that amount was offered to Jennifer, leaving all options open for her. I also suggested that she simply get a quote from an American insurance company, who probably wouldn't be interested in such *detailia*.

After two years and three real estate agents, Birdland was finally sold. Now the last 20% of the stuff had to go. During the two years spent preparing for the exodus, I packed an average of 2.5 boxes per day. I wouldn't go to bed until I had packed at least one box. Wherever possible, I used standard-sized banana boxes; they were the ideal moving container, rugged and easy to handle. I scavenged banana boxes from the two supermarkets on Vashon another in Vancouver; eventually, I filled more than 400 of them, as well as another 100+ larger and odd-shaped packages.

As the boxes were filled, those being shipped to customers were photographed, inside and out. (The UPS incident, shipping crystals to John Emms, taught me that you need plenty of documentation, if you expect to win an insurance claim.) All packages were weighed, measured, numbered and their contents inventoried in an Excel spreadsheet; finally, each was given a position in a stack being assembled to fit into a standard, 8 X 8 X 20-foot [2.43 X 6.09-meter] truck or shipping container. The shipment pile was assembled in the “knotty pine room,” the renovated workshop & warehouse.



When Jennifer bought the house, the storage room was overflowing with packages destined for Canada. Limited by the confines just mentioned, if I added a new package to the pile, another had to be removed. The overflow of packages spilled into the former office, gradually reducing my living space to a 10 X 10-foot [3.04 X 3.04-meter] patch near the woodstove, walled in by boxes. It became obvious that all that stuff wasn't going to make the final cull. As I said, when the house sold, I still had plenty to do.

Fortunately, Jennifer Myrans was in no hurry to close the deal. Myrans needed to sell her own house in Oakville, Ontario. She hadn't even begun that process and I happily agreed to a late April closing (it was then January)—that gave Pam and I time to deal with the move, on the Canadian end. All the stuff mentioned above had to go someplace, the question was, where? I investigated storage spaces, but they were way expensive. It was amazing, how many self-storage businesses there were; more incredible was that none of them had any space available, except for one way out in White Rock—22-miles [38 kilometers] south of Vancouver; two hours away from our apartment, in rush-hour traffic. There, it would cost me north of \$400 a month for two 10 X 10-foot [3.04 X 3.04-meter] spaces. Serendipitously, I had been thinking of living in White Rock; it's a reasonably-affluent beach town, the southern-most point in Canada on the west coast, just six miles [nine kilometers] from the US border. Several famous Hollywood stars live in White Rock, side by side with deep-pocketed retirees; it's also known as a bit of an art colony. That all sounded great to me; I reckoned I might even get a little boat. Convincing Pam was another matter; however, she agreed to have a look, even though she knew the place well—one of her aunts had lived there.

Luise DiPetrantonio, our real estate gal, took us on a tour of White Rock; we cruised out in her BMW and spent an afternoon looking at a few places. We only like one (I thought it was perfect). It was nestled in a wooded glade, with a pond. The interior was nicely laid out, modern and well built. And, ironically, the condo was in the same complex where Pam's aunt had lived, where she had visited during her nursing-school days. But there was a fatal flaw, discovered when Pam and I were in the main space (the living room, dining area and kitchen were all rolled into one... nice). Pam asked the agent to turn on all the lights. Alas, it was even with full lighting, it was dark, especially compared to the light Pam got in our southwest-facing West End condo.

Pam likes handicrafts, she likes to draw and paint. Her avocations—and a sizeable family of plants—need good, natural light. Being nestled in a forest glade this condo certainly lacked that. On the drive back, I asked Luise to shift gears and look for condos in the West End. I reckoned that we could sell our 550-square-foot [51.09 square meter] condo in Lancaster Gate and get a larger space, maybe 1,000 feet [92.9 meters]. Then we got lucky. Just as the purchase and sale agreement for Birdland was being signed on Vashon, a condo in Lancaster Gate went up for sale. We had looked at it, out of curiosity, a year earlier.



It was in original, late 1970s condition, meaning it needed work. Although the asking price was low, the place looked like it had the potential to become a financial black hole; so, we skipped it.

However, during the year since, the seller had refurbished the place sufficiently to justify its still-low asking price; so, we grabbed it. Pam moved down six floors, from 908 to 308, leaving 908 available for my stuff from Vashon.

With those decisions made, I was able to measure up 908 and work-out how the stuff from Vashon would fit. Armed with that plan, I was able to make the final cull on Vashon. Top priority was given to my image archive, the originals and the artwork that derived from them. As I confessed earlier, I was a pack rat—I kept everything that I could... until I couldn't. As I packed my negatives and transparencies for shipping, I culled the work done for clients, and, as mentioned earlier, went about returning it to them. That was a chore. In many cases I hadn't been in contact with them in two decades or more; some companies had been acquired by others; hunting down current contacts was time consuming. For some companies, I got lucky. For example, EJA: Lennart Kittel, a pilot for Net Jets, ordered a 40 X 30-inch [101.6 X 76.2-centimeter] display print of an EJA jet he saw on my website; he explained that Net Jets bought EJA, that he loved my shot. So, I wrote to Lennart and explained my situation and he agreed to help me. Lennart served as an intermediary between me and the art director and advertising manager at Net Jets. They accepted my offer to send them everything I had: negatives, original art and illustrations, and publication mechanicals. I kept the color slides; I promised to send them later, after I digitized them. Hmm—haven't gotten to that yet.

Besides EJA, I managed to track down contacts at:

- ALIA, Royal Jordanian Airline
- Olympic Tower's new owners, in New York
- Piper Aircraft
- Sikorsky Helicopters, now part of United Technology
- USI, now part of Dow-Dupont.

My huge collection of car pictures, including a few dozen assignments for *Car and Driver* magazine, was sent to Peter Klebnikov, the Editor-in-Chief of the Environmental Defense Fund's quarterly newsletter, *Solutions*. Out of the office, Peter was an auto-racing enthusiast; part of a group organizing a museum to preserve the history of the Bridgehampton race circuit, on Long Island.



Klebnikov discovered sepia-tined versions of pictures I shot of the Bridgehampton Can-Am races in the late '60s (above)—the stuff that got me work at *Car and Driver* magazine—displayed on my website. I ended up sending him a bunch of files, and the rights to do just about anything with them, gratis.

Klebnikov agreed to be the caretaker of my car picture collection; I reckoned that, having the negatives and originals in New York made more accessible for anyone interested in my early car work.

[For information, contact Peter Klebnikov at the Environmental Defense Fund, 275 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010; pklebnikov@edf.org.]

Dona Tracy and I were still in regular contact then; she asked to have the 30 X 40-inch [76 X 101.6-centimeter] black-and-white prints that hung in the studio on 73rd Street; there were about a dozen of them, printed and mounted on Masonite by Modernage Lab. Among the pictures were: *Transpo-72* [*Car and Driver*]; *Eclipse Lady*, *Reach for the Stars*, *Nightflight* [EJA], *\$5 Ride*, [Piper] and *Butterfly Bora* [*Car and Driver*].

Right after that, I inadvertently broke Dona's heart, hawking a picture she had given me for Christmas; it was a signed and numbered lithograph from John Lennon's 1969 Bag One Collection. Dona's gift was one of the few things I had of any substantial value (besides gear) and I needed the money. I waited until the anniversary of Lennon's death [December 8th], then advertised the piece on eBay; almost immediately I got a sale, to Mark Gerich, in Annapolis, Maryland.

Well, wouldn't you know, a couple of days later I get a tearful phone call from guess who? To this day, I can't figure how she knew I was selling that picture; she must have been scanning eBay sellers, or something, spying on me; I mean, what were the chances...? It was a spooky episode that reminded me how clingy she could be; that put me off.

Pete Bjordahl agreed to house the bulk of my image archive—contained in about six dozen flip-top totes, and to let me access it as need be. It's been a valuable resource, for this memoir; pictures are worth a thousand words; going through the archive brings back a flood of memories; every picture has a story.

Pete's generosity is appreciated beyond measure. I hope someday that some small percentage of the pictures will gain historical value, to provide Pete with income during his retirement—that is, if retirement is feasible in the future.

To the extent possible, I sold stuff locally or gave it away by listing it on the *Vashon All* website, where Islanders bought, sold, and bartered stuff. Another bunch of stuff got donated to Granny's Attic, Vashon's charity thrift shop; but, there was a huge amount of left-over stuff that was too valuable to throw out.

Linda Bianchi (Nancy McAllister's colleague, who was co-repping Birdland with her) suggested that I donate it to the Kiwanis Club charity auction. When she said they would deal with carting everything off, that was enough to convince me. I laid out everything in the emptied lounge and studio rooms, went back to Vancouver for the weekend, and when I got back, poof, like magic, everything was gone.

Waxing sentimental for a moment: I wonder who got the huge lightbox of *Inuktuk Astronomers*; it stood 8-feet high [2.44-meters]; I hated to part with it. I also miss my roller blades.

Before the final purge, I let Trace Baron pick through the pile; we bartered a bunch of my stuff for his help moving. He got my Isuzu Rodeo, a Beretta 9 mm pistol, a bunch of power tools, the DR Field mower, and 10 cords of Madrone [Arbutus] firewood.

For that, I got four shipments of stuff to Vancouver, including whatever would fit into his extended-chassis Ford F-350 truck, as well as a driver to help with everything.

Each load hauled was an adventure made more exciting by the risks taken crossing the border. The truck was always overloaded, piled high, covered with tarps lashed down with clothesline (it rained on three of the four trips). My loads looked like a latter-day version of the *Beverly Hillbillies*. I accompanied Trace's truck in my Honda Civic; it too was stuffed, with a bunch more stuff lashed down to roof racks.

My blood pressure rose each time we approached the border. I lived in dread that they would send the truck or my car to secondary inspection. It would have been difficult to reassemble the three-dimensional-jig-saw-puzzle arrangement of packages. Plus, there was a certain amount of contraband in each shipment.

On the very first trip, the Canadian border agent had an issue with my immigration status; he thought I had violated the provisions of my status as a permanent residency; his computer said that I moved goods to Vancouver there in 1982. (I did, when I married Sandra.)

However, here I was, entering from the States with another (huge) load household goods and professional equipment. He sent me inside for an interview; that turned out to be the perfect distraction for the truck, which was shunted to the end of a holding area, then sent on its way where there were no parking spaces available there (it was a busy day at Customs). When I emerged, the truck was safely across the border. Hallelujah!

On the second trip, we were just dumb lucky; the border agent simply asked if all the imported goods were mine and when I produced my computerized inventory list, he just waved us through. I reckon that he was probably nearing a break and didn't want the hassle of my complicated shipment.

The agent we encountered on the third trip was the most problematic; he asked me if I was transporting a gun and I replied that I wasn't. But, when the truck driver denied having a weapon, that sent the agent scurrying, with a confused look on his face.

Turned out that the truck's plates showed that its owner (Trace Baron—a registered gun owner in Washington State, with a concealed weapons permit) also owned a gun. The agent had to either trust us or search the truck.

He chose to let us go. Possibly, the Hillbilly-look of our truck made him think twice. Searching us would have been a considerable undertaking. However, I also thank my lucky star—the lines at the border were particularly short that day; I really thought we were in for it.

On the fourth and final trip, I was the most nervous—there were “odoriferous materials” in the shipment—my entire cooking spice collection, including a three-year supply of my best bud, screened to fine flakes and packaged in commercial cooking-spice containers.

I kept my fingers crossed that the K-9 unit wouldn't be on duty that day. The shipment also included my heavy-duty photo gear as well as large-format artwork; I hoped those would be the red herring that distracted the Customs agents from the spices.

However, need I even say? We were waved right through. Having a computer list did it again; I was well-enough prepared that the agents trusted me and/or by then their computers showed that I was a regular.

There was no way to bring my extensive collection of European and Scandinavian liqueurs; even if I successfully smuggled them—as I had, over the years, across several European borders, then into the USA—there was no storage space in my little Vancouver condo.

So, I left most of the 70+ bottles (!) for Jennifer Myrans, along with the *Cocktails* neon sign that I knew she wanted. I also left her the entire 220-volt sound system, the 220-volt KitchenAid appliances and some of my antique family furniture—the Chinese trunk left to me by Roger James Mesney and a turn-of-the-century library table once owned by Grandma Kate Taylor.

Those gifts cost me another few grand; but at that point the only thing that mattered to me was kissing goodbye to Vashon and sleeping late in Vancouver for at least a year.

Although the Chinese chest seemed unique, thousands of them were brought home by returning soldiers after the World Wars. However, it wasn't all about money. It was not without grief that I lost those heirlooms of family history; but they were white elephants that didn't have a place in my future. As it turned out, neither was particularly valuable.

2014 – Period of Adjustment – Another Move

Pam came down to Vashon for the final cleanup and exodus. As we had several times before, we lit the fire pit and incinerated the last of the doomed pictures, together with whatever else was cleanly combustible.



The fires roared well past sunset.

By then I no longer felt any pain; melancholy morphed into existential contemplation, about the temporality of existence.



Nancy McAllister hired professional cleaners to give the house a final shine; but, they just about ruined a few things—they used abrasive pads on my specially-made, quilted stainless steel stove backing, scarring the surface irreparably. Then they swabbed the hardwood floors with so much water that some of the planks started edge warping.

I nearly freaked when I saw what they were doing; I ordered them to stop and threw them out; they were outraged; I was raging. Nancy was flummoxed by my anger. I told her that if Jennifer demanded repairs, that they were on her and her cleaners. (Nothing ever came of it.)

Pam and I did the rest of the domestic detailing ourselves; I learned how, watching a real professional cleaner prep my Vancouver condos at the Westport for sale. (She was amazing, she got into every nook and cranny. For example, she used tooth brushes to clean between the seals of the refrigerator doors.) Following her examples, it took me two days to detail the kitchen alone, what with its dozens of cabinets, cupboards and drawers.

Presently, the job was done; the house was completely empty save a few things left for Jennifer Myrans. There was nary a trace that I had ever lived there.

I was a broken man. Driving down the hill for the last time, I couldn't bring myself to turn around for a last look at ~~Birdland~~ the estate. My thoughts were with the birds and (especially) the pond fish; how long could they survive, on their own. But they were no longer my problem and I shed no tears; there were none left.

Following Pam’s advice, I tried to focus my mind on what lay ahead. In Vancouver, a nearly impossible task awaited me—finishing two projects I had hoped to complete at the Vashon studio, but didn’t have time to. One was digitizing all my slides, pictures to create a digital-image archive. The other was returning originals to as many clients as possible.

Starting around Halloween, before Jennifer Myrans arrived on the scene, I started digitizing slides; I reckoned I’d begin with the ones that had the most potential resale value, as historical photos, and chose Cars and Airplanes to tackle first. Previously, I sent all my car negatives to Peter Klebnikov, in New York; but I still had a tote box filled with a couple of thousand color slides; I wanted to have digital copies of those, before I sent them to him.

I set-up a Bowens Illumitran 3S slide copier in the eBay-photo studio (my former lounge). The sound system was still intact there, so I could groove while I toiled. I rigged the copy camera (a Nikon D2X) to a computer, automating the system.

Although ten times faster than a scanner, the copy-camera system still required, on average, two minutes per slide, to process and save each new digital image. With all the slides I had, there was no way I could get anywhere near to being finished in less than a year.

Besides digitizing the slides, I had 50+ hard drives storing my digital images (left); those could be reduced to 10, if duplicate files were edited out.

All that now awaited me in suite 908 at Lancaster Gate—my new studio.

To digress for a moment, about downsizing:
When my stuff didn’t fit into suite 908, the excess filled the bedroom of suite 308.

That left Pam and I with precious little living space.

I was clueless about what to do with the truckload of canvas and paper artwork I didn’t want to part with, the ones I refused to burn.



I thought I could find sales outlets in Vancouver; but that has proven futile. Hundreds of pictures still sit in storage, in the former bedroom of suite 308, waiting for me to die. Then Pam will have the option to toss them or possibly explore the boosted value of a dead artist’s work. I hope she will give my former colleagues and friends a year or two, to discover my demise and, perhaps, request a one of my pictures; I suspect there aren’t many such people left. Or, maybe Pam and her brothers, David and Lloyd, will find a gallery or other sales outlet; they are fine pictures, after all.

Suite 908 turned out to be unworkable for me; there was just too much stuff, no room to move; and it was less convenient than I reckoned. At first, I thought the six flights of stairs separating 308 and 908 was a healthy choice. Ha!

Hiking up six flights of fourteen stairs each got old faster than me.

Each day, for the first month, I traipsed up the six floors of stairs and weeded digital files. I bought ten new LaCie 1-TB [terabyte] hard drives with which to assemble a new, streamlined collection of digital-image resources.

Somewhere along the line, some doubts started clouding my vision of the future—why was I making a new library of old stuff; to what end was all that effort to be invested? My pictures were unlikely to earn any real money—on the Internet, stock pictures sold for a buck, or less.

So, what was I going to do with the million or so images that I planned to re-collate and organize for the next two years?

I couldn't answer that question, about why I was working on a picture library—so the project died on the vine, along with another bit of my soul.

To digress for another moment, about making money with stock pictures: The only guy I knew that ever made any real money from stock photography was Chad Ehlers, in Stockholm. Just one of his pictures—a simple snapshot of ocean waves—earned him SEK 100,000:00 (about US \$50,000). Bob Peterson and Ted Russell also made out pretty well, earning enough money to raise families.

The most I ever made was just south of \$20K. However, I wasn't focused on stock photography in the '70s and '80s, when the stock-photo market was hot; I was too busy making slide shows. Plus, my experiences with stock-agent Leo DeWys soured me on the whole stock-picture scene; having him rep my work was a complete waste of time and (considerable) effort.⁴²

I sank into a deep depression; only the writing of this memoir has eased the gut-level feeling of *ennui*. The realization that I am now irrelevant is overwhelming; at this point, there seems to be little I can do to remedy the situation causing my malaise; but I have ceased complaining.

I am lucky to be alive and healthy; to have Pamela Swanson in my life; to have the opportunity to (try to) remember as much as I can, go through my memorabilia one more time and write this memoir, about a life lived in adherence to the traditional values espoused by my parent's generation, the Great Generation. When it comes to values like faith, hope and charity, they were the proverbial *Last of the Mohicans*.

908 was so uncomfortable that I didn't go up there anymore after the first month or two. Pam eventually asked if she could use the space and I agreed.

⁴² Leo DeWys ran a one-man stock-photo agency; he was a small fish in a big pond, which is why I thought I would get more attention than I might get at one of the larger agencies, e.g., Photo Researchers and FPG. Leo repped my work for about ten years, starting in 1970, around the same time Sue Keaton repped me for original assignments.

She needed a place unclouded by my dark ethers. It wasn't healthy being cooped-up together in a tiny condo all day; we each yearned for privacy. Eventually I couldn't take it anymore and made a move to manifest my original dream—having two apartments next to each other; you know, his and hers. I knocked on the doors of our neighbors in the suites on either side of our apartment; my pitch was simple and sincere: I asked to be the first person they called if they decided to sell.

To my amazement, the owners of 307 came back to me immediately; they were considering either renting or selling; they—Sarah Lau and her son Kelvin—thought my offer to buy was as providential for them as their offer to sell was for me. Kevin, who occupied 307 (Sarah, his mom, lived in Toronto; she was a high-level bank executive) was a graduate student at UBC [University of British Columbia]. Sarah visited at Christmas-time; we quickly agreed on her request to get back at least what she had invested three years earlier (the market had gone down since then). I agreed (and would have agreed to more) simply to get the space right next door to our suite, 308. Better yet, 307 was a slightly larger condo, on the southwest corner and had a better layout for all the stuff in 908—that is, the same stuff could be arranged into a much more workable arrangement even though it was only 25 square feet bigger [2.32 square meters]. The sellers asked if the closing could be postponed until the end of April; when Kevin was moving to Geneva, Switzerland, to continue his studies there. That suited us fine; it dovetailed nicely with the Vashon closing, although the finances would be tight because I would receive the Birdland proceeds after the Vancouver closing. However, by pooling our resources, cashing in and out of various accounts and investments, Pam and I came up with just enough to cover the purchase of 307 without a mortgage.

We left the sale of 908 up to Luise DiPetrantonio, our default Vancouver real estate agent. The unit lacked a parking space, which could have been a problem, and the kitchen area was deficient by today's standards; it was a DIY kluge of IKEA-style cabinetry, installed by the guy who flipped the apartment, or his friend's son. However, Pam had renovated the bathroom—a considerable expense—so that looked snazzy; and she repainted the cabinetry, giving it some accents. Yet, the suite lacked the stone counter tops and the silent drawers & doors that folks demand these days. The buyer would probably want to put in \$10,000 or more to upgrade the kitchen. We took the price down a bit when the first showings didn't get any results. The market was soft, nothing like today's (2016) bubbly madness, with multiple prospects trying to outbid each other. There's just so much [excessive, easily printed] ~~money~~ currency available to those connected with the Deep State. Today, everything sells at or over listing; not so back then. I was getting discouraged and feared the necessity to drop the price further.

Then, a senior citizen (my age), from Toronto, John Duravetz, took a look and subsequently hired an inspection by Douville & Company, to check out the condo, as well as the Lancaster Gate building and grounds. (!) I had my doubts that 908 could pass muster; it was so full of stuff that the inspector complained he couldn't get into the corners that needed to be examined. Fortunately, he gave the place got a clean bill of health and Duravetz agreed to our price. He bought it and re-did the kitchen, through IKEA, for CAD \$16,000. During the month-long sales process, Pam and I got well acquainted with John and became friends. He and his partner, Charles Fawcett, use the place—which is quite spiffy looking now—for the summer months. They spend winters in Toronto, managing their investment properties.



Four views of the studio room in suite 307.

The move from 908 to 307 gave me a second chance to go through all the stuff from Vashon, which badly needed re-sorting. Despite careful pre-planning, my stuff didn't fit into suite 908, as mentioned.

The move from Vashon back to Vancouver was accomplished in four hauls, by Trace Baron, using his Ford F-350. On the first haul, I brought up the "infrastructure" for suite 908—primarily the shelving and furniture. On the second haul, the shelves started filling up. By the end of the third haul, I knew I had a problem; but by then it was too late. On the final haul, stuff was packed-away willy-nilly, i.e., just make it fit. (!)

Having drastically overestimated the storage space in 908, things got piled on top of things. The suite ended up being the home-owners version of a stuffed derma. The density made access difficult—I simply couldn't move around without having to move stuff.

The elephant in the room was my artwork inventory; that was crammed into the small, 10 X 12-foot [3.05 X 3.66-meter] bedroom in 908. The artwork was packaged for shipping; there was no way to show it because there was no space to unwrap the packages (or rewrap them), especially the big canvases. The packages were back-to-back and belly to belly, from wall to wall, with a 1-foot-wide [30 cm] pathway down the middle. A few of the artworks were later unwrapped, to show around, trying to get a gallery thing going again, unsuccessfully.

Pam offered to move her studio into the bedroom of suite 308 and give me the larger 12 X 18-foot [3.66 X 5.49-meter] living room space, for my artwork. The idea was that with more space the works could be unwrapped and dealt with. Alas, by the time all Pam's stuff was packed into the bedroom there was no room for Pam. After a week, she freaked out and told me that she was leaving, to find an apartment of her own, somewhere else.

I managed to talk some sense into her, explaining that we could simply put things back the way they were, and that's what we did. Between moving from 908 to 307, and reorganizing 308 twice, I don't want to see another shipping box for a long, long time.

[Spoiler Alert (2018): We may be financially forced out of Lancaster Gate; Vancouver has become too expensive for fixed-income seniors with insufficient resources. I am thinking of Campbell River, on Vancouver Island, as my next home. Bowen Island is another possibility; we went there recently to check it out. Either would be a major transition. The big questions are, will the economy inflate or deflate? And, what will happen to gold?]

2014 – Victoria Excursion – Celebration Trip

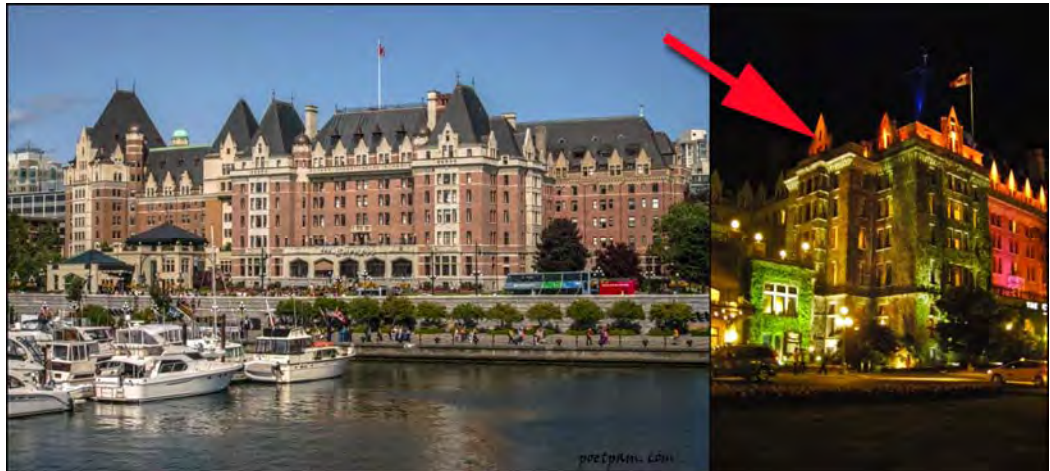
“When there is only one left, you can charge whatever you want.”

Yours Truly

In late April, when the move to Vancouver was finished, Pam suggested that we cash-in a coupon she had, for a weekend in Victoria. The trip was a promotional reward given to her by a friend who was a chauffeur for Harbour Air, the sponsor. The trip included round-trip flights, by seaplane (exciting!), and an overnight stay at the exclusive Empress Hotel.

The Empress was located at Victoria's inner harbor—it's the hotel you see in all the travel ads and posters about Victoria, the capital of British Columbia and the seat of its government.

Pamela Swanson photos.



The classic hotel, built between 1904 and 1908, became a landmark. Tragically, new owners are upgrading the icon beyond recognition. We were among the last to have a fabulous Indian meal in the famed Bengal Lounge; I drank Bombay gin martinis that night. Our room was memorable, in the nicest way; we were tucked-away in a little dormer room fashioned between roof rafters, protruding from the slate-gray rooftop, clearly seen in Pam's photos of the famous landmark. It's always nice to be able see a picture of a place you've been and point to the exact place you stood.

We walked all over Victoria town. I showed Pam where Bourne Gallery once displayed my pictures; the former gallery space had become a travel agency. We toured the Royal Museum, worthy of its name; their anthropologic exhibits rivalled those you'd see at the American Museum of Natural History, in New York. [Note: Some of the totem poles that appear in my illustrations were photographed in an around the Royal Museum (others in Vancouver's Stanley Park).] There was an in-water boat show going on that weekend, at the marina in front of the Empress Hotel. There were lots of tourists and activities. We had an afternoon cocktail on a patio overlooking the boat show, observing the maritime menagerie.

The next morning, before flying back to Vancouver, we went to Lighthouse Square and had brunch at the eclectic vegetarian restaurant, Rebar. I had eaten there before, with Ron Jacklin, when he brought me to Lighthouse Gallery, where I showed my work (but was turned down). I was ~~glad~~ surprised to see that the snobby gallery was boarded up. The arrogant so-and-so that used to run that place said he didn't have room for my pictures. Ha!

Maybe if he sold my stuff he'd still be in business. Schadenfreude aside, the new reality was that all the former galleries had gone bust; the art market was dead. Hahaha.

On the other hand, I was surprised to find a unique camera store—Camera Traders, in Market Square—that specializes in vintage, film cameras. I collected their card and when the time comes, I (or Pam) will solicit their help disposing of the cherry-picked gear I kept, for investment purposes.

I will probably never lift my heavy Nikkor 600 mm lens onto a tripod ever again; but, with every passing year it is worth more and more, to collectors and Hollywood cinematographers, who treasure Nikon's old, glass lenses. High-quality antique equipment is as good as gold.

[Reality check: As I write this (2017), it's a buyer's market for old Nikon film-camera gear. Supply outstrips demand by a wide margin, due to the facility of eBay *et al.*

[There's so much gear out there that those prices have plummeted. I intend to hang onto my gear for another seven years or so. I reckon that by the mid '20s, most old gear will have already moved from weak to strong (collectors') hands. Then, it will be a seller's market. Oh, and desirable antique equipment is inflation-proof. When there is only one left, you can charge whatever you want.]

It was refreshing to get away; the Victoria excursion was the first real break I had from a two-year-long exercise focused on ending one chapter in my life and beginning another. Frankly, they were the worst years of my life, bar none; the most emotionally excruciating, even tormenting.

The Victoria trip was just the beginning; we embarked on a full year of holiday trips. Those excursions restored some of my vigor; they distracted me from a dark reality—that I had become irrelevant to all but Pam and a (very) few others.

I am not a whiner. I claim responsibility for my circumstances; I put myself out to pasture, without thinking through the consequences. However, in defense of myself: How can one know what the future holds? We only get one chance at life. I've spent three years (so far) fighting depression triggered by feelings of irrelevance and loneliness.

Writing this memoir has been a curious salve. Although I try to resist becoming too Proustian, many days it is more interesting to explore the past than do nothing more than conjure pipe dreams about a future that can never be.

If I want relevance, I'll have to invent my own; I guess it always was that way.

Although I'm not sure anyone will ever read this memoir, it will at least serve me. My memories are dissipating, the neurons are losing their charge, like magnets slowly losing their attraction. The race is on to record as much as I can, while I can.

I got a real scare recently, one that woke me out of a deep sleep. In a dream, I couldn't remember the number of my first driving license, which I got when I was 17. Understand, I've always prided myself on remembering that number—MO569577489771196-45.

I've spouted off that number at innumerable cocktail parties or other social discourse for years when the subject of memory was discussed; people were always impressed. However, that night and for the next two days, I couldn't remember it. I was beginning to panic, because I hadn't written it down anywhere—that I could remember—but now I have and can rest easier (at least for now).

2014 – Western States Tour – First Real Holiday

When Pam and I married (09.09.09), Bill Swanson gave us C\$5,000 for our honeymoon.

We decided to stash the cash instead. The time wasn't right for an extravagant trip. I had just finished moving my picture-printing business and art inventory down to Vashon. There, re-roofing the house set me back \$22,000, severely depleting what little discretionary money was left. Although I was in no mood to take an expensive vacation, I was (am) under some unspoken pressure from Pam; she had ants in her pants and thought that money was meant to be spent. (She still does.)

To digress for a moment, about my fiscal conservatism: When it comes to money, I become a member of the old guard; I'm now what was once called a *saver*. That's a new state of mind for me. I was never a saver. Possibly, that's because I grew up during inflationary times, when money's currency's loss of purchasing power was palpable; when it made more sense to ditch dollars for real stuff, like cameras and projection gear—the means of production. I hadn't learned that currency does not perform the most important of money's thirteen characteristics:

- - ~~Store of value~~
- - Unit of account
- - Medium of exchange
- - Standard of value
- - Controlled quantity
- - Valuable
- - Durable
- - Homogenous
- - Divisible
- - Portable
- - Consistent
- - Liquid
- - Convenient

Currency cannot store purchasing power because its value is dissipated by intentional inflation. Back then, I didn't realize that the sources of currency—the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank and first-tier (TBTF) banks—attach “interest” to every dollar created; that inflation is necessary to pay those tithes. I didn't know that there is nothing Federal about the Fed; it's as Federal as FedEx. Neither is the Fed a reserve of any kind; it creates currency out of thin air.

The Fed is a (profit driven) privately held corporation owned by an elite group of financiers and banks with the approval of the U.S. government. Every single dollar in existence pays interests to the Fed's bondholders—descendants of those who attended the secret meeting (at Jeckle Island, Georgia⁴³) when the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank was conceived, organized and approved:

- JP Morgan
- Henry Davidson (partner, JP Morgan)
- Nelson Aldrich (U.S. Senator, Republican, Chair of Senate Finance Committee)
- Arthur Shelton (private secretary to Nelson Aldrich)
- Frank Vanberlip (president of National City Bank and former U.S. Treasury official)
- Paul Warburg (Kuhn, Loeb & Co.)
- Benjamin Strong (vice president, Banker's Trust Company)

[See the Appendix: *Money – The Fed | Ponzi Diagram*]

They say, whoever controls the money, makes the rules.⁴⁴ Well, because the U.S. dollar is (still) the reserve currency of the world⁴⁵, the descendants of those seven families, and those to whom they sold Federal Reserve Bank bonds, control the world's money.

Contrary to what we are told—that inflation is good—at 2% inflation (the Fed's stated target) dollars lose 50% of their purchasing power every 72 years. Higher inflation rates cause more purchasing power to be lost faster.

Price hikes are the symptom of inflation, not the cause. It's the quantity of currency that is inflated. When more dollars chase the same amount of goods, prices rise.

When I grew up, people saved to buy the things they wanted; we were taught that debt was bad; but that POV has been turned on its head. We are made to believe that debt is good. TV ads encourage us to boost our credit score. The way you do that is by increasing (and paying back) the amount you owe.

Today, everyone lives on credit; they are debt slaves. I am debt free. My financial insurance is a stash of precious metals; that's my hedge against fiat currency exchange fluctuations, especially devaluations.

Foreign-exchange rates have greatest effect on one's wealth, far more than the Market (excluding severe crashes, like 1929 and 2008). For example, recently (2016), when the value of Canadian dollars—“dollarettes,” as financial pundit Kevin O'Leary calls them—collapsed to just US 75¢, I lost 25% of the net proceeds from the sale of Birdland—my retirement funds. Before that, when the funds were sent to Canada, in 2014, the exchange rate was still relatively high; US dollars were selling for about \$1.10 in *Canadian Pesos* (another O'Leary favorite).

⁴³ https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/jekyll_island_conference

⁴⁴ The actual quote, by Mayer Amschell Rothschild, godfather of the Rothschild banking empire in Europe, was: “Give me control of a nation's money supply and I care not who makes the laws.”

⁴⁵ Per the Bretton Woods Agreement until recently, oil and gold could only be purchased in dollars.

Jennifer Myrans would never have been able to afford Birdland at 2017 exchange rates; just as, now, I could not afford to go back to Vashon, even if I wanted to. The current (2018) rate of exchange has made America very expensive for Canadians.

After Birdland was sold, a final tally was made. Combining condo and moving costs, we had a lot less property, but a better bank balance. If ever there was a time to travel, that was it; we had enough cash.

Another compelling reason to travel was that I had 120,000 United Airlines *Mileage Plus* credits that were going to expire if not used before the next February. Thus, in the weeks after our Victoria excursion, I researched trips to three places that Pam and I agreed on: Sweden (the land of Pam's paternal lineage), New York (my old haunts), and Asia (Vietnam and Cambodia).

Pam wanted to go to Sweden first, during the summer. That meant we wouldn't see the Northern Lights; but we also wouldn't need our fur-lined undies. July was my preference. The entire country closes in July for a month-long holiday; however, the earliest flight to Sweden that we could book was August 10th. With two months to go before that departure date, I decided to take Pam on a driving tour of the western States.

My little Honda's odometer was nearing 110,000 miles. To prep it for the long drive ahead, I had the engine overhauled and a new timing belt installed. In addition, the entire suspension system was replaced, with new front struts and rear shock absorbers; and, of course, new brakes. After all that, the Civic drove like new again; like the little racer it was built to be.

The drive down through Oregon and California on Highway 101 [aka the Pacific Coast Highway] not only had spectacular views along the way but was some of the most fun driving I ever enjoyed, winding through the lush forests of the coastal mountains. I could tear through the serpentine turns, thanks to the new suspension system; it was a thrill.

We were on the road for 29 days (we had a 30-day medical-insurance travel policy); but we could easily have spent twice as long. We had sore fannies half the time and only spent a day or two anywhere, which wasn't long enough in some cases.

After blasting through Washington State (been there, done that), we stayed with Pam's cousin Derek Swanson and his wife Judy, in Camus, Washington, a former farming area off the Columbia River just a few miles from Vancouver, Washington, and the Oregon border.

Pam hadn't seen her cousins since they were kids; when Derek was her babysitter; when the two families lived in Ocean Falls, BC.



Photo by Pam Swanson.

The Swansons lived in a big ol' farmhouse that they fully restored, in high style. Except for the frigid temperatures (their recently-divorced son, who moved back to live with his parent, preferred icy air) we felt right at home. They had a fabulous vegetable garden that was built sectionally, above grade, in large wooden frames. That approach would have made my life much easier on Vashon, had I known about it. What with all the family catch-up between Derek and Pam, the time slipped away. We didn't see much of Judy that trip because her sister was in hospice care, nearing her end; that cast a long shadow over our visit.

The next day, we drove south to Portland and visited Sound Images. Dave Frey had sent me his regrets, apologizing that he didn't have time to see me (hmm); but, Steve was obliging and it was fun catching up with him over lunch. By then, I had been out of the audiovisual business for nearly seven years. A lot of water had spilled over the dam during those years. Sound Images was no longer doing Watchout spectaculars for Nike; that business morphed into a video production operation spearheaded by Dave's grown-up son, Tyler. Steve showed me some of Tyler's toys; those included a battery of Go Pro cameras, including one rigged to a flying drone; I drooled when I saw that one.

I hadn't seen Steve since his wedding to Shari, and that was some time after Dave stopped hiring me, in 2005. Now, Steve and Shari had a family, with two rambunctious boys. I never figured Steve to be a soccer dad; but he sure was now. After lunch, Pam and I took a walk, through Portland, along the banks of the Willamette River, with a few detours into the Old Town section and Chinatown; then it was off to Tillamook, on the coast, where we toured the Tillamook Cheese factory before heading down US #1 and staying the night just south of Newport, Oregon.

San Francisco was to be our next stop over; it was nearly 600 miles away, so we spent most of the day driving, stopping briefly at Sea Lion Caves, in Florence, Oregon, for a few vista snapshots of the spectacular seacoast and at the Redwood Forest.

That night, we stayed at the Modern Sailing Academy marina, in Sausalito (seaside town ten miles [sixteen kilometers] north of San Francisco), with my sailing friend, Johnny Connolly; at his home, aboard *Amazing Grace*, a 40-foot [12.2-meter] motor-cruiser. [See pictures in previous section, *2007 – Modern Sailing – Grecian Odyssey*.] Pam and I had our own cabin, our own "head" (toilet) in the bow section.

After greeting us, Johnny returned to his stateroom, in the stern; he stayed there until we went out for dinner. That seemed odd to me because Johnny had the gift of gab and loved to hear himself talk. We went to his favorite Indian restaurant; but Johnny pecked at his food, hardly eating any of it; he explained that he wasn't feeling well. I asked if his unease had anything to do with the alimentary ailments that hospitalized him in Greece, after our cruise there, a few years earlier; he said no, that he had liver cancer. Yikes!

The next morning, Johnny's sister, Cindy, came to drive Johnny to the doctor for a pre-surgical examination. I couldn't even remember how long it had been since I saw her; but it had been at least 40 years since we shared a brief tryst, when I still lived in Flushing, during a lonely interlude between Leslie and Andrea. Cindy was running late so it was a mercifully short encounter. There was no time for idle chat and what little conversation we had was awkward.

After bidding Cindy and John farewell and drove on to San Francisco; I had a feeling it was the last time I would see John, and it was; he died three months later. His brother, Kevin, tells me that he had to sue the hospital to release Johnny, so that he could die peacefully, aboard his beloved Amazing Grace. Amen.

When I booked our hotel in San Francisco, I made a mistake; I selected the Civic Center area, which, while sounding safe and secure, turned out to be quite the opposite--a place where homeless bums slept in boxes and prostitutes were pimped to passers-by.

During the first of our two nights at the Civic Center Inn, a car, parked just beneath our window, on Polk Street, was broken into and ransacked. The thieves smashed the back window. I must have been really tired because I didn't hear it. There were all kinds of other strange noises on the streets, blending with endless sirens.

Our motel had a limited number of parking spaces—we were lucky to get one—but, they were all outside, exposed to the ~~street-urchins~~ public. To be safe, we took everything out of the car and hauled it all up to our second-floor room. It was a basic accommodation, well used but clean enough; nonetheless, all things considered, I couldn't help worrying about bed bugs. (Once, at a seemingly respectable budget hotel, in Paris, I found pubic hairs on the sheets when I pulled back the covers. I never forgot that and, to this day, still check for things like that; it's a curse.)

We toured San Francisco on foot; it was a l-o-n-g walk, from early morning to past bedtime. Pam is a walker, always has been; she routinely takes 5-mile walks [8 kilometers]; once, she walked 30 miles [48 kilometers], to visit a relative. Today, she does a minimum of two miles a day, just on her photo walks around Lost Lagoon; she goes in the morning, religiously. On other days, she'll walk four miles across town visiting every dollar store along the way, in search of things for her crafts projects, or to thrift shops, in search of little treasures and accessories for her ever-changing collection of eclectic outfits (each stunning and every one costing just a few bucks).

Being a walker makes Pam the perfect travel mate; she likes to explore places and take pictures of them; that's something I understand. Although I don't take pictures anymore (don't need to with Pam around), I still see them all around, in almost everything. Finding photo ops is the vacilando of our travels, even our walks around Lost Lagoon; we are both after the same thing, which makes for comfortable travels together.

It was just before tourist season; San Francisco had a relaxed tempo; people were courteous; drivers didn't honk at each other; sirens were few and far between (except at night); and, the city was clean (except for the Civic Center area). Our walk that day was an existential one; we headed from our skid-row motel up to, and through, Knob Hill—S.F.'s richest neighborhood—on our way to the waterfront attractions at Embarcadero and Ghirardelli Square. We visited a vending machine museum, full of curious contraptions and gimmicky games. But the real attraction turned out being a community of sea lions, living on islands of floats put there for them.

There wasn't enough space on the platforms for all of them. The antics of the of the pushy bulls provided endless photo ops; they reminded me of being on the crowded New York subways; too much unwanted body contact.

Las Vegas was our next stop. On our way, we passed through Yosemite National Park, but didn't spend much time there. In Las Vegas, we managed to find an affordable, comfortable place at the LaQuinta; they advertised being just two blocks from the famed *Strip*; they meant Las Vegas blocks, each about a half-mile long. That was no problem; a couple of extra blocks to get to our hotel didn't matter after walking the 4.2-mile [6.8 kilometer] length of Las Vegas Boulevard, down one side and up the other. The highlight of Las Vegas was seeing *Mystère*, by Cirque du Soleil.

To digress for a moment, about Cirque du Soleil: I had seen *Mystère* three times before. The first time was at the invitation of Microsoft, who booked an entire performance (!) for their clients. Because I was part of the crew, hired by Jon Bromberg to photograph a speech given by Bill Gates, I got invited, too. The show made such an impression on me that, after that, every time I was in Las Vegas, I made it a point to see the spectacle again.

If you've seen *Mystère*, you know that, while the house was filling, a spot-lit actor, playing the role of a goofy usher, provided some pre-show entertainment. While escorting couples and families to their seats, he played pranks on them. I had paid a bundle for two of the best seats in the house (for Anna and I). As the wacky usher brought us to our seats, he took me aside and asked if I would be willing to be part of the show; I agreed... what a thrill!

He told me that I was "Daddy;" that I should go up on stage when called. If you've never seen the show, it began with a chubby baby (played by a well-padded adult) who rolled an oversized beach ball onto the stage, goo'ing and gaa'ing. After a while, the baby "discovered" the audience, looked around wide-eyed, pointed at me, and exclaimed "Daddy!" Thus, I was summoned to the stage for a short interchange with Baby—it was my 15 seconds of fame. I didn't mind seeing *Mystère* a fourth time; I knew Pam would love the show.

Pam wanted to visit Sedona, Arizona; the town had a reputation as an art colony. On our way there, we drove through Williams, Arizona, a funky, cowboy-themed, tourist-oriented town catering to the thousands of Harley drivers and car enthusiasts that drive the legendary Route 66.⁴⁶ The townspeople of Williams recreate put on a family-oriented cowboy show every evening at sundown—a mock shoot-out between the good and bad guys in the center of town. The nostalgic show attracted a fair crowd. Pam and I jostled our way through the crowd, to get near the front row, so she could get some good shots.

The next day it was on to Sedona. However, we didn't stay long. A smoky forest fire ruined the chances of any good pictures and the town turned out to be an expensive tourist trap.

⁴⁶ Wikipedia: US Route 66 (US 66 or Route 66), also known as the Will Rogers Highway, the Main Street of America or the Mother Road, was one of the original highways within the US Highway System. US 66 was established on November 11, 1926, with road signs erected the following year.[4] The highway, which became one of the most famous roads in the United States, originally ran from Chicago, Illinois, through Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona before ending at Santa Monica, California, covering a total of 2,448 miles (3,940 km).[5] It was recognized in popular culture by both the hit song "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66" and the *Route 66* television show in the 1960s.

We high-tailed out of Sedona and headed to the Grand Canyon; we bypassed the popular viewpoints at Flagstaff, Arizona, in favor of the more dramatic—but hard to reach—north rim. There was only one road to the north rim of the Grand Canyon; it was long and winding, reminiscent of the famous Hana Road, that leads to the Seven Sacred Pools in Hanalei, on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. Both were roads whose looks deceived, as seen on maps; what looked like a half-hour jaunt ended-up taking hours—because I couldn't make any speed.

I wanted to get to the north rim before dark and pushed the Civic as hard as I could. The little Honda held tight in the turns; it was fun for me, but maybe not for Pam. We arrived precisely at sunset.

Pam grabbed her gear and we fast-tracked down the trail, to get to a decent viewpoint before losing the sunlight. It was a scramble, but we found a sweet spot and enjoyed the vistas, bathed in golden light.

After that rush of euphoria came a reality check—we had no place to stay the night and were miles away from the nearest town. There were 200 cabins at the north rim, part of a resort managed by the National Park Service; they offered all the accoutrements, including a fine-dining restaurant.

However, they were totally booked—we were told that their rooms sell-out a year or two in advance! So, it was another late night, without a decent meal.

On our way to Denver (Colorado), we side-tracked and stopped in Taos (New Mexico) to visit with Chris Korody. A long time had passed since I last saw him, at his Manhattan Beach home, the night he took Anna and I out for dinner at Michi's Restaurant. That was before his circumstances changed; before he pulled-up stakes in California and moved back to desert country, the land where he grew up.

We caught Chris at another crossroads, moving across Taos, from one side to the other. He had a new steady gal, too—Susan Embrey. We rented a cabin from her, to stay in during our visit; it wasn't just any ol' cabin; this one, which Chris and Susan dubbed the Casita (little house) was straight out of *Southwestern Living* magazine. Susan, it turned out, was an interior decorator by trade. The little Casita was next to her house, which also qualified for a magazine feature.



Left to right: Pam Swanson, Chris Korody, Yours Truly, Susan Embrey, 2014.

I could see why Chris fell for her; he was so design oriented and liked hanging out with artists. While not an artist himself, in the strict sense of the word, Korody is an *information architect*; he recognizes high style and likes to do big things with top talent.

We had the most fun the night when Pam and I (read: me) made dinner for Susan and Chris, at her house. Sue's was a designer kitchen equipped with every pot, pan and gadget known to man; most of them were brand-spanking new; that revealed to me that she was more a *collectioneer* than a cook; the cooking utensils were decorations, not tools; they created the impression that she was a chef; whereas, cooking actually intimidated her.

Cooking does not intimidate me. Knowing that I had a great kitchen to work in; I made an elaborate Indian repast. Pam and I shopped all afternoon; I dropped \$100+ on ingredients. The way the kitchen was set up there was a service island across from the stove, sinks and main counters; people could be served on one side of that bar, while the chef prepped food on the other.

I wanted to show off a little to Chris, so I made three complicated Asian-Indian dishes. It was amusing watching Susan's face as I sullied more and more of her virgin gear; by the time I was done there were hardly enough burners on the stove. I use a lot of ingredients; not just for taste combinations, but for a complete, balanced and rich set of nutrients. Ultimately, food provides both fuel as well as the building blocks of our bodies; we are what we eat; what else could we possibly be, if not what we eat?

To digress for a moment, about my *philosophy du cuisine*: Not many people cook like I do. My "style" is an eclectic blend that some call "fusion cooking." Some of the earliest fusion cooking I enjoyed was a blend of Chinese and Cuban cuisines made in cheap little joints on the west side of Manhattan, south of Hell's Kitchen, in the 30s and 40s, along 10th and 11th Avenues. At those eateries, I discovered that cooks didn't always use cookbooks, that they frequently broke the "rules."

Before that, I always cooked by the book, following recipes religiously. I stuck to the rules for a good twenty years, perfecting techniques mastered by others, before finding my own style. In the late '80s and early '90s, I amassed a library of several hundred cookbooks and read them all cover to cover, some more than once. I tried umpty-ump recipes, following the instructions to the letter; it's something I still do when trying something for the first time. However, as with any art or craft, after a while you understand the principles that underlie all recipes. Those principles are the true "knowledge" of how to cook; knowing them, you can cook anything.

Most of the dishes I make require at least an hour and a half to prep and cook. I try to include at least six veggies together with cheese, nuts, seeds and some carbs—pulses, beans, rice or pasta. Sauces (or dressings) usually include apple cider or balsamic vinegar together with either coconut or olive oil and up to a dozen different herbs and spices. Combining so many ingredients can be a tricky business; it takes some time to learn which combos work, what goes together and what doesn't—like Cuban and Chinese, for example, or the Indian-Asian dishes I cooked that night for Chris and Susan.

While I chopped my way through a dozen ingredients, the other three enjoyed conversation and wine. What I forgot to tell people was that it would take me two hours to make dinner. By the time the meal was ready, the diners were more “fried” than the food.

(The night before, Chris had treated us to dinner at an expensive downtown restaurant, ordering \$100 wine. I felt mortified having brought Charles Shaw wine from Trader Joe’s; Chris sarcastically called it “two-buck Chuck,” a condescending term I hadn’t heard before.)

While everyone enjoyed the meal, the cleanup was another matter; I felt a twinge of guilt when Susan (understandably?) insisted on doing it herself, as she knew where everything belonged.

We day-tripped to Santa Fe, 105 miles [170 kilometers] south, to check out the art galleries that gave the town its reputation.⁴⁷

I’d heard so much about Santa Fe for so long that I had a lot of preconceived notions, none of which were anything like what it turned out to be. Santa Fe is known as a gallery town; but I wasn’t expecting the sheer quantity and concentration of them; or the commercialized, Disneyesque *faux-frontier* setting, where Davie Crockett would fit right in.

Of course, I had my eye on finding a gallery that might become an outlet for my enormous stash of pictures. However, I discovered that none of my stuff would “fit” there. My art was made to appeal to Michael Godard’s clientele—successful Gen-X’ers, those latter-day Yuppies (young urban professionals) living in Vancouver’s trendy Yaletown neighborhood. Because my work had to look good next to Godard’s; I used his kind of super-saturated colors, a kind of hyper-realism. Most of the folks that were shopping in the Santa Fe galleries were looking for folk art with western themes—a cactus silhouetted in a sunset, perhaps; not an or *Inuktuk* (a pile of balanced rocks, like an Inukshuk) bathed in moonlight.

I picked up a couple of business cards, to appear optimistic; then we got some ice cream and headed back to Taos. Pam was wearing a smile, but I was a bit depressed. Places like Santa Fe are intimidating; for the customer, there are too many choices; for the artist, the extent and diversity of competitive artworks is daunting. The toughest part is that true genius often gets overlooked or passed over, in favor of critics’ choices; the people buy what the media reports, and the media are only interested in what’s trending—it’s a self-reinforcing feedback loop. Art is a strange world where, by comparison to the commodities market, an ounce of lead is sometimes worth more than an ounce of gold.

The gallery scene in Santa Fe brought back forty-year-old memories, of returning to my 73rd street (New York) studio one evening and discovering a new picture in the window of the art gallery in the building next door. It was a 40 X 60-inch [101.6 X 152.4 cm] white canvas with a big red dot with a staggering, \$25,000 price tag attached to it (equal to more than \$100,000 now). That blew my mind; how hard could it be to paint a red dot?

⁴⁷ Wikipedia: The city is well known as a center for arts that reflect the multicultural character of the city; it has been designated as a [UNESCO Creative City in Design, Crafts and Folk Art](#).

All the supplies put together couldn't have cost more than \$500. Why would anyone part with that much money for a piece of bogus art? I still don't have an answer to that one.

In the case of art, which has no real utility, how does one determine "worth?" I know how much time I put into my pictures; my "wages" often turned out to be something like \$2.50 an hour...if I managed to make a sale. That's why I stopped making art; I couldn't earn enough to support my habit. I wondered how many of those Santa Fe artists were living the same chimera that I was.



There were more reminiscences of things past at our next stop, visiting Joey Porcelli (aka Joey Kimball) and her new husband, Randy Pharo, in Golden, Colorado (home of Coors beer). Golden is the American Dream come true, appropriately named; a perfect community of perfect people in a perfect setting. Golden sits 20 miles [30 kilometers] due west of Denver, at the edge of a string of mesas that form the front range of the Rocky Mountains, just a few miles farther west.

Denver and its surrounding foothills communities lie on the western edge of a great desert that was once a seabed. The table-top mesas are on the leading edge of a ridge caused by the geologic concussion of continents. (As you push a pile of earth, there is a point on the leading edge, where the first wrinkle appears in the surface; the mesas are that leading edge, the place where the surface tension breaks, where some goes up and the rest down.)

Joey Porcelli-Kimball Pharo and Clarence the dog with Yours Truly, 2014. Photo by Pam Swanson.

The Pharos house was at the end of a cul-de-sac tucked into a canyon between two major mesas. My car strained up the long, grinding slope, to 5,675 from 5,000 feet [1524 meters to 1730 meters]. I was surprised at first that their house was "middle class;" I expected a mini-mansion, based on what I knew of Randy's successful career as a lawyer in the oil business. (It was Pharo who brought several cases of expensive champagne to Pete Bjordahl's wedding.

Joey went through the same changes as everyone else in the slide business. As the pond dried up, her career, like mine, dematerialized. On the other hand, Randy was a partner in a successful law firm representing a profitable oil firm. (The company has turned out to be the best stock I ever bought; dividends have arrived on time for nearly a decade.) Randy's marriage proposal thus came at an opportune time for Joey, economically and (eventually) existentially. While Randy provided a secure economic foundation, it came with a price: *control*.

Randy was a natural-born leader; he was a director at heart. I first observed Randy in action when Pam and I were invited to a family reunion party that Randy hosted in Vancouver, BC—that's right, he flew his family to Vancouver for a celebratory weekend.

Since the event was in my neighborhood, and since I was a colleague of both Joey and her nephew, Pete Bjordahl, the Pharos were kind enough to invite Pam and I, to a gala dinner at Vij's restaurant, a five star Indian eatery.

Vikram Vij, who opened Vij's in 1994 and today runs a nearly a dozen other places, is a clever restaurateur (which is why he is successful, duh). He sets the scene so that one must wait at least one hour for a table... at the bar, where restaurant profits are made. As there were a dozen of us in the Pharo party, we dominated the bar. Well above the din and clatter, Randy could be heard ordering exotic cocktails and expensive, single-malt whiskeys. Pharo basked in the adulation that ensued. Randy was like a character out of *The Godfather*—he bought people with extravagant gifts and indulgences. The same thing happened at Pete's wedding, as I described earlier. When Randy showed up with \$2,000 in champagne, the focus turned to him.

Randy knew how to dominate; his weapon of choice was financial; Joey was his prize; she was living in a golden cage. Randy was bringing home the bacon; Joey didn't need to work. She became a soccer mom, of sorts; but that wasn't Joey. The gal I knew was a go-getter who liked producing things; she was a character straight out of an Ayn Rand novel. However, as I viewed her current situation, Randy's ~~wants~~ needs came first; if there was a schedule conflict, they went to his event. And, why not? ...he was funding it all.

Although she never complained, I felt that I could sense in Joey a kind of frustration; it was the same as mine; we both wished that what we were doing mattered. Joey (like me) was trying to be relevant.

To give herself a purpose, I suppose, Joey wrote a (big) book about the history of the theater in Denver; she also started teaching writing. However, I sensed in her the desire to do another big show. I wonder if she saw that in me. (Yes, I would love to do another big show, to somehow climb out of the abyss of irrelevance.)

Our visit with the Pharos was a bit awkward, actually. Their house was undergoing a remodeling during our visit. What with the kids gone, they were repurposing the space. Pam and I stayed in the only bedroom that was finished; it was like staying in a brand new, first class hotel; we had our own, private bathroom, featuring a glassed-in shower.

There was no chance to thank the Pharos by making dinner for the Pharos. Joey cooked pasta one night—an exotic recipe for vodka-flavored sauce that tasted like a simple Sauce Alfredo but was good, nonetheless. It was the wines that astonished me; Randy kept a 300-bottle collection of fine wines in a climate controlled (and locked) basement room. It was the first time I ever saw a "cellar" like that.

The wines Randy served upgraded otherwise pedestrian meals to the kind of dinners you might read about in a *Diners* magazine feature. The next night, we had pizza (they ordered-out three extravagant pies from a boutique pizza place in Golden and served them with more vintage vino. They left the table early that night, to attend a Hilary Clinton book signing. I could tell that was an important political event for them, he being a well-healed lawyer with the potential to possibly influence oil-money donations to the Clinton Foundation.

At one point, Joey nostalgically showed me a faded copy of the Incredible Slidemakers' $A=ME^2$ promotion poster [See picture in previous section, 1977 – *Bumbles – Rocking AMI*]. I was dumbfounded, that she had kept that keepsake for so long. I made sure to send her one of the seven “new” copies that I saved from cremation on Vashon Island; now, besides hers, there are only six other copies that I can say for sure exist. It is situations like those that make me realize that I am nearing the end.

Photos by Pam Swanson.



While at the Pharo's, we took a sightseeing trip to the Phoenix Gold Mine. I'm a gold bug, as you know, so that was a treat even if it was a bit disappointing—the mine had closed years ago; it had been bought by a couple of prospectors promoters who cobbled together a little show billed as a mine tour. There wasn't much to see in the defunct mine; we were led a short way into the entrance of the old mine and shown what a vein of silver looks like. We had our picture taken, pretending to detonate a dynamite explosion. Then we were invited to pan for gold in a stream adjacent to the mine. They told us that the stream was fed by an active gold mine further up the mountain, but neither Pam and I nor several other suckers tourists saw any yellow metal that afternoon.

Our next hosts were Lana and John Whitcomb. You'll recall that I had a long working relationship with John—doing the Cadillac Fairview show with Pran AV, in Texas; the AT&T show, with Watts-Silverstein, in Seattle; as well as a few of Whitcomb's other endeavors—and that I had stayed with the Whitcombs for a week, when I was grounded in Denver by the events surrounding the 9/11 terror attacks, all described earlier. I had told Pam a lot about Lana and John, but even that didn't prepare her (or me) for our visit with them.

I stopped at a weed store to pick-up a nice big joint—just in case—but I needn't have; Lana and John were as well-stocked as ever. It took me a bit of searching to find their house; they'd moved since my last visit, to the “other” side of Denver, to a house that was a bit more down-market than John would have liked. Their new home was a roomy three-floor Tudor-style house with a huge, secluded yard; that's where we spent the afternoon and evening.

John was in top form; he carried on for hours extolling his virtuosity as an “information architect;” to listen to John, you think he was sage; his ideas were visionary; but as I mentioned earlier, while he talks the talk, Whitcomb never walks it.

He never got down to brass tacks. I'd heard it all before, so he took Pam aside and bent her ear while listened to Lana complain about John; her snide remarks poked fun at John's exaggerated view of himself.

We were starving by the time John ran out of gab and started the BBQ grill. The sun had already set and it was another hour before dinner was ready. The steaks were great but there wasn't much for Pam to eat; maybe I forgot to tell them that Pam was a vegetarian, or they forgot I did.

By the time dinner was over, Pam and I were exhausted. We were both suffering from cauliflower ears and longed to get a good night's sleep. We had a long drive ahead of us the next day, to Wyoming. Our bedroom was a well-appointed basement apartment with a private bathroom; it was totally comfortable but freezing cold. There was no way for us to turn down the central air-conditioning, and not enough blankets to keep warm. At least we had each other.

The next stop was even more interesting, at least for me—seeing Arthur Havers (left), after nearly a decade and a half.

We had kept up electronically, as email developed; but we hadn't had a face-to-face talk in all that time; so, when we visited them in Wyoming, I wasn't sure what to expect.

All I knew was that Arthur and his wife, Susan Prescott, had become innkeepers—and I couldn't help thinking of *Faulty Towers*. Ha!

Photo by Pam Swanson.



I could have looked them up on Google; but I prefer to be a naive pilgrim. I like the surprise of seeing places for the first time as they really are, without any preconceived notions. I've found that, if you research your destinations too much, you set yourself up for a disappointment. Most, if not all, of the travelogue pictures you see, show places in their best possible light; the pictures have almost certainly been enhanced, using Photoshop or other means, to look brilliant.

When you go there, the unadulterated place won't look the same; it might even be overcast or rainy. Without researching the place, I'd have no idea what I was missing; my potential disappointment would, therefore, be diminished. So, without the benefit of location research, I had no idea what we'd find at the Historic Elk Mountain Hotel.

The first surprise was finding that Elk Mountain Hotel was far off the beaten track; so far from the Interstate highway [I-80] that we would never have found it had we not known it was there and made it a destination. There was no way anyone would stumble upon the Havers' new enterprise. The town of Elk Mountain was about the size of two football pitches. There was no exit from I-80; just a small sign to indicate the mountain. The first sign for the hotel was at the head of their driveway. So much for visibility.

Elk Mountain had been an important town back in the days of the Wild West. In the early years of the 20th century, the Elk Mountain Hotel was a stop-over point for travelers heading west, following the Oregon Trail; it was also the premier social hub for the entire region, like a local Waldorf Astoria, attracting guests from as far away as Rawlins, Laramie, and Cheyenne. Until the early '50s, people came from miles around to have formal affairs at the hotel and party hearty at the hotel's nearby Garden Pavilion; famous names played there, including Louis Armstrong. However, when the Interstate Highway System was built, during the Eisenhower administration, the new road bypassed Elk Mountain by two miles [3.2 km]. Thereafter, the town died and along with it the hotel. What do they say, "So near, and yet, so far?"



Photo by Pam Swanson.

Then, around the turn of this century, a brave soul decided to restore the property to its former glory and re-open the premises as a 12-room, boutique hotel. The restoration crews did a stellar job; the hotel is stunning in its early-American authenticity.

It is a handsome *destination property*, a 4.5-star hotel; the missing half-star is for obscurity—being located in a remote place, with few Natural perks, unless you happen to be a hunter, bird watcher or other wildlife enthusiast.

What happened to that developer was the same thing that happened to me—with Fork Inn the Road—but on a much grander scale. After sinking a fortune into upgrades and remodeling, that developer needed a certain ROI (Return on Investment) to make ends meet (leaving profit aside, for the moment). When the expected traffic failed to appear, the investment became long-term. Impatient, the owner put the place up for sale in 2007... which is where Arthur and Susan entered the picture.

The Havers bought the enterprise, with the owner providing the financing. Arthur figured that a bit of good marketing was all the little gem needed.

[Spoiler Alert: Today (2014), Arthur says he wouldn't have bought the place if he had known the financial world was going to collapse a year later. After the 2008 Crash, discretionary spending tightened; people ate more hamburger instead of steak; that didn't augers well for a fancy place like the Elk Mountain Hotel.

I could see why Susan fell in love with the auberge—there was a first-class kitchen, servicing a 30-seat dining room. Susan knew well how to manage that size operation.

When I met the Havers, in Belgium, in 1989, Susan ran a lunch restaurant in downtown Brussels called the Chambertin. It was about the same size as the dining room at the Elk Mountain Hotel; but had a kitchen only half the size of Elk Mountain's spacious, 800-square-foot [74.32-square-meter] cookery, and wasn't nearly as well equipped. However, Chambertin didn't attract enough clientele; Arthur sarcastically nick-named it "Chamber Pot" and then "*That Place*." Chambertin's failure was a real disappointment for Susan, one that I keenly appreciated, given the demise of my restaurant, for similar reasons.

In the Elk Mountain Hotel, Susan found a new chance to realize her ambition—to serve *Cordon-Bleu* cuisine.



While that dream has come true for her—people do come from miles around to experience her classic European cuisine—their numbers have been insufficient to turn a profit.

As for Arthur, a Pisces, he wanted to have his own business because Big Business let him down. Havers wasn't suited to climb the corporate ladder; he took things far too personally. Arthur preferred to work quietly (and thoroughly) in the background.

As a Brit, it took him a bit longer to realize that, in corporate America, what counts is who you know, not what you know. After working as PR manager for DHL, where I met him, Arthur left Brussels, moved to Palo Alto, and put in a stint at e-Trade. When that fell through, I think that's when he decided that he didn't want to rely on others anymore, that he wanted his own business, something that he and Susan could do together. So, they decided to take a chance, move half-way across the country, and take over a boutique hotel.

Arthur wasn't intimidated by the remote location of Elk Mountain. I think he warmed to it, the way I warmed to the remote location of Fork Inn the Road—you figure that your place will be so good that people will make an extra effort to go there. That would be wrong.

If something isn't staring them in the face, people don't see it. People want convenience; they won't go out of the way for anything unless it is totally exceptional. People like Arthur and I reckon we are sufficiently exceptional to make things work, whatever the challenges. Such hubris is also our downfall. When Fork Inn the Road got into trouble, my solution was to bail out; Arthur's solution is to keep making Elk Mountain Hotel a better experience; instead of cutting corners he's making more improvements.

On the lighter side, Elk Mountain Hotel had the best-stocked bar—and wine cellar—for miles around; Denver would be the closest place to match Arthur's abundance of selections, including exotic whiskeys and tequilas of which both he and I were particularly fond.

To digress for a moment, about my preferences: In more prosperous days, my drink of choice was Lagavulin single-malt scotch whiskey, Laphroig in a pinch. My first drink was a Canadian Club Manhattan cocktail, made by Bob Banning. When I went to work at Basford Incorporated I switched to gin martinis—Bombay or Tanqurey—the favorite drink of *Mad Men* (advertising executives). It was in Europe that I switched to Scotch; I would have done so sooner if single-malt whiskeys had been readily available in the States.

However, in 1960s America, Scotch meant blended whiskeys like Johnny Walker or (God help us) Dewars. I didn't like those; they're too sweet. I prefer the dry, peaty flavor of single-malt Scotch whiskey, the smokier the better. Similarly, Arthur and I both prefer India Pale Ale over normal beer (whatever normal is, in these days of craft beers).

After dinner, Arthur brought out a bottle of Don Julio Anejo tequila and we did shots for the rest of the evening. Given the amount of catch-up (and tequila), the conversation was fast and furious. Susan and Arthur can be wonderfully social in a candid way, if you can capture their attention and engage them in conversation. However, (like me) they're generally too busy and don't have time for other people. I reckon that the Havers, like my father, were brought-up the British way—to earn the respect of others by doing things well; by making something of yourself; by earning love the hard way.

(Like Arthur and Susan, with age I have gotten more deliberate and selective about how I spend my time. So many things are not worth the effort. Age gives one the advantage of being able to calculate the probabilities of success or failure. My life has worked in cycles, with ups and downs, like a wave or the tides; what was down went up, and vice versa. With experience, I gained insight into those waves and patterns.)



The Havers put us in the General John Freemont suite, the hotel's biggest and best accommodation, lavishly decorated with paintings and framed photos of risqué 1890s nudes. Arthur told me that occasionally conservative guests ask him to remove the dirty pictures from their rooms. Ha!

It didn't take long to notice we were the only guests. OK, the tourist season hadn't really begun; still, we had to wonder how they managed to survive. We got the answers to that question at dinner that night. They explained that running the Elk Mountain hotel was a financial roller coaster. During the summer, travelers heading to Yellowstone National Park would occasionally frequent the hotel; in the winter, their guests were mostly hunters and sport fishermen. Winter or summer, their occupancy rate seldom exceeded a dismal 30%.

Some of the financial gaps were filled by occasional wedding receptions or office parties, as well as a steady but small stream of restaurant customers.

But they weren't getting enough business to really make a go of it. To remedy the situation, they remodeled the attic into a meeting room, with seating for twenty around a long, board-room-style table; with some success, they promoted the hotel as a conference center, for local businesses. But, for all their efforts, they were barely hanging on.

Indeed, that was self-evident. During our three-day visit, we were the only hotel guests and there were only a handful of restaurant customers. It was a sad state of affairs; I wanted to help and put on my thinking cap, to come up with ways Pam and I could help the Havers promote the business. The hotel's website lacked the kind of stunning visuals you'd normally expect to see; so, I volunteered to return with my camera gear and provide them with a complete set of new pictures—and we did just that, a year later.

Apart from meal times, we saw little of the Havers. Arthur busied himself tending to the myriad chores of keeping the hotel and its five acre property in tip top shape, while Susan spent the days in her palatial kitchen, prepping ingredients, preparing *cordon-bleu* meals.



A background shot of Elk Mountain was populated with pelicans and pronghorn antelopes and an eagle (from my archive).

One afternoon we went on a sightseeing trip up and over Elk Mountain; there were some snowy vistas worth photographing, but nothing exceptional; after that tour, and a walk through the tiny town of Elk Mountain (population 196), there wasn't much for us to see or do.

Nonetheless, we managed to gather together enough elements to assemble a promotional illustration for Arthur and Susan, called *Elk Mountain Eagle*. Subsequently, Arthur used the picture for a poster.

On our last day, Pam and I volunteered to make dinner; it was our way of saying thank you. Also, after three days of Susan's epicurean extravaganzas, we needed some real food; her gastronomical delights were heavy on the cream sauces and light on the veggies; we wondered, how they avoided heart attacks, eating rich dishes all the time?

To get the fixin's for dinner, Pam and I drove 60 miles [90 km] to Laramie, the closest town with a supermarket, returning with the ingredients needed for one of my vegetarian curry concoctions. Susan wanted to help or at least get together the things I needed; she kept asking me what I was going to make; but I had no answer for her—I never really know for sure what I am going to make until I get into it.

I've always prided myself on being able to make a nice meal out of whatever was in the pantry, and this was no exception. Working in the hotel's big kitchen was a dream; there was plenty of space to chop a dozen veggies and lay out the twenty different herbs and spices I used to make three different curries. Susan was incredulous that I had no plan, that I simply made things up as I went along; her style of cooking required absolute precision; mine was more the *short order* variety. Arthur, meanwhile, kept plying us with fine Scotch whiskey; that certainly augmented my culinary creativity. I don't think they ever had dishes like the ones I made that night. They complimented me but didn't ask for seconds. There were copious leftovers; I had to wonder if Susan and Arthur ate them? More likely, they were given to the kitchen help. Ha!

We took the scenic route back to Vancouver from Elk Mountain. On the first day, we passed by the Grand Teton mountains, on our way to Yellowstone National Park. We were planning to stay in Jackson Hole, Wyoming; but the place was packed with tourists. Instead, we drove on and overnighted in the tiny town of Briggs, Idaho.

The next day was spent touring Yellowstone. I had been there before on a winter photo expedition with Allan Seiden, but it was all new for Pam. We spent the morning touring the many geysers; in the afternoon we watched Old Faithful, then drove on to Livingston, Montana, where we overnighted.

Glacier National Park was next on our list; I was excited, the place had been on my bucket list for years. However, it was a disappointment because the famous Going-to-the-Sun Road was closed; even though it was early June, winter snows hadn't been completely plowed.



Photo by Pam Swanson.

We stayed the night at the West Glacier Village and the next day drove straight-through to Colville, Washington.

We spent a day there, so I could have the car serviced. Then, it was on to Omak, Washington, where we had lunch on the banks of the Columbia River before crossing the border into Canada and continuing to Osoyoos, BC.

There, we visited Pam's good friend Susan O'Connor; from there it was just a hop skip and a jump back to Vancouver.

Safely home, we discovered that our fridge had quit while we were away; everything in it had spoiled; what a smelly mess that was.

["Spoiler" Alert: that was nothing compared to what happened a little later, when an upstairs neighbor's apartment flooded, seeping into our condo while we were away on a trip to Asia.

We arrived home from that trip to find that everything in our apartment had been rearranged!]



Pam Swanson (left) & Susan O'Connor at The Den, Vancouver, 2015

2014 – Sweden Trip – Nostalgic Moments

We had hardly gotten home from our tour of the western States, when it was time to get ready for an even more ambitious August trip, to Sweden.

Our ambition was to find the town where Pam's paternal relatives lived, a place called Öglunda, about 214 miles [345 km] south of Stockholm. It was a whirlwind two-week tour; we saw a lot of my old friends and colleagues, staying with a few of them. Thomas and Lena Lagerqvist put us up for the first week at their home on Lidingö, an island east of Stockholm; their kids had flown the coop long ago, leaving behind a guest room equipped with Internet, an adjacent TV room, and a fully appointed bathroom.

Thomas loaned us his (brand new) [Volkswagen Passat TDI](#) for our drive south, to explore Pam's ancestral lands and go sightseeing for a couple of days. What a car that was! The damn thing (it was very nice, actually) had computer-assisted windshield wipers that decided how fast to go depending on the amount of rain they sensed on the windshield. It took me a while to realize that I was not in control; when I tried to manually adjust the speed, the wipers had a mind of their own.

Wiper issues aside, it was nice cruising the well-built roads of Sweden in a good car, one that performed and handled well. The trip reminded me of the many years I spent driving Saab Turbos all over Sweden and Norway. As he gave me the keys, Thomas told us to keep the car as long as we wanted. He didn't need it because, to keep in shape, he was biking to his Stockholm office, from Lidingö Island, where he lived. Given that opportunity, I planned a two-day trip.

On the first day, we visited the magnificent cathedral in Skara as well as the tiny parish church of Öglunda, where Pam's paternal grandfather grew up. Then we continued south, along the west side of Lake Vättern, round the south end of the lake, passing through Jönköping, then headed northward, up the east side of the lake. The plan was to overnight 25 miles [40 km] north of Jönköping, at the Hotell Gyllene Uttern, in Gränna--a lakeside hotel that I had passed oh, so many times, on trips from Stockholm to Trolhättan, visiting Saab, and Göteborg [Gothenburg], visiting SKF, Hasselblad and Volvo. I always wanted to stay at Gyllene Uttern, but never did—including this trip.

On the second day, according to my plan, we'd continue north along the east side of the lake, to Linköping; there, I hoped to put in an appearance at Dataton, to say hello to Bjorn Sandlund, Mike Fahl, Jacqui McHale, Frederik Svahnberg, and Jan Nordqvist; I was hoping to have dinner with at least one or two of them, like we used to do in the old days, when I came down from Stockholm. We were all bosom buddies then. Now, I wanted to totally surprise everyone at Dataton, by just showing up, out of nowhere. Poof... Mesney's here!

However, the best laid plans don't always work out. It was already nearing sunset by the time we reached Gränna and the hotel was full. They explained that there was a big Volvo truck-dealers' show in town, that every hotel was booked for miles around. They recommended a place an hour up the road; but we ran into the same deal there.

Skit! [Swedish for "shit."]

Compared to the US highway system, there aren't many places to stop or stay overnight along Sweden's main highways and byways. There was nowhere to go but north; I hated blowing by so much beautiful Swedish countryside at night, when it couldn't be appreciated; but we had no choice. The Lagerqvist's car was nice, but I didn't want to sleep in it.

I reckoned that we'd find a place in Linköping, for sure. We got there near midnight; I parked the car and headed for one of the four hotels in town. The manager had left a note saying, "Back soon!" on the counter.

I waited and waited only to be told, an hour later, when the mangy manager returned, rubbing his eyes and yawning, that the place was fully booked. He suggested a hotel down the street, but they were closed; and the other two big hotels were filled. *Fan!*

There was no way we were going to sleep in the car; the only logical choice was to go back to the Lagerqvist's house and chalk up the trip to some kind of record drive—about 20 hours, in all. We called from a gas station to tell them what was up, that we'd be back about 4:00 am; but that was overly optimistic; we didn't get back to Lidingö until after 5:00 am due to construction detours around the entrance to the Lidingö bridge.

The VW's sexy-voiced auto-pilot didn't know about the detours; she went absolutely mad when we disobeyed her every instruction, trying to decipher posted traffic-diversion signs that were, of course, written in Swedish.

So, round and round we went, until we found the right route after exhausting all other possibilities. At the time, we considered that a small miracle, tired as we were. As we finally collapsed on our bed, we could hear Thomas and Lena beginning their day.

Thomas and Lena hosted a reunion party for me; they invited many old friends and colleagues with whom I worked, at AVC and Saab. I knew about the event beforehand; Thomas was kind enough to warn me in advance.

The reunion party was an early-evening BBQ held on the patio in the Lagerqvist's yard. I needed a little help to deal with the stress of meeting so many old friends at once, so I made sure to bring a few pocket-sized vodkas (just in case), and treated myself to a toke of my rapidly-diminishing mini-stash.

Filip Järnehag photo.



The guests included (clockwise from upper left): Christine Ströman (Bo was unable to attend, as below), Lars "Lasse" Hellquist, Kurt Hjelte (tipping his hat), Micke Wasdahl, Hilarie Cutler (Håkan wasn't there due to a brain hemorrhage that affected his vision), Thomas Lagerqvist (Lena was camera shy), Lotta Helte (Kurt's wife), Yours Truly and Pam, Filip Järnehag (behind the camera).

It was a nostalgic evening spent recalling the times we had together, the good and the bad. I realized how happy I could be living in Sweden again, where I had so many friends.

Of all the guests, I related mostly with Kurt Hjelte; he seemed the most damaged by the collapse of multi-image and AVC. Kurt failed to make the transition into digital; he relied on his son Jörgen to translate his ideas into digital creations.

But Jörgen, as good as he was (and he was good), eventually left his dad's business to become a ballroom dancing instructor. *Otroligt!* [Unbelievable!]

Without digital skills, Kurt was lost; his fate was irrelevance. In his own way, though, Kurt was fighting the demons of depression. He started-up a community radio station in his garage. From what I gathered, it was a combination talk and music program. The more I thought about it, the more appropriate I found Kurt's new avocation. Except for a ~~mild~~ case of ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder] I imagine Kurt was the perfect talk-show host—he could talk a mile a minute, about almost anything, especially his wild ideas. Those were usually about meetings and events, which he excelled at theming and organizing.

Hjelte was the consummate party animal. He wasn't some character out of *Animal House*; rather, Kurt specialized in high-society events; you know, white gloves, silver service and all that. He came into his own organizing events like the VIP dinners held in conjunction with of the launch of the Saab 9000 CD.

Kurt micro-managed events down to the finest details. He and his gal-Friday, Marina Lindahl, armed with walkie-talkies and cell phones, would cruise the floor, making sure that the hotel, catering and staging crews were on their toes; that the right people were introduced to one another; and that the all-important members of the press got their photo ops.

But the Kurt attending the Lagerqvist's reunion party wasn't that man; he was a shadow of his former self. Once outspoken, Kurt spoke softly and humbly; I had to lean in to make out what he was saying. Back in Vancouver, I tried and failed to connect with Kurt's internet radio station.

Bo Ströman wasn't at the party, either. He suffered the same fate, and worse. Ströman's wife, the former Christine Carlsson, arguably AVC's most powerful producer, explained that Bosse's state of mind had devolved from melancholy to depression and dementia; that he was no longer fit for company. The toll his condition was taking on Christine was palpable and profound.

In happier days, at the height of his career, Ströman managed the Saab Chess Tour, a collaboration between Saab, ABBA and British Lyricist Tim Rice.⁴⁸ The latter were interested in promoting their new West-End musical *Chess*, and Saab wanted to show off their new car.

⁴⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chess_\(musical\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chess_(musical))

The result was a series of five gala dinner shows, held in Stockholm, London, Paris, Amsterdam and Hamburg. Each was a black-tie event attended by the aristocracy.

Bo Ströman was a smooth operator, a sexy Swede with a dashing appearance. He oozed empathy. I think he was genuinely good man who must have found himself in the horns of a dilemma when the company went down, having to hide the truth behind little white lies. Sandra and I visited Ströman at his lakeside country cottage in Kupdalen, twice.

The first time was just after the Christmas recess; it was a winter wonderland. We met second wife, Maud, and two daughters Malin and Anna.⁴⁹

Everyone was happy and secure in their relationships, so the weekend was warm and fuzzy. Then Bosse got involved with Christine Carlsson, I started fucking around with Lena Nyberg, and both of our families fell apart. He changed after that, as did I; we were still warm, but less fuzzy.



Saab spun off a print-ad campaign featuring the finale scene from the Saab 9000 CD launch show, of the car arriving at the Monte Carlo Casino in Monaco, driven by Saab's well-known rally driver Eric Carlsson, dressed in black tie.⁵⁰ Sten Granath photo.

Ströman was one of the people I most wanted to reconnect with during the Swedish trip, but it was not to be.

⁴⁹ Ströman was a great progenitor. He had three wives (Bitte, Maud and Christine) and five daughters: Lotta and Lina by his first wife, Bitte; Malin and Anna with Maud; and Maria with Christine.

⁵⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erik_Carlsson

I wanted to ask Christine if we could visit Bo, but (for once) held my tongue. She made it seem as if he was super depressed and might not recognize me. *Herregud!* [OMG]

Curiously, talking about Bosse's dementia struck a chord with me. I know that my mental capacity is diminishing, at an accelerating pace; so is the rest of me. I know what I must do to take care of my body—exercise it and eat right. And I know that to preserve mental vitality I've got to exercise my brain, which I do, producing this memoir. I'm doing everything I should, but the decline persists; but that's another matter, called aging.

I reckoned that a primary reason that retired men get depressed and senile is because there is nothing to exercise their brains, unless they read or write, and most people don't. Most people are lulled by the TV and/or Facebook and friends. They are not self-propelled, by and large, and need a job to keep them busy, engaged, relevant.

I told Christine about an idea I had, for an organization called *Gray Matters*. It would be a kind of employment agency, helping seniors find work, in jobs they could do.

Many old people (myself included) go nuts when they retire and become irrelevant. As Nike so succinctly said, they need to, *Just Do It*. The question is ...what?

Joel Holiber triggered the Gray Matters idea; he was one of my first bosses, at J. Charles David advertising agency, when I was 17. His little company was going through growing pains; there were just four of us to do enough for a staff twice the size.

To alleviate the situation, Holiber hired a retired friend, to be a kind of office manager, making sure the little things got done, the ones nobody else had time for.

The old dude ordered supplies, dealt with messengers and cleaners, you get the idea. It was perfect for everyone, especially for the old man; his job gave him a purpose, a reason to exist. Doing the most meaningless tasks, he always wore a smile, of appreciation.

To digress for a moment, about the Gray Matters idea, which I think has potential: There are only so many Walmart-greeter and burger-flipper positions; but there is an over-abundance of idle seniors. What is the solution?

An organization like the Japanese *Koreisha* provides a model; it's an employment agency that books seniors at affordable rates for easy jobs like clerks and greeters. Koreisha works in Japanese society in large part because the Nipponese respect their elders. I'm not certain the idea would work in the West, where old people are discarded as useless burdens on society. As a culture, I'd say the Japanese are the most empathetic society in the world, bar none.

I floated the Gray Matters idea to Pete Bjordahl; he liked it enough to enlist the support of Randy Pharo, who was (way) less enthusiastic; for him, the risk-reward ratio was out of whack, not worth the investment of his time.

(I would expect that of Randy, and his oil-baron ilk. So much for empathy....)

Age-related prejudice is an age-old problem (hahaha). I have gotten used to it; I've given-up fighting the discrimination; instead, I busy myself writing this diatribe and live in the past, like Proust.

As became our wont, Pam and I made dinner for our hosts, as a way of saying thank you. We shopped for supplies in Lidingö Centrum, at Konsum, the island's only supermarket; the prices were shocking, to say the least.

We had enough money although our budget was somewhat reduced when we discovered that a few thousand Swedish krona's worth of cash that I had saved from the late '90s (when I worked for Lexivision and Scania) was no longer in circulation; nobody would take them, not even the Riksbanken [State Bank].

They recommended that we send the cash with a letter to someone higher up the chain, in the head office, who had authority for such odd transactions, all of course involving fees. Doing so, we would end up with 50% of the value and would have to wait several weeks. *Fugetaboutit.*

I opted to let Pam use the fiat bills to decorate things (seriously), together with the rest of my old-money collection. (I reckon I may be doing the same thing with my dollars soon, if what they say about a coming economic crash and reset is true.)

To digress again, this time about my money collection: Over the years, when I came home from trips abroad; the loose change got thrown in a jar. After a couple of decades, the jar got bigger. It ended up weighing nearly 10 pounds [4.53 kilos].

In addition to the coin collection, I had a shoebox full of outdated paper currencies, particularly old Russian rubles. How I ended up with so many is a funny story:

On my last trip to Tallinn [Estonia], in 1991, the exchange rate between dollars and rubles had reached astronomical equivalencies; although the official exchange rate was nearing 50:1, it seemed like I was getting 100 rubles for every single US dollar.

I wanted to exchange \$100; however, the lady at the foreign-exchange window said with a sigh that she didn't have enough rubles. I managed to explain that I had nothing smaller than a Ben Franklin [nickname for a \$100 bill] whereupon she shuffled off into a back room and after some time emerged with a big box full of cash.

The teller's window wouldn't open, so the contents of the shoebox was fed to me through a slot in the window, in thick wads of cash. When my attaché case was full, I stuffed the wads into every available pocket.

The whole thing became a minor spectacle and I got worried; so, I lingered at a nearby café for some time before leaving with my huge stash of cash, until I was reasonably sure that anyone who had been watching me went away.



Pam eventually transformed my worthless fiat currencies into obets d'art. She decorated more than two hundred "keepsake boxes" with my old money collection. I have nearly a dozen of them.

Photo by Pamela Swanson.

For the Lagerqvists, I made an Asian-vegetarian "melange," served with noodles. I kept it simple, the ingredients were bankrupting us. What a funny feeling that was—compared to little Sweden, Canada was a "poor" country; our weak Canadian dollarettes didn't buy much in Scandinavia.

I wasn't used to that; I grew up in a rich country, the US of A. Wherever I went in the world, my greenbacks had what's called purchasing power. With US currency to spend, I was always a winner. However, the tables turned. Now Swedish kronor (and the Euro) out-performed dollars; I was the poor mouse.

I adored Sweden and missed being there. I considered moving back to Stockholm, when the end neared for Birdland; but it was totally unaffordable—Norway was the world's most expensive country and Sweden wasn't far behind.

[Rant Alert: we hear so many negative things about Socialism. We are told that Capitalism and Democracy are a better combination; but, that's rubbish. Socialism works best for the interests of citizens; ~~Capitalism~~ Creditism works best for the Deep State, the crony capitalists who run things, e.g. the Pilgrim's Society.

Don't believe me? Go live in Sweden for a while. You'll experience an economy that hums along in high gear. Everything works in Scandinavia. Everybody has a nice place to live, enough to eat, free education, single-payer health care, and they all drive nice cars.]



Photo by Pamela Swanson.

Sven Lidbäck (left) picked us up from the Lagerqvists on our last day in Sweden. He took us to lunch at his luxurious, harborside condo, in Gåshaga, an exclusive marina on the east side of Lidingö island, overlooking the main shipping lane through the archipelago, between Stockholm and the Baltic Sea.

It was easy to see that Sven and his wife, glass-artist Catti Åsélius, had done well for themselves. (The day after entertaining us, they were leaving for a round-the-world' cruise on the QE II...!)

Catti put on an amazing spread with all kinds of exotic seafood dishes; Sven brought out his best *snaps* [schnapps]; we sang songs and toasted each other, in the best Swedish tradition.

Kjell Gustafsson was also invited that luncheon; he gave us a ride back to Stockholm in his Porsche Carrera. Pam managed to squeeze in behind the two seats. Nice, riding in a sports car again.



Kjell Gustafsson, 2018, Stockholm, Sweden.

Kjell dropped us off in Stockholm, at Rick and Cilla Pedolsky's apartment, on Götgatan. The Pedolskys arranged for us to rent a huge, comfortable apartment in their building for a week, from friends who were away on holiday; it was the perfect place to stay, "around the corner" from my old Hornsgatan studio, right in the heart of Söder [Södermalm], Stockholm's South Island, the Soho section of the city, originally known as an art colony, once the hippest place to live in Stockholm.

We spent two days on an epic walk about, exploring Stockholm. On Södermalm, we visited all my old haunts—the former Hornsgatan studios of Incredible and AVC; the former Vetebullen Konditori (bakery), where I learned how to bake bread, as an apprentice—as well as Rick's offices, where I had the opportunity to see Håkan Hansson; that was an inspirational meeting.

Håkan had the tenacity to keep up with presentation technology; he had reinvented himself as a coder, a quant, a writer of original algorithms, that create and define the behavior of computers.

Pedolsky ran a computer applications company called iPosters; their software helped presenters illustrate their messages at meetings, sort of like Microsoft PowerPoint. At first, I was intimidated by the three of them—Håkan, Rick and Cilla—envious of their contemporaneousness, their relevance, compared to my own irrelevance. Then, on second thought, I remembered how it felt, dealing with ~~stupid, ignorant~~ clients, I felt lucky to live free. Although a poor mouse, I was my own man.

In central Stockholm, we took in most of the top tourist attractions including the Vasa Museum,⁵¹ which was under construction when I lived in Sweden.

⁵¹ Wikipedia: The Vasa Museum (Swedish: *Vasamuseet*) is a maritime museum in Stockholm, Sweden. Located on the island of Djurgården, the museum displays the only almost fully intact 17th century ship that has ever been salvaged, the 64-gun warship *Vasa* that

The famous ship was under wraps then, for nearly three decades, being sprayed with formaldehyde-laden polyethylene fluid designed to “petrify” her ancient planks with plastic.

Now, one could not only see the famous ship, but also go aboard her; it was experiential, feeling how sailors lived “only” a few centuries ago, standing on those ancient timbers gave me a shiver, like the one I had standing by the hearth sipping Lagavulin Scotch whiskey in a thousand-year-old pub, in Sticklepath [England], where my father was brought-up. Experiences like that give one pause; they are such scary reminders of our mortality; so many have gone before us; life will go on, long after we are gone.

One can't help but wonder if the dead can see beyond the grave; in the future, I would sure like to be able to pop in every once in a while, to see what became of this and that. In the holds of the *Wasa*, beneath her decks, I momentarily left the Now; I felt like I had travelled through time, back into the 17th century; that I was one of the crew. I didn't see any ghosts; but I had a sense of being there, so long ago; it was just a flash, then I was back in the Now. I wondered about the departed *Vasa* sailors; whether they could catch glimpses into our dimension from wherever theirs may be? All too soon, my question may be answered.

We met up with Stefan Petersén, my former *mentor de patisserie*. It was a reconnection I was looking forwards to, not only seeing an old friend but also showing Pam where my confectionary skills took root.



To digress for a moment, about my interest in baking: After learning bread baking, I was keen to learn cake making.

The bakers at Vetebullen Konditori (left) recommended me to Stefan, who was then head of patisserie at Wienercaféet, on Biblioteksgatan, a *konditori* [combo bakery & café] famous for its French- and Austrian-style confections.



It was Christmastime, when I first met Stefan. He was totally engrossed decorating the konditori windows with massive displays sculpted from 300 pounds (136 kilos) of chocolate. His phantasmagoric sculptures were like scenes out of a Walt Disney movie, with castles, flying dragons, and all sorts of flora and fauna, all made of chocolate.

sank on her maiden voyage in 1628. The *Vasa* Museum opened in 1990 and, according to the official web site, is the most visited museum in Scandinavia. exhibits fleshing out the epic tragedy [sic] of Sweden's infamous battleship.

Chocolate was his Petersén's passion. He was an internationally acclaimed chocolatier, the winner of numerous international awards.

Stefan explained that he was leaving Wienercaféet to take over the bakery at NK—Nordisk Kompaniet—the biggest department store in Stockholm. He asked me to contact him again, after the New Year; I did, and was welcomed to join his crew of twenty master bakers, as an apprentice.

For nearly six months, I woke at 4:00 am and worked at the bakery from 5:00 to 8:00 am, before returning to my studio to begin a normal day's work. When I left Sweden, a year later, after apprenticing with him for half a year, Stefan came to Arlanda Airport to say goodbye. His parting gift was an 18-inch [45.7-centimeter] chocolate sculpture of a dragon. (!) I was already over my limit for carry-on baggage, and there was no way to check (or eat) the sugary serpent. Fortunately, the Scandinavian Airlines [SAS] hostesses were understanding; they found space for it in a galley cooler. (I managed to get the dragon safely home to Vashon, where it was proudly displayed for nearly ten years, before eventually drying out and disintegrating.)

Pam and I met Stefan at the NK bakery, where I once cracked 350 eggs and whipped up huge vats of Italian meringue every morning, apprenticing for Petersén's master pâtissiers. He showed us his latest collection of chocolate sculptures and an elaborate wedding cake he decorating with airbrush illustrations. Then we went to a local café and tried to reconnect over drinks and snacks; but it wasn't working.

Stefan was in metamorphosis. He was burned out, done with the bakery business; giving up his award-winning career to become a fine-arts sculptor, producing a line of imaginative animal characters—strange bird-like creatures. His plan was to move south, to Lund (a university town just north of Malmö) and sell his work in a gallery there.

For my part, I had no good news to share with Stefan; I was in a dark space, too, having just lost Birdland; so, it was no surprised that we lost touch after that last meeting. We each went a new way, his forward, mine backward. He left NK a month after that meeting. If I hadn't contacted him when I did, I'd have never found him. Now, I don't know how to find him; I've tried, but Stefan Petersén is a common name in Scandinavia, something like John Doe.

Rick and Cilla had us out to their family *stuga* [summer house] on Söderboud Island, out in the archipelago, about two hours from Stockholm, by ferry.

(Most folks don't know that Sweden's archipelago has more than 24,000 islands and islets; it is a kind of barrier reef that is extremely difficult to navigate.)

That excursion was definitely a highlight of our Swedish tour.



I had been there before, years earlier, during the time I spent producing the *Natural Selection* show, with Filip Järnehag. On that visit, before Cilla's mom passed away, they made *fläder* [elderberry] sorbet, by hand, with hand-plucked flowers from the bush growing by the side of their stuga.

This time, Rick and Cilla invited us to walk around the island (it's small) to pick wild blueberries and, if we were lucky, some chanterelle mushrooms or *svart trumpetsvamp* [black trumpet mushrooms]. Our harvest wasn't bountiful, but the walk was unforgettable. The wild blueberries were very small but much tastier than the big, commercially-grown varieties. We ended up with enough blueberries to toss on some (store-bought) ice cream; and, if I remember correctly, we each got one mushroom at dinner.

Rick and Cilla were good cooks, creative ones. I offered to make dinner, but that idea was dismissed in favor of a contribution towards dinner supplies, purchased of at the island's little commissary. That store offered a remarkable range of goods; basically, anything you'd need to survive on the island if Söderboud were cut-off from the mainland for any reason. They had food, fuel (including booze), hardware and building materials—like a mini combo of Costco and Home Depot.

Saying goodbye to my Swedish friends was difficult; it was hard to keep a smile; I felt feel like it might have been the last time I'd see them. It's hard to imagine life ending; however, the grains of time slip inexorably through the hour glass.

2014 – Vietnam & Cambodia – Honeymoon

Three weeks after returning from Sweden, Pam and I were off again, this time to see Asia. Pam wanted to see Vietnam, where her good friend, Ron, had gone to live.

When Ron left Vancouver, to live in Nha Trang, he gave Pam his favorite chair together with a mask of a Vietnamese girl carved from wood. I think they were in love with each other (vicariously, not actually—he was a gay man and she was also gay, for a while, at least.).

The chair became Pam's favorite, she reads books in it every day for hours. The mask became a memorial candle that Pam recently kept lit during Ron's recent [2013] losing battle with cancer; the still faces her (hahaha), in our bedroom. [Update—January, 2019: The mask has gone; Pam said one night that it was time to let it go; I don't know what happened to it.]

Love and jealousy aside, Ron had gone to live in Nha Trang [a bit more than halfway down the east coast of Vietnam] and had nothing but good things to say about living there (especially the cheap beer).

Another place Pam wanted to see was Angkor Wat, in Cambodia. I was keen on that idea; my travel-writer friend, Allan Seiden, who spent a week there, told me that he could have spent a month. Coming from Seiden, that was quite a testimonial.

We booked a thirty-day tour of the two countries, from late September to early October, to avoid the autumn monsoon season.

Vietnam was a whirlwind excursion—a city a day—by trains and buses. My experiences taking trains in India, Italy and Poland had taught me to be careful and thorough booking reservations—to always aim for first class, possibly settle on second class, and avoid third class at all costs. Sometimes we had a four-bunk cabin, but not always. Many days we just sat with the riff raff. While we watched the scenery, the locals watched blaring CCTV screens playing garish Vietnamese movies and TV game shows, night and day.

On every ride, we were the only white folk. We got stared-at a lot; but we were otherwise treated as one of the crowds; a minor oddity, at best.

Most of the other passengers were peasants; they had no manners. One scruffy old man had the nerve to put his feet in my lap when he snoozed; I let him know that was not OK; he gave me a look as if to say, “What’s with you, Mac?” That said, aside from the peasants we encountered on trains, just about everyone else we met was totally polite.



That’s Pam in the blue shirt.

Generally speaking, people everywhere were enthusiastic and friendly. They made me realize that Vietnam was a country on the move, a star rising in the East.

Vietnam had the same high energy as Malaysia; everyone had jobs that they were doing with dedication and ambition—even the shoe-shine boy. For example, on our first walk-about, while we were waiting for a traffic light, one enterprising lad ~~conned~~ talked me into letting him repair my Skechers running shoes. He said he could rejuvenate my high mileage shoes on the spot. His come-on was a price of \$10; but it ended up \$40. I could have bought a brand-new pair of knock-off Nikes for that price. From then on, I bargained!

When we arrived, we stayed at the Angel Palace hotel in Hanoi; another of Pam’s friends had recommended the place, and so would I—everything was super there.

The food was so good that we ate there most evenings; and the staff was particularly helpful, with travel advice. Of course, they were interested in booking tours, for which they would receive commissions. However, I had made all our arrangements well in advance, back in Vancouver.



Nonetheless, when they heard that we were heading to Ha Long Bay they recommended we take the high-speed boat, for \$25 each. I hadn't heard of that alternative; I already had train and bus tickets for \$20 each, so we declined the boat offer. That was a mistake.

The train from Hanoi to Hai Phong was the sleaziest of all our train trips. Because it was our first train trip, it was cause to worry about what lay ahead during our planned 1,200-mile [1,800 km] trip by rail, down the east coast of Vietnam, from Hai Phong to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon).

At the Hai Phong train station dozens of drivers hustled us; we hunted down a Mai Linh cab (they had a good TripAdvisor rating). We told the driver to take us to the bus for Ha Long; but, there was no bus station where he took us, just a solitary bus—a well-worn old beater—parked at the side of the road, ready to leave, impatiently waiting for us.

The situation seemed suspiciously odd; but there was no time to think and zero alternatives. We were pressured into a quick cash transaction and hurriedly climbed aboard, grabbing two seats on a milk-run bus that stopped every mile or so, to pickup roadside passengers, packages, even pets. The ~~ticket~~ cash collector hung out by the (open) back door most of the time, or else he sat next to the driver and dialed-in ~~annoying~~ loud Vietnamese rock music on his boom box. At first, I was angry that I somehow got us roped into the strange ride; then, the whole thing morphed into an amusing reality show, trucking along with *real* Vietnamese.

Our bus wasn't traveling along the main highway; there were no signs in English pointing out where we were. As the seaside approached, I could see towering limestone islets on the horizon. I got up and reminded the ticket guy that we wanted off at Ha Long Bay. He didn't speak a word of English (except pop-song lyrics); everything we "said" to each other was done with gestures; I wasn't sure he understood.

I got nervous when the bus approached the Bãi Cháy Bridge [over the Cửa Lục Straits, connecting Hông Gai with Bãi Cháy]; but the bus stopped 100 meters shy of the bridge and we were ushered off, onto the shoulder of the road at the last exit. We were left in the middle of nowhere, with all our stuff. Now what?

As we watched the bus drive away across the bridge, I began to wonder if there had been a misunderstanding; had the bus driver mistakenly let us off too soon? There was nobody around to ask for help, and two possible ways for us to go: over the bridge or down a step, winding road that led who knows where.

Having anticipated just such an occurrence, we donned our backpacks and readied ourselves for the strenuous trek across the bridge when a man on a Vespa started circling us. He spoke (very) broken English but we understood him well enough to know that we should take the road down the hill instead of hiking across the bridge.

I mistakenly thought he was offering to ride us into town because he kept circling around us. Remembering the shoe-guy scam in Hanoi, I tried to explain that we wouldn't fit on his bike. We left him and started down the hill on foot; but he kept circling us.

Then a proper taxi showed up and it became clear that he was protecting us, that he had called the taxi for us. The cyclist gave us a wave as he drove off and the cab took us down to the Sai Gon Ha Long hotel.



The hotel was tourist factory—a tower with hundreds of rooms. Guests arrived there by the bus load; one evening, I counted the arrival of fourteen.

Fortunately, I booked one of the hotel's exclusive garden apartments.

Amazingly, we had the pool to ourselves; it was a secluded spot; like a private spa.

[Spoiler Alert: on our return trip, from Ha Long to Hanoi, we took the speedboat recommended by Angel hotel; that was a delightful trip that included lunch!]

We skipped the Halong Bay cruise ships (of which there were 500!).

Instead, we booked passage to Monkey Island Resort on the east side of Cát Hải (Cat Island).

That way, we got to cruise through Halong Bay on our way to the resort and had a tour of Cat Island, to boot.



Photos by Pam Swanson.

Crossing Halong Bay was a disappointment; the otherwise impressive United Nations heritage site was despoiled, littered with so much plastic flotsam and jetsam—mostly tossed overboard by local fishermen—as to make it repugnant. Imagine the Grand Canyon or the Redwood Forest, littered with trash and excrement; that was the scale of the eco-vandalism at Halong Bay.

At Monkey Island, the situation was a bit improved; yet, every morning two dedicated staff boys collected several wheel-barrows full of junk combed from the beaches—plastic flotsam that floated in with the over-night tides; such a shame.

We got to Monkey Island well ahead of the crowds; the resort was in the process of re-opening after considerable refurbishment from storm damages. Dock renovations were on going on while we were there, and the disco was a work in progress. On the plus side, with the resort half empty, we had the place pretty much to ourselves.

Our thatched-roof bungalow was clean and comfortable; there were about thirty of them, each a mini apartment; most were tucked into a hillside palm-tree grove.

We were lucky to get one of the twelve facing the sea; we stepped out of our front door right onto the beach.



Among other activities, we hiked across the island, took a kayaking trip around it and got a mild sunburn.

We met a fun couple at dinner—Richie and Jena Anstis—from Melbourne, Australia, on their honeymoon.



PPhotos by Pam Swanson.

I don't remember how we ended up at their table, or they at ours; probably because we were the only white people at the resort.

We first met Jena and Richie on the ferry from Ha Long to Cat Island. When the ferry landed, there was a mad scramble for cabs and busses; people went their own ways.

We didn't see them again until we found them on the patio, watching the sunset. The handsome young couple and the glorious sunset looked like a scene straight out of a travel commercial.

Jena and Richie were hard-core party animals; we had a blast with them. The two were demolitions specialists that contracted their services to western-Australian strip miners.

Their jobs entailed laying and detonating a few thousand pounds of explosives along a one-mile [1.6 km] "strip," to expose ore. The pair was paid a fortune for their dangerous work (and paid a fortune for life insurance). Talk about living in the Now: Richie and Jena lived their lives to the fullest; they spent like sailors and drank until the they dropped. Was it because they spent the better part of their lives flirting with death?

For example, during dinner (the food was great, so was the service) Jena polished off a fifth [750 ml] of Patron *Silver* tequila, while Richie polished off an entire quart-bottle of Johnny Walker *Black Label* scotch whiskey, mixed with Cokes. (Yuk!)

After dinner, we went with them to the disco and rocked with the locals. Our Australian friends had been there the night before and were already legends. The locals bought Richie shooters and beers to keep him on stage, singing (sort of) Karaoke. I couldn't believe that any human being could drink so much. I tried to keep up (the booze was cheap and the locals were buying) but couldn't. Pam and I hit the hay way before them; in the distance, I could hear the revelers partying in the clifftop disco until dawn. I wonder if the dynamic duo even remembers us—or if they're still alive.

Spending that evening with honeymooners was a reminder that Pam and I were on our own "honeymoon" excursion. When we married in 2009, Pam's dad gave us \$5,000, towards a honeymoon; but the circumstances weren't right then; I was embroiled with moving my business back to Vashon Island and re-roofing the house; plus, everyone was feeling the effects of the 2008 financial collapse.

Bill Swanson no doubt viewed our marriage in a more conventional light; however, ours was a marriage of minds, not of passion. As I explained earlier, we were good friends who wanted to simplify our dealings with Canadian and US immigration authorities. Our relationship was built on friendship and deep conversations that revealed common interests. When Pam and I met, I was already on the down side of the libido curve; I needed those little blue pills. That was more demoralizing than advertisements would have you believe; and, while the pills may have overcome erectile dysfunction, they didn't improve sensations from nerves that no longer feel anything.⁵²

We could have stayed at Monkey Island a week or two; alas, we had only two days. After speed-boating back to Hanoi, we took a stroll around West Lake, for a last look at the city and Trãn Quốc Pagoda, before having dinner at the Angel hotel, where we were staying.

The next morning, we got the train for Da Nang; it was a long, over-night trip. I wish we had planned a stopover in Da Nang; it was the newest, most developed city that we saw, bar none—a pristine, oceanside gem.

We cabbled the short ride from the Da Nang railroad station to Hội An and checked into the Vaia Boutique Hotel; I picked another winner with that hotel. (It pays to put in your due diligence researching hotels—I spent 10 hours researching Vietnam hotels before booking any.)

⁵² As with everything else I do, if I can't do sex right, I don't want to do it. Pam is super attractive and was, for all practical purposes, a virgin. However, between my physical difficulties and her lack of experience our times were awkward and sometimes bumbling. Once in a while, we would get it right. One such time was on a summer afternoon when we were sunbathing nude on the back deck of Birdland, all greased up and gleaming in the noonday sun. I climbed aboard and we had a great ride; it was so good that I knew nothing could top it... and nothing ever did. In the slide-show business, we used to say, "You're as good as your last show." I want Pam to remember me that afternoon, not by some feeble, pathetic attempts I might try now. Willy Nelson was quoted as exclaiming, "I out-lived my dick." I totally get that. For most of my life, I have had chronic testosterone deficiencies due to an inherited blood condition (leukemia); everything worked until one day it didn't. Without the power struggles associated with sex, our relationship has blossomed into a keener friendship; life together has become more peaceful, more wistful; holding hands and cuddling mean so much more now.

Vaia was spacious, with a Scandinavian style, i.e. minimalist; its location was perfect—just a short walk to the touristy center of Hội An, but far enough away from the hubbub to be quiet at night.

We did a walk-about through the historic parts of the town; it had been transformed into some kind of caricature of itself (like many of the other places we visited). Hội An was once an important trading hub, dating back to the 1500s; however, tourism had long since become the riverside city's *raison d' être*. What little authenticity was left had a Disneyesque veneer. The experience was also spoiled by in-your-face shop clerks and street hawkers. Wherever we went, desperate vendors came after us, selling any of a million kinds of things; some would come right up, stop us, and demand, "Mister, you buy something!" In retrospect, I should have taught her the word, "please."



We found sanctuary from the tempestuous traders in a Buddhist temple which was remarkably free of tourists.

The monks seemed surprised when we came in; we burned some incense, made a fairly substantial donation, and left with a handful of *Milagros* (votive charms).

Photos by Pam Swanson.

Another highlight was the huge, commercial-food bazaar; the diversity of ingredients was as staggering as the (low) prices; stuff that costs nickels and dimes in Vietnam sells for dollars back in North America.

After a leisurely riverside stroll along Bạch Đằng, we had dinner at a swank restaurant on Nguyễn Thái Học; there were so many restaurants that it was hard to choose; each was a little gem, filled with artworks and fancy furnishings. We lucked out with a balcony table on the mezzanine, overlooking the street and the goings-on in the restaurants across from us; all of them were packed, making money hand over fist.

It was hard to imagine that in less than two months, when the monsoon rains came, the whole town would flood and remain under water for several months. Shop keepers and restaurateurs cope by moving their stuff from the first floors to the second. Every year, the lower floors of every building need to be renovated, repainted and redecorated. Talk about tenacity! It was hard to imagine that many of the galleries and shops we were visiting would vanish under water in just a few weeks, after we left.

While on the subject of food, with the exception of the Angel Hotel, I was underwhelmed with most of our meals; Vietnamese isn't one of the world's *haute cuisines*; there was little variety and a sameness to everything—kind of like eating in Greece, where every restaurant offers the same selections. By contrast, in places like China, Malaysia, Thailand and India, there is an endless variety of culinary originality.

On the other hand, we didn't have too many opportunities to splurge on dinner; most days we ate in our hotel; some of those meals were exceptional.

At the Sai Gon Ha Long hotel, we inadvertently became party to a huge banquet. That hotel is an enormous one, capable of handling twenty bus-loads of tourists at a clip. The breakfast room seated 300, offering an all-you-can-eat buffet with dozens of dishes—foods from all nations.

We had another feast at a seaside restaurant near the Sai Gon Ha Long. The popular place was right on the beach. It was already packed when we got there; apologetically, they offered to set up a table for us outdoors. Ha!

There was no need to apologize--we *loved* being outdoors; our table looked out across the bay with a commanding view of Halong Bay, the impressive Bãi Cháy Bridge and the Cửa Lục Straits beyond; stars twinkled in the sky as did the lights of distant Bảo Tàng Quảng Ninh, shimmering sparkles, dancing on waves gently stirred by the wonderfully-warm sea breeze.

The menu was ridiculously inexpensive. The waitress was astonished when I ordered five dishes; she could barely make it all fit on our table. After our meal was under way, another table was set-up across from ours, for the staff and their kids. I couldn't help noticing the contrast between our spread and theirs. They also had five dishes; but theirs served eight people, not two. It was embarrassing; but the food was damn good and I ate it all.

Nha Trang was our next stop. This was the place that instigated and was the focal point of our trip, where her friend Ron lived. As fate would have it, Ron wasn't there; he had gone back to Vancouver, to deal with health and money issues. How ironic is that?

Nha Trang, by contrast to Da Nang, was a mature beach resort, a favorite with Russian tourists. (Imagine Miami Beach, with beefy Russians all over the place.) The contrast between the rich Russian oligarchs and local peasants was palpable; I was reminded of a moniker used a generation earlier—the so-called *Ugly American*. But I am getting ahead of myself.

We rented an apartment at Cozy Condos; it was another good choice, the best value of the entire trip. Cozy Condos is run like a boutique hotel; it's right in the center of town, just a few blocks from the beach. We were treated like royalty. Doan Lan Huong, the hotel's owner and director, knew we were going to be arriving late. She left a big basket of fruit for us, together with a giant floral bouquet and a very welcoming note. Our room—a full apartment, actually—was snazzy, well-appointed and well equipped, especially the kitchen (breakfast was included, served in a rooftop dining lounge). We never cooked there; it was more fun eating out.

We hunted down a restaurant that Ron had spoken so highly of, only to find it was a real dive; its saving grace was serving the cheapest beer in town—about 25¢ a glass—for a watered-down brew that was 2.5% at best. (That cheap beer probably explained Ron's liver disease.)

We got some Phở (soup) and headed off to spend the afternoon at a beach resort where rich Russian men (as measured by their girth) entertain either weighty wives or curvaceous concubines.



We managed to get up the courage to dive into the sea.

The surf was heavy that afternoon, kicked up by a stiff breeze.

An acrobatic kite-boarder zoomed back and forth just a few yards [meters] from us, launching himself into the air off the five foot [1.5-meter] waves.

Richie and Jena (our Monkey Island friends) had told us about the fun times they had on a *flyboard* (aka *hoverboard*),⁵³ an expensive aquatic fad. I wanted to try it; but it was way too costly... like \$500 for a one-hour ride. Watching bravado boys trying it, without much success, I calculated that it would take me at least two hours of trying to successfully ride a hoverboard; I reckoned I knew better ways to blow a thousand bucks.



In Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) we stayed at the Ngoc Linh Hotel; it was a Spartan experience, a tiny room with a bare-bones bathroom—a far cry from the relative luxuries we had been experiencing. When I went to turn on the bedside light, it exploded!

We got to know the manager a bit better because of that; he turned out to be a swell fellow and quite helpful, as was his partner-wife, who cooked and served breakfast every day. They work a long day; 6:00 am 'till midnight. Despite its odd location—on the edge of downtown, behind a Burger King store [at 284 Phạm Ngũ Lão, a back alley off the boulevard (Phạm Ngũ Lão)]—I grew to like the Ngoc Linh Hotel.

Backpacker alley photo by Pam Swanson.

⁵³ Wikipedia: A Flyboard is a brand of hydroflight device which supplies propulsion to drive the Flyboard into the air to perform a sport known as hydroflying. A Flyboard rider stands on a board connected by a long hose to a watercraft.

The area was full of little hotels like ours.

There were bazillions of back-packer tourists, and dozens of restaurants serving them.

On our first night, we chose a fabulous Indian joint that turned out to be so good we went back another night.

However, our best and fanciest meal was at a Vietnamese restaurant recommended by our hotel.



Photo by Pam Swanson.

Getting to that place was a hike; it was clear across town, on Pasteur Street; but it was worth the long walk there and back. Sure, we could have taken cabs, but then it would have been another drive-by experience and we would have missed so much. We also could have taken a pedicab; but we got ripped off by a pair of con-artist pedicab drivers on our first afternoon in Saigon, and declined all others after that.

We only had three days in Saigon, but we made the most of them; we visited nearly all the top tourist spots. The War Museum sticks in my memory; what I saw and learned there was utterly contrary to the American meme of that tragic war, the one fed to Americans by schools and the MSM [Main Stream Media]; what I saw there made me glad that I left the USA to live in Canada.

The National Museum of History also caught our interest; their extensive exhibits about the anthropology and arts of Southeast Asia—the evolution and differentiation of contemporary Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos—filled me in on chapters of history that weren't taught where I went to school.

The Museum of Fine Arts rounded out the cultural part of our itinerary. Pam loves art museums, but they drive me nuts; how does something like *that* get hung in a museum? As you know, I think the art business is a racket.

For general interest, we visited Independence Palace (from which Nguyen Van Thieu commanded South Vietnamese forces during the War), shopped at Bến Thành Market, and had afternoon snacks at the observatory restaurant on the 49th floor of Bitexco Tower, the tallest new skyscraper in the rapidly developing city. There was more, much more, but I will spare you the details.

Photos by Pam Swanson.



The two best things about the Ngoc Linh Hotel were that it was just a short walk to a fabulous French-style bakery, as well as the sales office of Mekong Express, the bus company we booked for our trip from Saigon to Phnom Penh, the capitol of Cambodia.

As I explained earlier, I did my due diligence when it came to booking trains and buses in Vietnam; there were plenty of horror stories on the internet, posted by unhappy passengers. I worked my way through a hundred reviews and drew my own conclusions, which turned out to be the right choices. Our trip on Mekong Express was as pleasant as any bus trip I have made anywhere; the only problem was the condition of the roads. Most of Cambodia's main roads were still unpaved, resulting in tortuous, teeth-jarring rides across washboard dirt roads, lurching to avoid cows and chickens crossing the roads, blasting through villages with horns a-honking, way too fast.

When we crossed the Mekong River, between Vietnam and Cambodia, the small ferry was so overloaded that I feared we'd sink; peasant vendors offered dried and pickled fish (yuk).

On the other side of the river, at Neak Loung, we were held up at Cambodian immigration. One of my forms wasn't accepted, resulting in new fees and a half-hour delay. I knew I was getting ripped off, but decided to go with the flow. Aside from those minor bumps in the road, my trepidations were for naught; we had nary a problem wherever we went and stayed at some of the best hotels.

2014 – Cambodia – Fading Fast

Pam chose Cambodia to see the temples, Angkor Wat in particular.

Cambodia was more authentic than Vietnam; less Westernized; more like India. The attractions were real places, not amusement parks.

In Phnom Penh, we stayed at the Eureka Villas Hotel; it exceeded expectations, as had the Mekong Express bus trip.

We walked the entire city and saw just about everything. Compared to Saigon or Hanoi, Cambodia's capital is a small city.



We spent a full afternoon at the Royal Palace, then visited another Buddhist Wat and strolled along the mile-long [1.6 km] riverside in search of a restaurant for dinner.

Photo by Pam Swanson.



Over at least a hundred competitors, an Indian place caught our eye. We were getting tired of Asian food, there's a sameness to all of it. Indian cuisine has a wider range of flavors and textures.



Photos by Pam Swanson.

Odd businesses occupied storefronts tucked between tourist-oriented shops and restaurants. One such oddity was a coffin shop. Imagine having a coffin showroom at your local mall! Such peculiarities and juxtapositions revealed that Cambodia was still very much a Third World country.

Despite considerable PR efforts to improve their image, poverty persists on a scale that belies Cambodia's corrupt government. Outright, in-your-face corruption has been replaced with a softer version; backsheesh is being distributed more equitably, to an expanding class of élites who participate in lifestyles that were only recently exclusive reserved for aristocrats. Cambodian society, like all others, is run by a so-called Deep State; an interconnected *Intelligencia* representing the commercial side of the reformed ruling fascist oligarchy.

To digress for a moment, about Cambodian corruption: A taxi driver confirmed my assessments of Cambodian society. We got into a conversation during the hour-long, seven-mile [12 km] ride to the airport, from Eureka Villa, on our last day. He was a brilliant chap and had a handle on what was what in his country. We had plenty of time to chat; the traffic jams were like parking lots.

As our driver explained it, the élites give people just enough to keep them from acting up. Lamentably, commerce was being stifled by the corruption surrounding efforts to suppress people, to make them debt slaves. The cabbie complained that educated people, like him, were relegated to robotic lives as taxi drivers or other such brainless occupations.

Poverty of any kind depresses me. Urban poverty is the cruelest. I was happy to get out of the city and into the countryside, where people may be poor but they seem happier and more or less content with their quality of life. Cities are unforgiving, not good places to be poor.

For example, at Pandey's village, in Khumhati, India, I watched people living in what you'd likely label abject poverty; yet the village had its act together; people cooperated to enable a clean and healthy lifestyle despite their deprivations.

We took a bus to get from Phnom Penh to the Angkor temples. The countryside changed abruptly at the edge of the city, becoming a vast region of rural farmers living in little clusters, smaller than villages, possibly they were family compounds, like the Pandeys. Then, out of nowhere, a pocket of civilization would suddenly appear, an oasis with fuel, food and supplies.

Siem Reap, the city servicing Angkor Wat tourists, sprawled across the jungle landscape, dissolving in and out of it at its edges, where our hotel was located.

I figured the taxi driver misunderstood me; he drove well out of the city and dropped us off by a little gate bearing the name of our hotel. There was no hotel in sight; everything was hidden behind dense foliage. A bit worried, I asked the taxi driver to wait, while I investigated the situation further. My frowns turned upside down as I walked through the gate and entered the private world of the Hanuman Boutique Hotel.



The Hanuman, named after a Hindu God believed to be the remover of obstacles,⁵⁴ turned into the finest hotel experience of the entire trip, earning a place on the Top-Ten Hotels of My Life list. Hanuman felt more like a spa resort than "just" a hotel. Set back in the jungle at the edge of town, Hanuman was deliciously quiet at night. We were soothed into slumber by the distant sound of poolside water fountains.

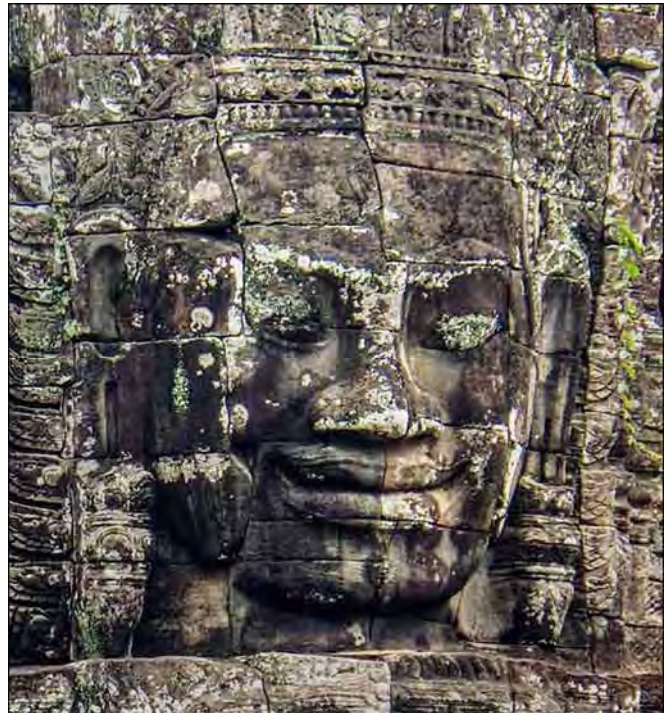
⁵⁴ Wikipedia: God of Strength, Knowledge and Bhakti; Lord of Celibacy and Victory; Supreme destroyer of evil; and protector of devotees.

Hanuman was also filled with art, real art, from sculpture to carvings and paintings, right down to flower arrangements and napkin folding. Appropriately, the hotel runs an art gallery, located across the street, selling exclusive, top quality Cambodian art and antiquities. Hanuman's chef prepared meals that enticed us back every night, save one. Most nights, nobody else ate at the hotel; it was like having our own private dining room, by a jungle waterfall with a secluded pool. Magic!

Angkor Wat was a primary motivation for our trip; no expense was too small.

For our first foray into the huge region of ruins, I booked a private chauffeur with the help of the concierge at the Hanuman. We opted for a "luxurious" car (a normal sedan, last-year's model—even those are a luxury in Cambodia).

We previously decided that we didn't need guides; they would have just have slowed us down, with their blah blah blah. Pam already knew everything we needed to know; she just wanted to take pictures at as many temples as we could squeeze into our abbreviated schedule. High on her list were Ta Prohm, Neak Pean, Preah Khan, Banteay Srei, and Pre Rup. So, to save a buck, we just hired a car & driver.



[Note to Self: Never be a chauffeur at Angkor Wat; the place is so huge that chauffeurs have to hang around for hours and hours waiting for their clients to return, never knowing when they will.]

Our chauffeur, Seyha, had the patience of a saint. We hired him for a second day, to see "what's Wat" in Siem Reap.

Truth be told, we cheated on the hotel by making a private deal with Seyha.

The staff at the front desk were kind of (unpleasantly) surprised when Seyha came to pick us up a second day, which they hadn't booked. I worried that Seyha might have done himself a dis-service, by making a private deal with us; the hotel might want to and blacklist him.



Driver Seyha with Pamela Swanson, 2014.

Seyha's fate is another of those million things I'll never know. Curiously, Seyha is actually a Cambodian girl's name. I reckon our chauffeur was likely a gay guy; evidence for my assumption were Seyha's fingernails; he grew one of his pinky fingernails to a length of three inches! (Pam remembers his name as Seeha; but there's no such Cambodian name, at least that I can find.)

We could have used a few more days to appreciate both the macro and micro aspects of the many Wats and the civilizations that built them. There was way too much for just a couple of days, which is all we had. I was glad not to have a camera; I might still be there! ...and, if I had one, my shots would compete directly with John McDermott's work. McDermott is an American photographer known as the Ansel Adams of Angkor.

His collection of images looked like the kind of pictures that I used to take, during my early career, when I was shooting infra-red film with ultra-wide lenses. When I saw his work at a gallery, in Siem Reap, I fairly turned green.]

At Angkor Wat, I saw with my own eyes the full extent and impact of China's growth, development and influence of their rising middle class—the place was overrun with Chinese tourists. To be politically incorrect but totally candid for a moment, I used to think that Germans and so-called "Ugly Americans" were the most boorish tourists. Let me tell you, the Chinese tourists at Angkor Wat were the rudest bunch I've ever encountered, anywhere. They just barged right in, huge packs of them led by tour directors waving group-identification flags.



We went early, hoping to get some clean shots of the Wat, without people. Forget that. It was nearly impossible to get any shots that weren't photo-bombed by one or more slant-eyes. To think that the Chinese are still in the early stages of gentrification. Ye gods, I'm glad we made our trip before bazillions more of them make it onto the middle class!

[Hot Tip: buy Chinese airline stocks.]

By contrast, when Pam and I visited the Statue of Liberty; the ferry and terminals were jam packed with tourists from all over; yet, everyone was polite. At Angkor Wat, Chinese tour leaders paraded their herds through the place with a sense of ownership, totally disregarding others, even stampeding them. I just wanted to push those Chinks off the edge. Ha!



Back on point, the experience was not insignificant. We hung around long enough and dove deep enough to elude the throngs. Deep in the corners, in solitude, one could appreciate the immensity of the temple as an art project. The temples were giant sculptures, ornamented beyond belief.

The stuff at Angkor Wat was on the same scale as the carving of Hindu Vedas into the marble walkway around the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India; simply monumental in scale.

Pam and I longed for those moments, alone, with the ruins; in the Now, being Then. We went our separate ways for a while, but didn't want to lose one another (it's a big place).

Around one particular bend, I encountered a person who I presumed to be a monk, not a beggar. What was this asexual old being doing here? (Begging) I got suckered in; it was like a moment in a play; I wanted to run into a holy person; I expected to; and there she was, reclining against a sleeping dragon; the juxtaposition was existential.

(I reckoned it was a woman until I did some work on the picture and looked at it up closely; now I have my doubts; could'a been a monk, not a monkette. But for purposes of this story, he's a she.)

I saw that there were strands of colored string piled before her.

She beckoned me toward her and tied a strand of orange-red string around my left wrist. While tying the knots she looked me in the eye and said something.

I hoped it was significant and gave her way more than I should have. (Don't want to spoil 'em, eh?) Then, I pulled out my camera. How could she say no? Ha!



To finish-up the trip with some fun, we spent our last week at the famous beach town, Sihanoukville, and Koh Rong, a nearby island. In Sihanoukville we were booked us into a luxury suite at a beachfront hotel—the Serendipity Beach Resort Hotel. On Koh Rong island, I arranged for what was advertised as an authentic grass-shack-style tree house at the island’s biggest and most influential resort: Coco Bungalows. Things didn’t turn out quite as planned.



Arrows point to our room. Pam Swanson pics.

The Serendipity turned out to be the biggest and the best of a meager bunch. The problem was that the hotel was right on the beach. When I booked online, I reckoned the beachfront location was a feature attribute. However, in this case, there were also a few dozen discos and clubs, crowded together along the entire length of the beach, competing for tourists with cheap drinks.

Each night, there was a battle of the bands; each joint tried to out-blast their competitors with sound systems that pounded disco beats right through the concrete walls and double-pane windows of our hotel.

The first night we didn’t get to sleep until the discos closed at 4:00 am. The next night, we got a reprieve when a spectacular electrical storm swept in with pouring rain that forced the clubs to give it up at 11:00 pm [23:00].



Photo by Pam Swanson.

On Koh Rong also, things weren’t quite as advertised. Our deluxe resort was actually well worn. In the grass shack that we were assigned, we were greeted by a mother cat and four new kittens, trying to get some shut-eye on the bed. I don’t know who was more surprised, the two of us, the cats, or the resort manager, who made good on the predicament by moving us into their best shack.

We were perched at the top of the hill, with a commanding view of the surrounding seascape.

Needless to say, we were thrilled with our hilltop tree house; that was until I noticed that a cookie left on the table wasn't there anymore, when we returned from the beach. I reckoned the cleaner probably nicked it.



But around midnight I discovered the thief was more likely the same rat that was now exploring the shelves adjacent to my pillow. Yikes!

My shouts abruptly woke Pam, who also jumped out of bed when I yelled, "Rats!" Between our flashlights, stomping and expletives, we managed to spook the intruders (and probably half the encampment). We never got a good night's sleep there, after that episode.

Our whole experience in southern Cambodia, especially Koh Rong and Sihanoukville, was one of being suckered in to yet another chimera, where things aren't what you thought they would be, and certainly weren't better.

It seemed like the hoteliers and restaurateurs on Koh Rong could care less what kind of experience we had, because dozens of visitors show up every day, and we would soon be replaced, never to be seen again. All they cared about was turnover, making their numbers.

They were on a mission, to get rich (and move to America). Greed will ultimately kill tourism at Koh Rong and possibly Sihanoukville; both destinations are over-booked, their facilities stressed out.

Photo by Pam Swanson.



Here are a few examples of what I mean:

Once we got to Koh Rong, we came to learn that Coco Bungalows was the biggest operation on the Island. They were in cahoots with Koh Rong Dive Center, ran the ferry and its port facility, and operated the Island's biggest restaurant/club, right at the end of the ferry dock, adjacent to their tree-top Coco Bungalows.

On our second day, we decided to eat at Coco's big, noisy, over-priced (by Island standards) restaurant. We were sitting comfortably at our table enjoying a cocktail and some finger food when there was a commotion in the thatched-palm roof above us. All sorts of bits and pieces of dried fronds and accumulated crap rained down over us. When I complained to the waitress she replied, "Oh that's the dog up there, we can't do anything about that...." I was outraged and we left immediately; I don't remember if I paid the bill or not; there certainly wasn't any gratuity. For her part, our waitress, who was also the owner, seemed to have cared less whether we came back or not; they had more business than they could handle.

It became clear to us that the whole Island was ecologically stressed; too many tourists were being pumped through than could be accommodated by the shoddy water and sewage infrastructure—that was a real Rube Goldberg affair. When we were being shown to our bungalow, the young gal leading the way explained that there might not be any water. What?

She turned out to have overstated the case; there was water throughout our stay, thank heavens; but you should have seen the jerry-rigged water collection and pipe system that spread across the hillside, behind the bungalows. The waste water plumbing was equally primitive; little rivulets of raw sewage ran down the hillsides, across the beach, into the otherwise reasonably clean waters (50-foot visibility) surrounding Koh Rong.



Photos by Pam Swanson.

Snorkeling was high on our to-do list; I wanted to rent some scuba gear and do a real dive—after all, Koh Rong got its name as a dive center; in fact that was the name of the business that started everything and continued to dominate the island's economy: Koh Rong Dive Center.

However, like the rest of the island, sea life had also seen better days. In fact, sea life and Koh Rong shouldn't be used in the same sentence anymore. Although the water was reasonably clear (not great), there wasn't much to see. There were no fish to speak of, the corals were few and far between and the entire sea bed was covered with a thin layer of some kind of fallout that was likely slowly suffocating what little life was left.

This was the first trip that I hadn't brought anything special to smoke or eat; the consequences of getting caught were just too extreme, especially with Pam in tow. There was nary a sign of cannabis anywhere we went, not even a random whiff blowing in the breeze—until we got to Koh Rong, where the sweet smell of Mary Jane was unmistakable.

Upon asking, I was informed that grass was sold over the counter at the coffee shop just a short way up the beach from Coco Bungalows. I walked by the place a few times before going in; everything checked out and it seemed quite out in the open, amazingly enough. The Island's one and only cop apparently turned a blind eye to the illegal ops (actually, to my eye, he looked stoned, too).

So, I went back to our bungalow and fetched a Benjamin Franklin [US\$ 100], not knowing how much things cost. It turned out to be a good deal—two joints for twenty bucks. I tucked the Js into my shirt pocket and the \$80 change into my shorts; but when I got back to our bungalow, the cash was gone; it must have slipped out when I reached in my pocket for a tissue. Yikes!

I zoomed back to the beach and searched stealthily; I even went back to the coffee shop to ask if anyone had turned in \$80 (hahaha). Those two turned into the most expensive joints I ever bought. Whatever. I savored one of the two, a puff at a time, while on Koh Rong, and saved the other for our last night in Cambodia, back at the Eureka Villa, in Phnom Penh.

On our last Koh Rong evening, Pam and I took a stroll down the beach at sunset. It was a magical moment. Despite Koh Rong's deficiencies, we had a great time. It was just the kind of fun place I had hoped for, to wrap up our otherwise educational Cambodian adventure. The world seemed at peace as our toes dabbled the sand between steps through the warm, clear sea.

As we waded our way down the beach, I heard some commotion behind us, back in the village. I turned to see what appeared to be a fire near the ferry dock and, as I watched, it grew to dangerous proportions before being extinguished. Later we learned that a fire dancer's routine went wrong when he accidentally kicked over his gas can.

Lord knows what would have happened if the ferry dock had gone up in flames; with an on-shore breeze the entire village—and our Coco Bungalow—would have been at risk of incineration.

After the excitement dies down, we chose the priciest restaurant on the beach; the offered a variety of curry-like dishes. I chose a chicken crêpe; that was a mistake (read on).

There were tight connections the day we left Koh Rong; I had made arrangements for a limo, through Mekong Express, to drive us from Sihanoukville back to Phnom Penh. The arrangements were for us to be picked up at the Serendipity Beach Resort at 3:00 pm, that time based on the ferry schedule. But the day we left; the ferry broke down. OMG!

We had no way to contact Mekong Express to notify them of our delay. We weren't alone either; another fifty or so folks had similar inconveniences. Eventually, everyone was packed onto the old, original ferry, which had long since been converted into a cargo scow.

Let me tell you, that ride was the original "slow boat to China." Traveling at maybe 8 or 9 knots [about the same in mph, or ~15 kmh], the scow barely left a wake. My blood pressure rose as I watched the clock tick away the hours.

Topping that off, when the boat arrived—at a remote part of a commercial harbor on the opposite side of the city, about as far away from Serendipity Beach as you could be—it poured rain.

We were herded like cattle into small, canvas-topped cargo trucks, with standing room only for most passengers (Pam and I were fortunate enough to score seats). As the truck lumbered through the flooded streets toward Serendipity Beach, the clock struck 3:00 pm [15:00]. My heart sank as I crossed my fingers.

Miraculously, although we arrived with a few minutes to spare, our ride had been delayed; so, we had time to go to the loo and buy some booze and snacks for the long bus ride back to Phnom Penh and the Eureka Villas.

Leaving Koh Rong, one of the ferry hands, a young Cambodian lad, passed us wearing a tee-shirt emblazoned with the moniker *All Gone, Koh Rong*; boy did that ring true.



To celebrate our last night in Siam we went to Phnom Penh's nicest riverside restaurant. We found it during our first explorations of Phnom Penh and decided to spend our last night there, even before we left the capitol for Angkor Wat and Koh Rong.

Our great expectations were not let down. We had a fabulous meal in a magically-romantic setting straight out of a tourism ad. The ambience was high class; this was possible Phnom Penh's premier eatery. I ordered enough for two and ate the whole enchilada; I paid dearly for that later, even though the check came to less than thirty bucks, with (a lot of) drinks.

Three times in my life I've gotten amoebic dysentery and every time it was from spoiled chicken. This time, the chicken's revenge began while we were still in Koh Rong; my bowels were in an uproar which just got worse as we plied our way back to Vancouver. In the final hours of our long flight from Taiwan, my innards went wild; I knew I was seriously ill; Pam knew it, too.

Cambodian washroom instructions. Photo by Pam Swanson.



We got home OK but the tightness in my abdomen stayed put and a day later, while Pam was out ~~boozing it up~~ with friends, it crept up to my chest and settled around my heart. I got short of breath and my heart started pounding; it scared the shit out of me; so I called Pam who rushed home from Shenanigans and escorted me to the ER at St. Paul's Hospital, where I was treated to Canada's finest life-saving services. There was going to be a wait, so I was given some Tylenol-3 to ease the pains in my chest—and that worked! In a half hour, I was feeling my old self; but they wouldn't let me go, insisting upon test after test, from chest X-rays to CT scans. (!) I can't imagine what my Cambodian meal cost the Canadian taxpayer... all for a stomach bug. On the other hand, I guess their precautions were justified; after all, I presented at the Emergency Room with what appeared to be a heart problem. If they had let me go and I happened to die they could be liable for negligence, if they hadn't done every possible test. Such is the nature of our litigious world. Oh well, better safe than sorry, eh? Thank you, Canada.

2014 – Pat Shipps Visit – Reconnections

Pat Shipps made a surprise appearance in Vancouver. She was doing a show at the Vancouver Convention Center. We met backstage. She was running the show and had put it together single-handedly with the help of freelancers. It was impressed that she was still producing; that she had adapted to digital media and production. After the show, she took a day off; Pam and I took her on an excursion to Whistler where we had lunch and toured the art galleries. It was an opportunity to catch up after having not seen each other since 1978, when Don O'Neill pirated her from Incredible Slidemakers; a move she came to regret.



Pamela Swanson photo.

2014 – Existential Depression – Indecision

Traveling around for the better part of a year was a good tonic for the stresses and strains of leaving Vashon. As long as we were on the move, I was distracted from the abeyant ennui lurking deep inside. When we got back from Asia, the depression hit. It began with the realization of my irrelevance. Having thrice lost my business, my *raison d'être*, there seemed no point to anything.

Why spend more effort building something that would likely be taken away by fate or circumstance? One must create one's own relevance, of course; but that is difficult to do when society disregards and even shuns you, which is what one encounters entering the so-called golden years.

They say that, to be happy, people need friends, family and an avocation that pleases them. All three of those were now missing from my life, aside from Pam. Pam's clan has become my default kin. My own sisters are estranged, and my other blood relatives are either dead or so distant that they might as well be. Even the Incredible clan, who were my surrogate children, have flown the coop, so to speak; I never hear from any of them anymore, except John Emms. Nor do I have any friends or colleagues to speak of here in Vancouver, except Ron Jacklin—and he moved to Mexico after his second wife unexpectedly died young, a victim of colon cancer.

And as for avocations, I have neither the space nor gear to produce pictures anymore, on a commercial basis. Besides, there is no market for them. Heck, can't even get rid of what I have left over from the heydays of Godard Gallery and Vashon Island Imaging; a few hundred of them are squeezed into one of our small condo bedrooms, gathering dust.

[Spoiler Alert: In an attempt to alleviate the art-storage problem, I tried The Great Picture Give-Away in 2017. I sat by the chain-link fence at the tennis courts across from our condo, displaying two or three canvases. When someone asked how much, that's when I told them that the work was free. That flabbergasted most folks. "Free?" they'd ask, "You should sell these in a gallery." Ha! Oh sure, I suppose that I could ask some crazy low price, like fifteen or twenty bucks; but that would more of an "insult" (to the work) than simply giving it to deserving folks. Pam suggested that I bring them all to Value Village, a big thrift shop chain here in BC; but that is too impersonal; plus, a lot of starving artists shop there for supplies; they use the canvases for their own pictures, painting over other artists' works. No thank you. I also advertised the Great Picture Giveaway on my website and, amazingly, have gotten absolutely zero results—not even one inquiry, after more than a year of promotion.]

After stewing in my own juices for a few months, idleness gnawed at me; so, I applied for a few jobs. I sought work to fill the time doing something meaningful that I enjoy. I want(ed) to work in areas where I have skills—making pictures and picture shows; but next to nobody needed those to hire those skills anymore. Using modern devices and apps, they could do it all themselves. Thus, I was (am) technologically redundant. I reckoned the perfect jobs for me were at frame shops or printing shops (there weren't any film labs anymore). After updating my resume, I approached three local businesses and was turned down by each. Serial rejections took the wind out of my sails and I sank deeper into an existential depression. I was unaccustomed to being rejected; not so long ago, I was a highly sought-after talent. Although some extra income would have been nice (we were living off Social Security) not just any job would do. I was not about to be a greeter at Walmart or a burger flipper; I didn't need money that badly; besides, any income I earned would cut into the Guaranteed Income Supplement that I receive from the BC government—thank you, Canada. (If the combined income of Pam and I exceeds a certain amount (~\$41,000 in 2018) we lose the income supplement altogether.) So, it wasn't about money—unless we happened to earn a lot of it. Ha!

There was volunteer work of course. Pam reminded about how her father came out of retirement and, in his 70s, went to Papua New Guinea for the Royal Canadian Legion, Canada's version of the US Peace Corps. But I am not altruistic enough for that sort of thing; and I detest *do-gooders*. I guess I read too much Ayn Rand.

[Spoiler Alert: I might have considered something like the Peace Corps after I finish writing this memoir; it could be a good way to see some interesting parts of the world; and maybe Pam and I could work together. But now some serious health issues have emerged; I am having a kidney removed in a few weeks [September, 2017], and my spleen is nearly as big as a football.]

With nothing else to do, I spent my mornings following the markets on TV, pretending to be a highfalutin investor. Every day, there'd be stories about financiers who'd made money on this or that stock, or bonds. I reckoned I could do that, too. After all, Filip Järnehag was making money playing the Stockholm bourse; and my Vashon Island FedEx driver made money (albeit not much) trading penny stocks.

To that end, I harvested financial data from Bloomberg BNN and made Excel spreadsheets of more than 100 stocks, tracking the number of times each got mentioned and the opinions of pundits. I stayed 100% liquid, 100% hedged with precious metals. None of my cash was tied to bank-savings plans. I was ready to pounce when the market crashed; ready to pick-up blue-chip stocks at bargain prices when the opportunity arose.

[Spoiler Alert: The market never crashed; it still hasn't (2019). Instead, the market morphed into a command-and-control economy run by machines issuing algos (algorithms) that trade fiat digital currencies given arbitrary values. That became evident to me after a year spent following MSM [Main Stream Media] financial pundits; it was like listening to the same record; like going to church, where the same litany is endlessly incanted. You know, the same ol' same ol'. A year later, I turned off the TV.]

For a while, Pam would invite me to join her on a mid-day walk around Lost Lagoon; it was the highlight of my day. That was until my taciturn melancholia intruded on the Lagoon's peaceful tranquility. Then she stopped inviting me. I couldn't blame her; I was robbing Pam of her moments of Zen. Pam has a passion for photographing the wildlife there, particularly birds. Although I didn't mind pausing as long as it took to get her shots, I think she felt pressured. Eventually, she stopped asking me.



Lost Lagoon Heron by Pam Swanson, 2019.

To digress for a moment, about Pam's photography: She takes pictures of birds wherever we go. I first noticed her interest in photography when she visited Vashon Island back in 2008. Through the windows behind her desk, there was a bird's eye view (pardon the pun) of the pond behind the house.

Bird feeders hanging over the pond attracted a couple of dozen regulars—towhees, chickadees, juncos, finches and hummingbirds—as well as a couple of resident squirrels and raccoons.



Photos by Pam Swanson.

Having her favorite subjects close at hand, to photograph as easily as shooting fish in a barrel, lit a fire in Pam; it's a fire that is still burning bright. In the years since, Pam's photography has morphed from advanced amateur to professional quality.

Last Christmas (2017), I splurged on a pricey long lens—a Pentax 150-450 mm telephoto—that became her new favorite and edged her work several notches higher. Although she could be making good money selling her exceptional nature pictures in the stock photo market, Pam chooses to give them away, posting new ones daily on her Facebook page, *Poetpam*, and website, www.poetpam.com.

At first, I thought, maybe Pam and I could photograph Lost Lagoon together; that shooting together would be akin to jogging together (although they say that jogging with your partner is a bad idea, unless both have the same tempo and speed). I tried it for a couple of walks then abandoned the idea, for fear of discouraging Pam.

Being a mentor is tricky; one must withdraw into the background and let the student shine. If the mentor is always showing off, the student may get discouraged by feelings of failure. If the mentor waits until the student has made it up to the next rung of the ladder before raising the bar, then the student is encouraged. So, I stopped taking a camera to the Lagoon (or anywhere else for that matter).

But what is success, or failure? Some say there is no such thing as a mistake; that everything is intentional; that you make your own reality; that you get what you want (possibly subconsciously).

What is *real* isn't always clear. Life is a chimera, after all. The proof? No two people see things the same way. We like people who see things our way, avoiding others who don't; that echo chamber reinforces our beliefs and behavior patterns.

Real is what you process in your mind and remember—your database. The size of that database determines the size of your world. I can feel mine shrinking; memories are becoming inaccessible.

Our brains are like a sponge. As we get older, the sponge doesn't seem to hold as much. What happens as we age? Does the sponge lose its absorption or is there simply too much for it to absorb? Or, do we choose to forget?

As my 70th birthday approached, I gave thought to updating my website profile. It was way out of date (still is); I hadn't worked on it since 2005; a lot had happened during the ensuing decade.

2015 – New York Trip – No Way to Go Home

As the New Year began, I had a reprieve from the doldrums of retirement; we took a birthday trip to New York, burning off the last of my *United* air miles.

I longed to see New York again, to visit with old friends, especially my expat Canadian cousin, Betty (Bonner) Ehrlich and my mentor, Burt Holmes.

Betty married New York stock broker Harold Ehrlich and they became a model couple in my early teen life. They lived in Greenwich Village (!) and encouraged me to visit them. It was during one such visit that I discovered what real coffee tasted like—Betty made drip coffee; my parents only used instant-coffee powder.

Betty and Harold divorced after having three daughters; he more or less disappeared inside the temples of Wall Street while Betty went on to support her daughters working as a book editor for Macmillan Publishers, then Simon & Schuster. During my periods of intense travel, I always made it a point to visit Betty whenever I returned to New York; I watched her kids grow in truncated time; suddenly they were grown-ups. Now, they were taking care of their mom instead of vice versa.

In the past, I always visited Betty at her apartment, on East 86th Street. When her girls were in school, Betty would make dinner. After her daughters flew the coop, Betty took me out for lunch or dinner; but those days were behind us. Betty was too old now, too frail and too forgetful to entertain anyone. So, our reunion was hosted by Betty's daughter, Leslie Ehrlich and her husband, Steve Vail, who welcomed us into their huge apartment on 93rd Street and Park Avenue.

Our conversation was lively—I had never met Leslie's husband and, of course, none of them had met Pam. Their precocious pre-teen daughter, Pauline, kept everyone entertained. We had a great time, although witnessing Betty's decline made me feel old.

Everyone promised to stay in touch; but you know how it goes; it has been a couple of years and we have already lost touch. I suppose it will be me who stimulates another reunion, if there ever is one.

[Whiner Alert: It always seems to be me reaching out to others. I wonder, why don't they ever call *me*? Where do I really stand in other people's eyes?]

Burt Holmes was another story; he was clearly at some late stage in a protracted death—exactly the kind of situation everyone dreads. I hadn't seen Burt in nearly a decade.

The last time was when he visited me on Vashon Island, during a business trip to see his client, the Wacom company, in Vancouver, Washington. Burt was a fit fellow then; after visiting Vashon he went hiking in the Cascade Mountains before heading home to New York City. Suddenly there he was, right in front of me, trying to say hello the same old way, but with a smile distorted by Parkinson's disease. I had to listen hard, to hear what he was trying to say; he spoke in a halting, garbled manner.



Pam and I visited Burt at Village Care hospital on West Houston Street, in the West Village, near Burt's apartment at 2 Grove Street.



Fortunately, Burt's twin brother, Ira Holmes, (wearing hat) was visiting from Florida; he was able to interpret much of what Burt was saying. Pam and I were grateful to fill the conversational voids with Burt by making small talk with Ira.

Photo by Pamela Swanson

During the visit, I had an epiphany: I realized that Burt's condition was—if only symbolically—pointing the way for us all. Simply put, I looked at Burt and saw the hooded, scythe-bearing Grim Reaper. I fell into observer mode, paralyzed by the circumstances; conversations were simplified to the point of irrelevance; it was all too odd. What to do? Put on a happy face.

Pam provided all the cues necessary; as a trained nurse, she had a practiced bedside manner; she had been in that situation a thousand times; but it was also clear she took this visit more personally. Somehow, the banter back and forth between Pam and Ira made the situation bearable. I chimed in a few stories about the glory days when I worked with Burt at Basford; then, it was time to go. That was the last I saw of the man who had the most impact on my thinking and writing. But it wasn't all melancholy on that trip; far from it!

[Spoiler Alert: Ira stayed in touch with Pam and I. He visited Vancouver a few weeks ago [summer, 2017], culminating a rail tour that took him from Florida, up the East Coast to Canada, then westerly, from Toronto, through the Rocky Mountains, to Vancouver. It was good to see him again; he looked and talked so much like Burt that I had a double take more than once. He told us that when Pam and I visited Burt in the hospital, it brought his brother back to life; it was the highlight of his last year. It was heartwarming to hear that.]

On our first day, Pam and I made a twelve mile walkabout, all over the city—from the Statue of Liberty and Brooklyn Bridge to my old studios on 23rd and 73rd Streets, on into the theater district where we bought tickets to the Broadway hit show *Wicked*.

After the show we had dinner at Gallagher’s Steakhouse, a New York institution dating back to the 1930s. Although the place has been completely renovated (I hardly recognized it) it was a sentimental occasion. I used to like to take my father there, for a treat; he was a roast beef lover like me. Dad preferred the end cut; maybe that’s why I do, too; but he could never afford pricey steak houses, like Gallagher’s, Delmonico’s, Peter Luger’s or Smith & Wollensky.

Pam is a vegetarian; when she couldn’t find anything except steak and roast beef on the menu, she inquired of our thoroughly professional waiter (who claimed to have worked at Gallagher’s more than 20 years); he good-naturedly replied, “Oh Lady, you’re in the wrong restaurant!” Then he arranged a special salad and potato.



Walking through Times Square, the photographer in Pam was irrepressible. She even got us in the heart of Revlon’s *Love Is On* billboard, on 44th Street & Broadway, where taking a “selfie” is *de rigueur*. It took a few tries; but she got it!

Downtown, we found two other restaurants that were so good we ate there every night except my beef gorge at Gallagher’s. One was a Pakistani joint on Lexington and 28th Street, called Lahori Kabab, populated with Pakistani taxi drivers and day laborers.⁵⁵ I thought it was an Rajasthani place until I was corrected—in no uncertain terms—when I complimented the manager on their great Indian food.

⁵⁵ https://duckduckgo.com/?q=lahori+kebab+new+york&t=h_&atb=v106-2_f&ia=places

Lahori Kabab served foods in the Mediterranean style, there were platters of finished food in glass deli cases; we just pointed at what we wanted and they dished it out to us. The stuff was delicious, and cheap. I really pigged out, which did not go unnoticed by the manager. After two nights, we gave the heavy Hindustani cuisine a break for some fresher fare, but we did go back to the Pakistani place a third time before heading home, which really blew the manager's mind.

We were looking for a salad bar (they're hard to find these days) when we chanced on Sweetgreen, a nouveau "raw food" (super-salad) eat-in/take-out restaurant [1164 Broadway, between 27th and 28th Street] right around the corner from our totally comfortable room at the Evelyn Hotel [7 East 27th].



Ten years earlier I stayed at that hotel while working for Steve Oliker [Oligopoly, Inc.] on a New York Life sales-meeting job.

Back then it was a small, fashionably flamboyant, Beaux Arts style hotel called the Gershwin. It was the first—and possibly only—hotel to decorate its exterior with oversized ornaments, like the giant droplets highlighted by the red arrows, which are all that was left of a much more elaborate post-Disney collage; what might have happened if Walt took LSD.

Boutique hotels with "personalities" were new then; the Gershwin boasted an eccentric clientele that included celebrities, rock stars (like the Rolling Stones) pop artists (Andy Warhol et al), and an emerging class of élites.

Photo by Pam Swanson.

I wanted Pam to share the same sort of eccentric experience I had there a decade earlier; but the place had changed hands; stylistically it was now just another small, three-star hotel (3.666 to be fair) in the trending NoMad district of Manhattan, an area that includes the old Photo District, where I built my first studio [42 East 23rd Street, at Madison Avenue].

The hotel was undergoing renovations during our stay; only one elevator worked and the lobby lacked ambience and even basic amenities. While I was disappointed, Pam was oblivious of the Evelyn's past and was quite pleased with our creature comforts there, which were a cut above what we normally live with in our Vancouver condos. With Pam fighting a cold, we got take-out and ate in our hotel room most nights; between Sweetgreen and Lahori Kabob were quite happy with our lot in life.

One day we rented a car and drove out to see the house where I grew up in Douglaston, as well as Junior High School 67, Bayside High School, Zion Church, Queens College and the house in Flushing, at 143-15 Quince Avenue, where Leslie and I lived after we were married.

The last time I had been in the hood was thirteen years earlier, when Mom died, in 2001. That time I was with my sisters most of the time, and we were on a mission, so the old neighborhood was a backdrop rather the subject of attention.

The family house, at 324 Manor Road, had been renovated, but still looked the same. It was all so near and yet so far away.

Cruising through Douglaston, ghosts of the past popped up everywhere; I knew the neighborhood like the palm of my hand, having walked every street innumerable times.

To digress for a moment: I started a snow-shoveling business at age nine, started a gardening business with my junior high school pal, Allan Seiden, at age 10, and did door-to-door selling for almost a decade, while in grade school, visiting just about everyone's home, selling pot holders and jewelry that I made myself, as well as Christmas and greeting cards. When I was twelve, my grandfather gave me a good camera and I started selling pictures—shots of people, pets and properties—those led to weddings and bar mitzvahs. So, as I say, I knew the hood like the palm of my hand.



Photo by Pamela Swanson.

For Pam, it was likely just blocks and blocks of houses going by; but for me, each one had a story attached to it. There were special ones, of course: the houses where Ginger O'Grady and Leslie Shirk grew up, Allan Seiden's garden apartment in Little Neck; Mike Friedman's house, where his father raised tropical fish; Wiley Crockett's place, where he turned the living room into a motorcycle shop; as well as the houses in Bayside where Dave Nolte, Joel Secan and Cecelia Franklin lived. There were many more, too many to list here; suffice it to say that it was a somewhat overwhelming experience; so many memories, so little time.

It would have been nice to take the long walk around the Point, to sit on the sea wall and watch the sparkling lights of the Throg's Neck Bridge around sunset, as I had so many times.

The first time I got high was in 1959, smoking a J with Mike Friedman down at Big Rock, watching the reflections of the Throgs Neck Bridge rippling across Little Neck Bay. I sat in that spot many times before; Ginger and I would go there.



1965 portfolio picture, Throgs Neck Bridge.

Maybe Mike's dope was stronger that night; I saw patterns and images appear in those reflections; the sparkles morphed into a movie; that's when I realized I was stoned.

I wanted to take Pam to the Scobi Grill, in Little Neck, but was surprised to discover that the diner didn't exist anymore; it had been replaced by an office building; a Little Neck institution was gone. My friends and I had so many meals there, for so many years, in so many situations. Scobi Grill was straight out of *American Graffiti*; it wasn't a stainless steel diner but was nonetheless of the same genre made famous in John Travolta's classic film. *American Graffiti* was actually filmed twelve miles east of Little Neck, in Long Island City. I had to settle for a bag of bagels purchased at a shop next door to the old Scobie Grill; that shop had been a book store back in the day.



Instead of Scobie Grill, we went to White Castle for lunch; the Castle was high on my list of go-to places. Not just any White Castle would do; it had to be the one at the intersection of Northern Boulevard and Bell Boulevard in Bayside. While attending Bayside High, I transferred busses at that intersection, from the Q12, between Douglaston and Bayside, and the Q13 which ran north up Bell Boulevard to Corporal Kennedy Boulevard, where I hopped off and walked the last eight blocks to Bayside High.

Life was all about connections then; I left the house around 7:30 and walked 1.6 miles [2.4 km] to the Q12, hoping for the 8:00 bus; that would connect with the Q13 at 8:30, getting me to school by 9:00. Missing connections meant I would not only be late but would also have to wait at the intersection of Bell and Northern, sometimes—especially in winter—for quite a while; hence, I became a regular at the White Castle.

Their little square excuses for a meat patty, smothered in onions, were mighty tasty and best of all cheap; "Buy them by the sack!" was White Castle's slogan; and at a quarter each, you could afford to. Their deep-fried onion rings were the best I ever tasted (still are); and they made chocolate shakes so thick that a spoon would stand at attention, served in portions so generous that you couldn't help noticing that most of White Castle's customers were way overweight. No matter, we were young then and could burn-off those calories.

For old time's sake I bought two burgers, fries, onion rings and a chocolate shake; that was my standard order on the nights when Mike Friedman, Steve Solomita and I would cruise down to the Castle after smoking some weed at Steve's place. Geez, did we get stoned; but it was a different kind of high back then, less paranoid; maybe it was just less powerful; well, not maybe; the stuff we got then was seedy Mexican stuff, field grown; you know, basic hemp. But what did we know? We smoked whatever Steve sold us.

To digress for a moment, about the evolution of weed: For whatever reason, today's dope generally makes me paranoid; that didn't happen in the old days; back then we laughed a lot and danced more.

Today's world is too insular, too "virtual," a chimera that commands our consciousness. Since dope magnifies what is already in your mind, if you get paranoid, it isn't the dope, it's *you*. Of course, there are different kinds of paranoia, many of them quite legitimate; fear of fire, for example.

Different drugs affect different senses, different parts of the brain. Each compound has a distinct effect on how we experience the reality engulfing us. Loss of control is what makes us afraid; not knowing where we are going will do that, too.

When I was young, I had (self-made) power and a sense of control over my life and destiny. That control was engendered by twin maxims: money begets money and nothing succeeds like success; those two axioms created a virtuous circle, each reinforcing the other, in a positive vortex. Of course, that works in reverse, too, creating a negative vortex instead of a positive one.

The control I had over my own persona derived from the control I had over people's perception of me. Grandmother Taylor and her daughter, my mom, never let us kids forget that society judged a man by the heels of his shoes.⁵⁶ I never forgot that and once owned two dozen pairs of expensive cowboy boots, in an assortment of colors to match my attire. To this day, I am very aware of my heels... even though I realize that few people glance below my neck anymore; if they did, they'd see that my shoes don't have heels anymore; they're athletic shoes, made by Skechers and New Balance.

[Hint: Those two brands offer shoes with a wide "box" (toe area), which I need. Wearing narrower Nike shoes for five years (because I more-or-less had too, if I wanted my job) resulted in a Morton's Neuroma. Ouch!]

After the New York trip, I found myself floundering and then foundering. I fell into a deeper depression. We had shot our wad, travel wise; there would be no more major distractions. It was time to come to terms with reality—the downsized, irrelevant version of myself.

To digress for a moment about age and perception: Can you remember what you thought of old people when you were twenty... or thirty... or even forty? When you were young, I'll bet you were dismissive of older folks; I know I was.

Actually, dismissive is too kind a word. *Unconscious* is a more appropriate noun. Old people didn't even enter my thoughts, when I was young. For all practical purposes, old people didn't exist. Talk about arrogance!

The young think they know better—and some of them do; the ones that rise to the top. However, being old, that works against me. Albeit illegal, age prejudice is alive and well.

I should have paid heed to some of the old blokes who did their best to advise me: Folks like Andrew Michaels, Milton Epstein and Roy Kramer—even Dr. Harold Leder, who died in his 50s.

⁵⁶ They also said, "Don't judge a book by its cover." Go figure.

Should have: That's what wisdom is all about. Wisdom comes with age and experience. It's like an old wine, a crusted cheese. Wisdom is generally conservative and cautionary; which is why youth dismiss it.

I am waiting for a sign [2017]. The Universe has always sent me signs in the past and I see no reason why this time should be any different. That said, we make our own Universe.

We are what we think and can be nothing less than that. We make our own reality, create our own future, modeling our lives like a sculptor who forms a figure from amorphous clay or rough rock.

I know full well that I must create the future I want because nobody else will do it for me (except possibly the government... ha!).

Actually, I have an idea. I've had several ideas during the last years; but all of them rely on other people and a lot of money; however, this one might be do-able. You'll laugh when you hear that the idea is to make booze. Haha or Aha? Time will tell.

At my age, time is a major consideration; for me, a long-term investment is just a few years. Having a small distillery is a business that I could control "myself" with the aid and investment of just a few others.

2015 – Saskatoon Schnapps – Berry Good Idea?

This idea appeared out of nowhere; fully conjured, ready to manifest. (The best ones usually do.)

It was not the first time I was struck by an idea that came out of the blue, like a flash of lightning. Another episode, noted earlier, was the idea for Baby Bird Books and Art. That time, the idea came to me when Pete Bjordahl said that I should write children's' books.

[Y'all know what happened to that one....]

This time it came to me when I heard the answer to a question about a type of bush I had seen in the countryside around Kamloops, BC, when Pam and her brother, Dave, took me on a sightseeing trip during a visit to their sister, Anne, and her family.

It was late spring; most flora was beyond flowering, except for certain large bushes densely decked with brilliant white blooms. When we got back, I asked Pam's brother-in-law, Blaine Dempster, if he knew anything about those bushes; he told us they were Saskatoon berries.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Wikipedia: *Amelanchier alnifolia*, the saskatoon, Pacific serviceberry, western serviceberry, alder-leaf shadbush, dwarf shadbush, chuckley pear, or western juneberry, is a shrub with edible berry-like fruit, native to North America from Alaska across most of western Canada and in the western and north-central United States. Historically, it was also called pigeon berry. It grows from sea level in the north of the range, up to 2,600 m (8,530 ft) elevation in California and 3,400 m (11,200 ft) in the Rocky Mountains and is a common shrub in the forest understory. With a sweet, nutty taste, the fruits have long been eaten by Canada's aboriginal people, fresh or dried. They are well

Well, as those words rolled off Blaine’s tongue, even before he was finished saying them, I conjured a berry-shaped bottle bearing a purplish-red liqueur called *Saskatoon Schnapps*. Blaine said the berries weren’t very nice, that they were bitterer and had big pits. As usual, his description was poppycock. Saskatoon berries are like a wonderful cross between cranberries and blueberries, resembling more that latter but tasting more like the former.



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True, they have tiny seeds; but those go unnoticed and they have enough natural sweetness as to require modest amounts of sugar to make them appealing.

When we got back to Vancouver, our friends from Edmonton, Alberta—Dawn and Martin Mohr—were in town, on their way to Indonesia, where Martin was about to embark on a year-long gig supervising the construction of a hydrochloric-acid plant.⁵⁸ I told him about my idea for Saskatoon Schnapps and he latched onto it. When he got back from Asia, Martin located a few kilos of frozen berries; then, he and Dawn made a syrupy blend that was equal parts of berries, sugar, vodka and water. Their concoction was too sweet for my taste.

I made another version—a concentrate, using Everclear—nearly pure, 190-proof (95%) alcohol, available just across the border, in Washington State—diluted with enough water to bring it down to 100-proof. I soaked 28 ounces [800 grams] of berries in 750 ml of Everclear for two months.⁵⁹ The resulting elixir was more to my taste. However, the taste was distinctly different from other flavored vodkas and schnapps being sold. It took me a while to figure out why—because the store-bought ones are all made using artificial flavors. Oh, they say Natural Flavor on their labels; but it turns out that “Natural” is 99% artificial; that is, chemically *derived* from real stuff, but made into something *unnatural*.

When I lived in Sweden, one of my clients was a company called Aroma AB [now Arc Aroma AB]. As their name suggests, they developed synthetic aromas and flavors. That was done by chemically analyzing a food and then duplicating this food’s component chemistry as closely as possible using non-food chemicals. For example, the artificial vanilla flavoring you buy in the market has nothing to do with real vanilla, which is extracted from vanilla beans.

[If you’re a baker, you know that two successive years of catastrophic cyclones in Madagascar wiped out most of the world’s supply of vanilla beans; the price of a cup (~3 dl) of pure vanilla extract soared tenfold, from \$5.00 to \$50.00.]

The big producers of alcoholic beverages use such Natural Flavors because real natural flavorings—that is, real fruit—have problems associated with them: eventually they go bad. It may take a long time because alcohol is a preservative; but Nature takes Her toll, truncating the shelf life of products made with real foods.

known as an ingredient in [pemmican](#), a preparation of dried meat to which saskatoon berries are added as flavour and [preservative](#). They are also often used in [pies](#), [jam](#), [wines](#), [cider](#), [beers](#), and sugar-infused berries similar to [dried cranberries](#) used for [cereals](#), [trail mix](#), and [snack foods](#).

⁵⁸ Martin is a stacker, like me, always looking for good alternative investments besides PMs.

⁵⁹ Update (28.12.13): I made two batches; the second has been steeping now for more than three years.

What Saskatoon Schnapps ends-up being will require some finessing. But it doesn't matter what's inside the bottle (as long as it is reasonably palatable); because this product is all about marketing—its appeal will be based on its image, as a Canadian luxury brand.

Nearly every country has liquors and liqueurs associated with it; Britain has gin, Scotland has Scotch, Russians have vodka, Canada has Canadian Club; and so it goes. Although there's a dozen other examples--like Molson or Labatt beer—Saskatoon Schnapps is for the duty-free market, where premium souvenir products are sold.

The idea is to expand the Canadian brand; to get more shelf space for Canadian products; to increase the Canadian product range with a new luxury liquor that appeals to tourists seeking Canadian souvenirs and/or business gifts, as well to Canadian national pride, in general.

Distillers are heavily regulated—appealing to Canadian pride might be helpful, dealing with the government. Pride should also come in handy selling duty-free shops on the new product, although for them the big sell is the bottom line. I see Saskatoon Schnapps as a premium product at a premium price that's up there with the best of the Austrian and Scandinavian liqueurs.

You've likely been to Duty Free shops in foreign lands; I'll bet that, unless you are alcoholic or a connoisseur intent on finding a particular spirit, you likely bought something to remind yourself or others of the time you spent in that country.



The berry-shaped Saskatoon Schnapps bottle will visually dominate the shelf in Canadian duty-free shops, where other Canadian products include maple syrup and Canadian flag-branded attire.

The label will announce that the liquor is *Made from Real Prairie Berries*, and a hang tag will explain that Saskatoon Schnapps is vodka made from Saskatoon wheat, naturally-flavored with Saskatoon berries, following the traditional Scandinavian method for making snaps, based on the chemical process known as *infusion*.

Saskatoon Schnapps bottle design © Douglas Mesney 2016

To digress for a moment, about infusions: If you remember your chemistry classes, you'll recall that chemicals respond to gradients; that is, chemicals move back and forth through gradient membranes, by a process called osmosis, until a stasis is achieved, with equal amounts on both sides of the membrane.

In this case, steeping fruit in alcohol, fruit juices (flavors) move from the fruit into the alcohol as alcohol fills the fruit (or water, vinegar, oil or what have you). Using finely-ground or pulverized fruit, the result is an alcohol suspension of fruit mash; the solid particles can be filtered out (or not); and/or the mixture can be re-distilled (which is how the Austrians originally made natural-fruit schnapps, before artificial flavors came along).

The infusion process is relatively simple in practice; to make a lemon-flavored vodka that could compete with Absolut Lemon is as simple as passing vodka through a #2 or #4 paper-cone coffee filter filled with a two-inch-thick layer of finely ground lemon peel. One pass should be enough; but if you really like lemons, you could pass the vodka through the grinds any number of times.

Scandinavians—who call schnapps *Akevavit*—use a lot of “hard” flavoring agents, like cumin and fennel seeds; those take their time giving up their flavors; such infusions soak for weeks, or months, and then are re-distilled. Generally, when it comes to natural flavors, you can't soak the ingredients too long—in alcohol that is.

Cherry schnapps—specifically *Kirschwasser*—is close to what I have in mind for *Saskatoon Schnapps*. The original Kirschwasser is a natural-cherry-flavored Austrian liqueur. The drink is not sweet; that is, there's no sugar in it.

The schnapps experience is more about aroma than taste; you never forget that you're drinking neat vodka. That kind of “dry” (unsweetened) liqueur is what Saskatoon Schnapps should taste like. That said, it remains to be seen whether a sweetened version will also be sold—a lot of folks prefer sugary drinks.

For now, it is just a question of creating the formula for the new drink and building a pilot plant to make the first 100 bottles. Those will be used to generate interest. I'll go “door-to-door,” take the product to Duty-Free booze buyers, and personally explain the new product to them.

The goal is obtaining non-binding pre-orders, with tentative commitments for product shelf space and promotional tasters. With those pre-orders, we'll pitch the product on a TV show like *Shark Tank*, enlisting the financial backing of Kevin O'Leary (who I consider the savviest Canadian financier).

Today, there are any number of boutique distilleries producing “craft” liquor products; those join a long list of artisan beers and wines. The new offerings are not cannibalizing the liquor market, they are expanding it.

When I grew up, nearly everyone had a few during the cocktail hour, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm [17:00 to 19:00]. Booze was fashionable, made the more so by TV shows like *Dallas*.

Then, in '80s and '90s, wine and beer were in, booze was out. Now, booze is back, big time; cocktails are in again; drinking martinis is *de rigueur*. For those reasons and more I think Saskatoon Schnapps is a product whose time has come, as a logical extension to the Canadian brand.

[Spoiler Alert: It's been three years since the Saskatoon Schnapps idea was conceived. Not much has happened. I wrongly reckoned that Martin Mohr would be more interested than he has turned out being. And, I don't want to do it alone, nor could I.]

How does that song go, "Que sera, sera?" [Whatever will be, will be.] If Saskatoon Schnapps is meant to happen it will. Meanwhile, I have a liter of concentrate that's been steeping for three years and counting, with no ill effects. (!)

2015 – Elk Mountain Hotel – Dead Cat Bounce

"You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear."

Sherlock Holmes



At the height of my depression, Arthur Havers sent me one of his cryptic emails saying that he and Susan wanted to take us up on my offer to have Pam and I produce a picture essay of their Historic Elk Mountain Hotel.

Although it turned out to be just a *dead cat bounce* for my career as a photographer, at the time it was life-saving opportunity—to become a professional again, if only for a little while.

Photo by Pam Swanson.

The distinction of being professional has always been important for me; it defines who I am. As a professional, everything I do must be perfectly executed. Real professionals treat their work like doctors; if a doctor fails, the patient could become sicker or even die. Need I say more?

Being in retirement, I missed the challenges associated with professionalism. I longed for significance, a chance to do something real and meaningful, something more than self-satisfying make-work projects.

It was the middle of winter when Arthur wrote; there was no way I could drive to Wyoming; my car didn't have snow tires; so, we agreed on a date in May or June, when the brilliant colors of springtime would show the property at its prime.

Although still a few months away, the assignment gave me a reason to get up in the morning, for which I was thankful. I filled my time getting ready for the job; it was a chore; after moving from Vashon, my gear—which lay dormant since 2012—needed re-organization and, in some cases, repairs.

Once I decided to close Birdland and retire, I no longer considered my photo gear to be a set of tools; rather, as a long-term investment, as collectibles. The gear was the first stuff to get packed and warehoused.

Now, I had to reassess and reassemble my kit, and get together a set of working gear that would fit into the back of my highway hero, the '98 Honda Civic hatchback.

While the Honda holds a lot, besides the photo gear we needed luggage space to support an epic drive of nearly 1,500 miles [22,500 km], from Vancouver to Elk Mountain, Wyoming.



North Cascades pit stop photos by Pam Swanson.

We left on a clear morning in June, travelled down the I-5 corridor to Bellingham, then east on the North Cascades Highway to Colville, Washington where I had the car serviced at Norm's Auto Repair, as I had on our first trip. Norm's one of the best garages I've ever been to, a lot like Doug's Auto on Vashon Island; offering the kind of good, old-fashioned, honest service that gives you confidence.



Photos by Pamela Swanson.

We overnighted at Benny's Colville Inn before heading to Livingston, Montana. Benny spent his money on sport fishing; his lobby was a trophy room; the mausoleum turned me off, but there were few alternatives.



Photo by Pam Swanson.

We spent the second night at the Parkway Motel; on the third day, we made it all the way to Elk Mountain, arriving in the late afternoon.

It was a grueling trip spanning three 10-hour driving days. We blasted past some of the best scenery to be found in America; but I was a man on a mission; this was a “job,” not a holiday.

Stupid me made it into a mission; it didn’t have to be. If I were Pam, I would have bitched and moaned about the extreme tempo; there’s no reason why I couldn’t have taken it a bit easier, slowed down enough to make it a pleasant excursion. Instead, having bought a two-week health-insurance policy (Canada’s health plan doesn’t cover out-of-country travel), we had a strict schedule; six days on the road and seven days at Elk Mountain.

Pam was the perfect travel companion; she ate almost nothing but carrots and apples; drank little more than water and a few sips of my coffee; could hold her pee longer than anyone I’ve ever known; didn’t make small talk; and didn’t mind cheap motels and restaurants. When they were passing out the thrifty genes, Pam was richly endowed.

However, I pushed her limits on the that trip; my own, too. I used to be able to drive forever; but after 10 hours, I was bushed. Worse, my right leg started getting spasms half way through the trip; the cramps were so bad that I couldn’t drive safely, I had to get out of the car and stretch my legs a couple of times. I was worried that I couldn’t continue, that we’d be stuck in the middle of nowhere; the cramps were that bad.

Arthur was nowhere to be found when we arrived at the hotel. Susan was busy in the kitchen preparing for imaginary guests. Don’t get me wrong, I admire Susan and Arthur because of their intrepid spirit; they are indefatigable. If I ran a place and nobody came, I’d move on; but they have stayed and built a customer base, small but enough to survive.

You know that phrase about restaurants, that it’s all location, location, location? Elk Mountain fails that test on all three counts. It is in the middle of nowhere, as I described earlier. Our job—and I include Pam in that corporate euphemism—was to make the place look good enough to be a destination; a place off the beaten track that people will make an extra effort to go to, see and experience. Those who get to the remote Elk Mountain Hotel are richly rewarded; but getting there is not fun, unless you are a car enthusiast or happen to be from Texas, where driving two or three hours (each way) to go out and eat is par for the course.

Always putting the cart before the horse, I had planned way beyond this self-created job; the photo essay about the Historic Elk Mountain Hotel was going to be my new portfolio, enabling me to re-ignite my career and go after new clients in the boutique-hotel industry. I reckoned that, when Lew Price saw my new portfolio, that he would call me right up and book me, to make a picture story about Auberge St. Antoine, in Québec.

I was still under the delusion that professional photographers are relevant—they are not. Now everyone can make perfect pictures, thanks to hand-held computers and amazing digital-picture applications. Arthur and Susan had likely gone down that route before agreeing to pay \$500 towards our fuel bill and bring us back to their hotel, to get some proper pictures made.

But what is a professional picture? Fully half is just getting things right technically—the exposure, cropping, etcetera. Today’s computerized cameras handle things like that with ease; it can be as simple as point and shoot; the camera “knows” what you are shooting and how to maximize the quality of the image. The other half, knowing what to shoot, cannot be as easily done by a machine, no matter how smart it is (yet).

My *modus operandi* has always been to tell the whole story in a single shot; that’s what cover shots do, they encapsulate an entire thesis in a single visual icon; such shots are visual poems, like haikus.

When working on picture essays, portfolios or slide shows, I held to the principle that principle less is more. Each individual picture in a collection should tell as much of the story as possible. Different styles invoke different interpretations of the subject, of course, requiring more or fewer illustrative components. Using radical wide-angle or telephoto lenses, in place of using normal perspectives, can alter the impressions of the scene, radically in some cases; they are more *poetic*, in that sense.

Our biggest challenge at Elk Mountain Hotel was simply showing the rooms; their sub-compact size (“intimate” is how Pam described them) demanded the widest possible lenses; those are the toughest to use of all lenses, because they distort the most. It was for that very reason that I knew that I would be able to do the job, even before I volunteered to do it—because I am the proud owner of a Nikkor 10.5 mm, an extremely wide-angle lens that takes in nearly 180-degrees of view (slightly more than your eyes).

Although the Nikkor 10.5 mm lens could capture the contents of the hotel’s compact rooms, the pictures might not necessarily look good because, as mentioned, wide angle lenses distort perspectives; the wider the lens, the greater the distortion. A 10.5 mm lens can make a room look bigger than it really is. However, depending on the angle of view, it can also make it look weird.

For architectural (undistorted) shots, the kind I was after, the lens had to be lined-up rectilinearly squarely to the subject and horizon. In addition, there could be no protruding foreground objects, because they would be distorted and look grotesquely out of proportion (too big).

To solve that problem, I established an imaginary line across the scene, in front of the camera. Everything in the picture had to be behind that line. That was a tricky business in the tiny rooms at Elk Mountain Hotel. Sometimes, the corner of a bed would cross the line and become too big in the picture and look abnormal. Then, and only then, would I opt to elevate the camera POV [Point of View] until a better sense of “normal” could be obtained. My goal was to capture, *Reality at Its Best*.

After adjusting the lighting to be within a two-stop range, the pictures of every scene were *bracketed* across a four-stop exposure range, at half-stop intervals.

You would be amazed by the lighting aberrations in most rooms, the differences between dark and light zones, even in your own home or office. You don't normally notice such differences, because we see with telephoto eyes. Like eagles, our eyes zero-in on details, which are remembered more than overall scenes. [Sherlock Holmes famously said, "You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear."]

When a super-wide lens captures the whole field of your vision, only then can you appreciate the differences in brightness and contrast across the scene. When making quality photos (or films and videos) the lighting must be balanced in a range that can be recorded; that can necessitate the use of fill light, to brighten the dark shadow areas. Fill light is a pain in the ass but necessary for quality photography.

Actually, there's another school of visual thought that prefers pictures shot with available light. That was the look made famous by Life Magazine. However, advertisers and publishers (the primary employer of professional image makers) generally prefer fully lit shots.) I wanted to make a portfolio to demonstrate my technical photographic proficiency (read: light balancing) to attract clients who wanted pictures that were superior to what they could accomplish with their cell phones. Thus, in order to have a full range of fill lighting options available at Elk Mountain, Pam and I packed a set of strobes as well as an ancillary set of hot lights.

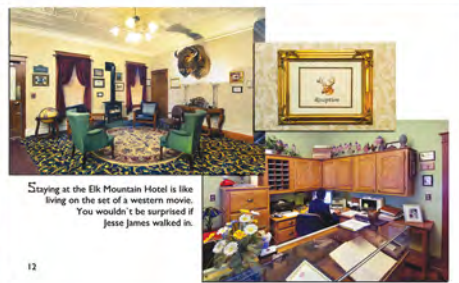
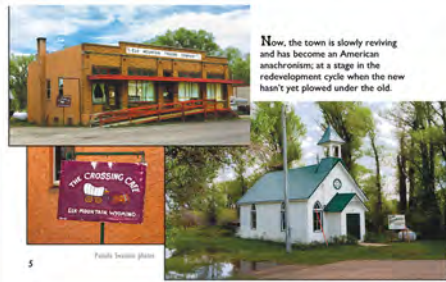
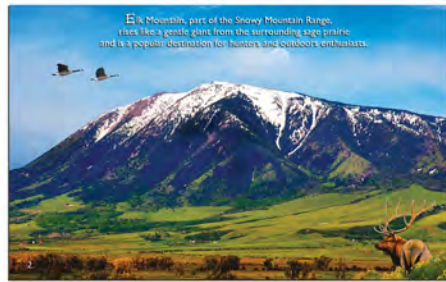
We ended up using the hot lights because the strobes took too much time. The reason photographers use strobe lights is because they are roughly the same color as daylight; both have the same *light balance*. However, because the flashes are instantaneous, it's impossible to adjust the brightness of strobes with the naked eye; test shots have to be made to observe strobe exposures. With hot lights, you can see the light balance without having to shoot test shots.

Of course, hot (tungsten) lights are 3200 degrees (Kelvin) while daylight is 5600. Compared to one another, one is more orange (tungsten) and the other blue (daylight); but that can be made to work. If you balance for the warm-toned tungsten light, the colors of the room will look correct while the daylight world outside the windows will look overly blue, like evening. Or, color-correction gels could be taped onto the windows, which is what we did in some cases, where views through the windows were important. The orange-colored gels [CTO] blocked the daylight's blue wavelengths, to balance with the tungsten lighting. Wherever possible, we simply closed the venetian blinds and that was that. Ha!

The fireplaces were more of a challenge. In most cases, we simply burned some newspapers and shot the scenes with super-long, one-minute exposures, which made small fires look like roaring blazes.

In every case, I was acutely aware of the background; what was happening in the corners of the room and outside the windows. I've never forgotten the time I had to reshoot a Burger King job because of crap in the backgrounds that I failed to see. Ever since that episode, BG crap has been a bug-a-boo for me. It's an unfortunate curse that, wherever I go, I still find myself scanning the floor, peering into corners, looking under tables, behind doors, searching for objectionable crap.

2015 | Portfolio | Elk Mountain Hotel Brochure | Plates Nos 1-4





In the parlour there are celebrity photos of stars who played at the hotel's night club, the Garden Spot Pavilion, once located adjacent to the hotel near the gazebo.



The parlour also has an extensive collection of DVD movies for the enjoyment of guests, as there is no television anywhere else in the hotel.



The attic was converted into a spacious conference room for business meetings with board-room seating for groups of up to fourteen people.



Elegance contributes to the feeling of luxury at the Elk Mountain Hotel; an opulence that is unique and hard to find in America's prairie land.



... "Nearly" because they prove irresistible to some guests and replacements aren't easy to come by in the Wyoming prairies.

Combining Arthur's wry humour with Susan's innate sense of comfort and good taste, the decor includes rubber ducks and teddy bears in nearly every room...



Most rooms are on the second floor and they are named after famous Wyoming residents who helped shape the State's history in the 1800s and early 1900s.



Room One is named after mountain man and explorer Jim Bridger. He discovered a shorter way across the Rockies, called Bridger's Pass, which is today the route of Interstate 80 and the Union Pacific railroad.



Room Two is named after Major John O'Ferral. His involvement in the Whisky Gap incident of 1862 went down in history as the first blow for prohibition.



Room Three is named after Eliza Swain, the first woman to vote in an open and public election in Wyoming and the nation on September 6th 1870.



Room Four is named after Esther Hobart Morris who was the first woman to hold a judicial position in the United States.



Room Five is named after "Big Nose" George Parrott, the County's most infamous outlaw, who met a grisly death at the end of a rope in Rawlins back in 1881.



Room Six is named after Lawrence Welk, accordion-playing band leader of the Champagne Music Makers, who was raised on a North Dakota farm and toured the Midwest before becoming a television star.



Room Seven is named after gravelly-voiced, guitar-playing country music singer Hank Thompson. He and his backing band, The Brazos Valley Boys, were voted the No. 1 Country Western Band fourteen years in a row by Billboard magazine.



Room Eight is named after Louis Armstrong, who became the public face of jazz, a role that has never been completely filled by anyone else since.



Room Nine is named after General John Rawlins, who served during the Civil War and later as the United States Secretary of War.



Room Ten is named after Nellie Taylor Ross. After marrying Wyoming governor William Ross, she became the first woman governor in America when her husband died and she was elected to replace him.



Room Eleven, the Evans Suite, is named after John S. Evans, who was the builder and owner of the original hotel, dating back to 1905.



Room Twelve is named the General John Fremont. He was a Union Army officer and explorer who later became known as "the man who mapped the West."

Room Twelve features a hearth-side seating area and private, enclosed patio, making it one of the hotel's most comfortable and gracious accommodations.




37

All the hotel's bathrooms are scrupulously clean, like this one which is part of the Room Twelve suite.




38

Room Fifteen, on the third floor, is a guest room reserved for the hotel staff.



39

Some say they have seen ghosts at the Elk Mountain Hotel. One is a young woman seen in the hallway near Room Eight. I didn't believe it until the night I took this picture (hahaha).



40

Although it may never win the prize for most haunted hotel, there have been no shortage of ghost sightings at the Elk Mountain Hotel.



41

Although the gazebo is new, it marks the site of the long gone Garden Spot Pavilion, which in its day was the most popular night club for miles around. Today the century-old cottonwood trees are home to dozens of swallows and other wildlife. And yes, a river runs through it (the Medicine Bow River).





42

Oh, give me homes—
Where the buffalo roam,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies they ain't cloudy all day.



43

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to pictorially commemorate Elk Mountain Hotel in honor of my good friends, the proprietors, with the generous help and support of my wife, poet and photographer Pamela Swanson.

Left to right:
Douglas Meisney
Susan Prescott
Arthur Havers
Juliet
Pamela Swanson
Griz



44

This collection of photographs depicts a style that I call *Realty At Its Best*. Everything appears normal; the views are undistorted and the colors are correct, so the photographer's work is "invisible."




45

The pictures in this collection were made by combining the best pairs of many different exposures of each scene – from dark to light – to make a tone balanced final image. This multi-layer blending technique is a technical version of the Zone System made famous by naturalist photographer Ansel Adams, himself a perfectionist.



46

The pictures were shot with Nikon super wide-angle lenses, particularly the 10.5mm that captures a full 180-degree view – an extremely wide-angle perspective that is difficult to control but important when photographing tight interior spaces, like Elk Mountain Hotel's ornate, but compact rooms that average 10 X 12 feet with "modesty" sized adjoining bathrooms – both nightmares to get into a single shot.

Other lenses included the 14mm (so sharp) and 12-24mm zoom, (used as a 17mm prime). Various details were shot with the 24-120mm zoom, not the sharpest, but good for saving time by limiting the number of lens changes needed for different angles and points of view.

The "feel of the room" was used to establish the lighting mood of each scene. Then each scene was lit with tungsten quartz lights which mixed with the hotel's blend of incandescent and fluorescent lights as well as natural window light.



47

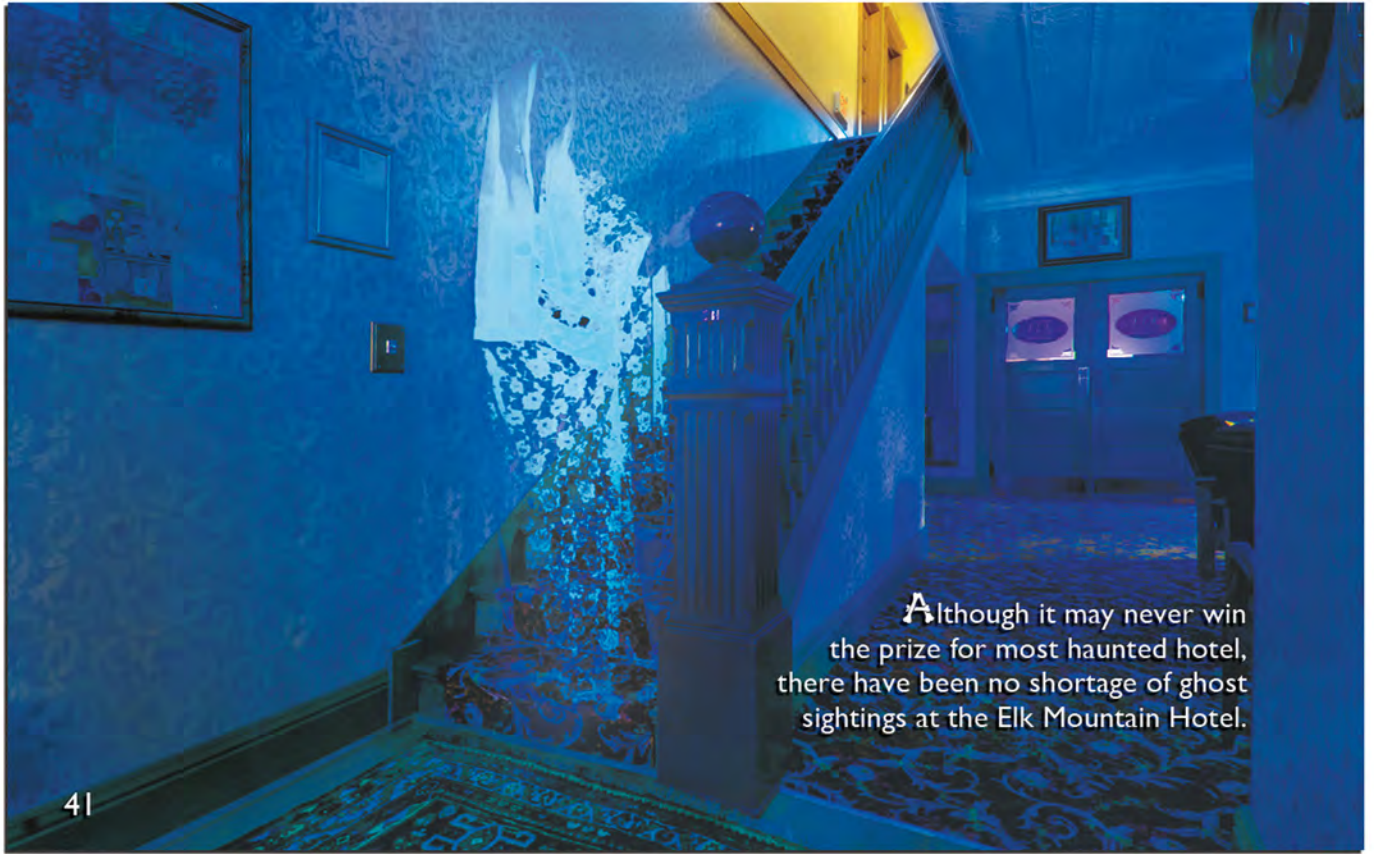
Inquiries about this picture collection should be addressed to Douglas Meisney Vancouver, BC 604-683-4390 dougla@mmeisney.com



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Douglas Meisney

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Although it may never win the prize for most haunted hotel, there have been no shortage of ghost sightings at the Elk Mountain Hotel.

2015 – Reality Check – Portfolio Turned Keepsake

When we got back to Vancouver, I combined Pam’s shots of Elk Mountain village and surrounds with the hotel shots and came up with a 48-page portfolio brochure. [See, *2015 | Portfolio | Elk Mountain Hotel Brochure | Plates N^{os} 1-4.*] It felt good putting together a publication again, combining three of my best talents—writing, illustrating and publication-designing.

I put in about a week on the first version of the brochure and was quite proud of it, until Carolyn Hadley ripped it apart. She really let me have it; and she was “right.” I had made some fundamental design errors. For example, there was no white space—the background of all pages was dark blue, bordering on black.

While I always loved the way black backgrounds make pictures pop off the page, Hadley pointed out that print is hard to read against dark colors. She pointed out that books and magazines printed on white paper. [Duh!] She also had some choice words about my writing. The only good thing she had to say concerned my use of semi-colons; she said I was one of a very few writers who understood what they were good for—keeping a thread going.

When it came to anything editorial, I considered Carolyn Hadley to be some kind of guru; she is a character straight out of an Ayn Rand novel. I took her critique to heart, went back to the drawing board and changed the background to white. Changing the color was easy; redoing all the files, then duplicating and archiving them was not; it meant another week of my time; but I am glad I did it. Ten copies were re-printed; I sent Arthur and Susan two of them and kept eight, to mail to prospective clients, like Lew Price.

However, I have totally revised my thoughts about doing photo essays on boutique hotels. It would be a thankless task; I’d set myself up for problems and disappointments. That’s no way to spend one’s golden years. Time is the most valuable commodity for me now. I want to spend it doing things that I want to do. More and more, those are things that deliver personal reward—happiness—rather than financial reward.

I gave up the idea of shooting boutique hotels for another reason, as well. During the photo sessions at the hotel, I noticed that Pam wasn’t taking well to being my assistant. I should have suspected she would eventually tire of that job, after our experiences trying to work together at Vashon Island Imaging; that part of our relationship fell apart the day that Pam had to hand trim 1,000 post cards.

Things were never the same after that. We almost never work together as a team anymore. She doesn’t mind doing favors for me, but doesn’t want to feel locked into anything. These days, aside from occasional Lagoon walks or going to the beach, in summer,⁶⁰ Pam and I live separate lives. We see each other just a few moments each day.

⁶⁰ Pam and I also share time together on our trips; I wish we could travel more, even though we do pretty well for a couple of “broke” blokes. When gold gets back to what it was when I invested, I’ll cash-in a third of it as per the advice of “Mr. Gold,” Jim Sinclair, and use the proceeds to buy trips for Pam and I. Sinclair says that at a cycle peak you should sell a third and keep two thirds, selling another third on the next cycle peak. That way your principal amount remains essentially the same (less the inflation “tax”) while you periodically harvest profits accruing from the appreciation of gold and silver values, which inversely imply depreciation of fiat currencies, like the US dollar. There are still a few places I would like to see,

I like living alone, and so does she. There's no overlapping in our lives; her interests are utterly different than mine. Pam is a poet and I am a pragmatist. I used to cook for both of us, but lately that's stopped too; she doesn't like most of the things I eat. But I think it is safe to say that we would rather live together than apart from one another; and that's all that matters, really.

2015 – *Technobsolescence* – Beginning of The End

During the last decade, I've gradually lost touch with virtually all things computer.

Apart from a new Asus GL552 laptop, bought last winter, (to write and design this memoir) the rest of my rig is now more than ten years old. As a result, my tech development has been gradually arrested.

Beginning with the demise of my Watchout-based AV business, and continuing for the four years I did fine-arts work, ran a printing company (Vashon Island Imaging) and produced a series of books (Giclée Prepress and the Baby Bird books), I didn't need any new gear—except Epson printers, paper cutters and framing tools.

Considering all the Watchout gear I had—a network of some 20 machines and even more monitors—I had more equipment than I knew what to do with. Nor did I need any software upgrades; the versions of the applications I worked with were more than enough to meet my needs; I never felt obsolete.

Then came the Great Purge. Beginning in 2007, with the loss of Vancouver-gallery income (plus the money I invested in Eye Candy Design Solutions), followed in quick succession with three more failed business investments (Vashon Island Imaging and the two book projects), I was hemorrhaging money.

In 2011, I reached the point where my projected annual base costs were twice my income. By then, it was apparent that there was no economic recovery going on, at least in my neighborhood; nor was any relief on the fiscal horizon.

That was when I decided to abandon ship, to close-up shop, sell the Vashon property and downsize into a Vancouver condo. During that purge, the only tech I needed was a pair of computers: one to use for a digital darkroom (to process pictures of stuff being sold) and the other to manage eBay sales, compile customs lists and maintain contact with the world.

Finally, when Vashon was gone and I was installed in Vancouver, there was—and still is—no reason to upgrade.

My old machines continue to be good enough for the jobs that need to get done; and with no commercial clients, there is no need to send files that are the latest version—or any files at all.

As you probably know, even a two-year hiatus can jeopardize one's technological prowess and, even worse, their professional standing.

although not many as I have been to so many places already. However, Pam wants to see more and I don't blame her. Meanwhile, we seem to have made Burning Man an annual adventure, and that is a trip, in all aspects of the word.

For example, what would you think of a chauffeur driving a two-year-old limo? Would you choose that chauffeur or the one with the latest model?

Writing this book, most of my computer time is spent in MS Word or Google⁶¹. The trusty Windows 7 laptop that Pam loaned me has served me well; so has my vintage, fifteen-year-old Dell 8200 desktop machine, which I now use for picture work, in combo with a seventeen-year-old Nikon D2X.

[Spoiler Alert: as mentioned, I treated myself to an Asus GL552 laptop last winter, when Pam's trusty old Acer started blue-screening; the thought of losing two years' worth of writing was a strong motivating factor.]

Rant Alert: How sad it is that there's no more personal software. Now, you no longer own your applications, you rent them. Everything is run from and stored in the "Cloud," by subscription (rent, by another name).

I don't like the idea of the Cloud; I don't trust the system. Cyber warfare has begun; we already experience the disruptive effect of cyber skirmishes. What I like even less is that, for example, Microsoft can intrude into my machine and upload any software changes it pleases, whenever it pleases them; and I have no control. Before Windows 10, a user could turn updates on or off; one had a say in the matter; but that is no longer the case. Soon, such command and control will be pervasive, everywhere.

Or, take the American NSA [National Security Agency]: they suck up and archive the entire contents of the Internet every day. So does Google and God knows how many other search engines, corporate entities, government agencies, whackos and criminals. Call me paranoid; but I've covered the camera in my computer.

I reckon that, one day, things will get out of hand and some serious digital damage will be done, probably by some form of EMP [Electro-Magnetic Pulse]. I prefer to keep my files in the confines of my own studio, on hard drives that are off-line and unplugged—totally out of harms way, except for an EMP (which we can do nothing about), or natural magnetic degradation.

I won't soon forget the day that Pam and I de-sleeved and trashed 3,800 CDs and DVDs. We hauled them to the dump in two huge garbage cans. Nor can I forget us burning a few hundred photos, illustrations and repro-art masters in a 10-foot deep, purpose-dug fire pit—a combo crematorium and burial pit, used to cremate art and possessions that required a dignified death.

[Did you know: Magnetism fades away over time? Avoiding data loss requires hard drives to be restarted and refreshed every five years or so. I am way overdue with the 50+ drives that house what's left of my image and music files. All the analogue masters are long gone.]

⁶¹ 2018 Update: I have stopped using Google because of their tracking; I now use DuckDuckGo.

2015 – Burning Man – Spirits Rekindled

What might have become an annual event⁶² started last year in August & September when Pam and I went to Burning Man at the invitation of Dean Rossi.

He invited us to join a camp of twenty friends—the so-called OCD Camp [as in, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or, in this case, Obsessive Compulsive Dean]; it turned out to be a rare, life-altering experience.



At Burning Man people can, to one extent or another, be who they want to be, but can't be in the default world.

The result is a lot of extreme behavior, expressions of peoples' inner-most selves.

Above: *Repent*, 2004.
Right: *Touching Figures*, Pam Swanson, 2015

Everything is very different at Burning Man; you have to adjust, which mostly involves letting go, letting yourself be more of yourself.



Left to right: Pam Swanson, Dean Rossi, Yours Truly, Jenn Miller.
Photo by the late Craig Law.

I was thrilled to be going and glad that the relationship between Dean and I was on the mend.

Recall that I mentioned feeling screwed by Dean, and his partner, Joe Ness, when they cut me out of their plans to expand the multi-media show at the Peppermill Casino. Now, given a decade's worth of retrospective analysis, I realize that dumping me was essentially Joe Ness' doing; simply put, he wanted my job. Stupidly, I made Joe's job easier when I shot myself in the foot during a phone call with Bill Paganetti (described earlier).

⁶² 2018 Update: We only went to Burning Man twice. It is unlikely we'll go again.

To digress for a moment, for a brief rant: Joe Ness was an incontrovertible narcissist; he considered himself a top film-maker, the likes of a David Attenborough. Ha! Joe may have a good eye and deliver a decent product; but he has nothing inspirational to offer.

To be fair, what he and Dean built was astounding; if nothing else, QAV was a testament to the organizational and production skills of the two of them. With virtually unlimited funding provided by Paganetti, they spent four years going around the world and shooting “Kodak moments” in panoramic HDTV.

The amount of custom-made gear they hauled around the world was impressive, all by itself. I used to schlep a dozen Pelican cases; these guys had two dozen. Plus, their set-ups were painstaking because they were working with three cameras, to get enough pixels for panoramic projection. The triple-camera rig required careful realignment for every new angle; the three cameras had to have pixel-perfect alignment. That was accomplished with a custom-made tripod rig and special lensing, to merge the three separate pictures into one, panoramic image. (Later, when 4-K cameras became available, there was enough pixel detail in the video original to allow one-camera shooting.)

Today, as you cruise through the Peppermill in Reno, as Pam and I did this year, on our way to Burning Man, you’ll be struck by the extraordinarily beautiful collection moving pictures that are billboarded on every conceivable wall. The vast array of screens is aptly titled “*Windows on Our World.*”

Although he shoots live-action video, Ness is essentially a stills photographer; the camera doesn’t move in any of his shots; the only motion is in the scene—ocean waves, for example, or trees blowing in the wind, or fish swimming. If I shot video, I would approach it “his” way because neither of us really understands motion photography; we see the world as stills.

During all that, Dean’s dedication was—had to be—to Joe and their company, Quantum Audio Visual [QAV]. That must have been hard on Dean because I believe he and I shared (still share) a unique bond; either that or Dean is a con man’s con man. Dean isn’t phased by a person’s age; it is all about what they can do for him.

Of course, having been shafted by Ness, I felt screwed. But all that was put aside when Dean and I reconnected in the flesh at Burning Man.

Pam tracked Dean down on Facebook at my request, as I mentioned earlier. I used Burning Man as “bait” to lure a response; it was at Burning Man, after all, that Dean and I had forged our relationship, the one he had to forsake, for Joe.

Dean responded! We shared an hour-long mutual *mea culpa*, about the decade that disappeared between our last conversations. He acknowledged my request and invited Pam and I to become part of his camp (“his” meaning that he is the organizer). Of course, I said yes—it was exactly what I wanted to have happen—proving once again that nothing will happen unless you make it happen; or, as Abraham says: You get what you want.

When we get together, I feel like Dean's older brother; we think alike, we both approach life as a project; both of us push technology to the limit; and we both live in a world where risk management is always critical.

For Dean Rossi, life is about family, his "family," of friends and colleagues—you could call it Dean's *entourage*—an impressive band of entrepreneurs, professionals and musicians (especially drummers).



Photos by Pam Swanson.

Dean organized a drum circle at our camp. They rehearsed several times a day, in preparation for a Playa-wide drum circle—a kind of battle of the bands. The best of the best gets to perform at the closing ceremonies, when the Man is torched; they can also qualify for stipends toward future Burning Man festivals.

An accomplished drummer, Rossi is the most ambidextrous person I have ever encountered; his hands and feet each operate totally independently, beating out complex African rhythms. I've seen a lot of percussionists in my day; none match Dean Rossi.

Burning Man ethic involves *radical self-reliance*. Going to Burning Man is unlike a normal camping trip; you have to think of and be prepared for anything; besides food, water, shelter and sanitation, there are myriad other considerations: possible car or medical problems, as well as dealing with the extreme weather conditions that sweep across the *playa* [desert floor].



Dust-storm photos by Pam Swanson.

I have watched those little igloo-style tents blown across the flat landscape like tumbleweeds. Enormous dust storms can wipe out visibility and clog your nostrils, if you don't wear a mask.

Burning Man Packing List

www.TravelGrom.com



camping gear

- Tent
- Sleeping Bag!
- Blankets & Pillows
- Air Mattress
- Foam Ear Plugs
- Carpet or Tarp
- Lanterns
- 18" Rebar Stakes & Covers
- Shade Structure
- Beach/Lawn Chairs
- Batteries
- Folding Table
- Old Carpeting
- Duct Tape
- Bungee Cords
- Rope
- LED Christmas Lights



toiletries

- Sun Shower Bag
- Towels
- Shower water
- Toiletries Bag
- Wet Wipes
- Spare Toilet Paper
- Gray Water Evap Basin
- Toothbrush & Toothpaste
- Shaving Stuff
- Soap / Shampoo / Lotion
- Sunblock + Aloe
- Condoms & Tampons
- Eye Drops
- Cough Drops



www.TravelGrom.com

food & drink

- Water!
- ICE!
- Alcohol
- Gatorade
- Dried Fruit
- Peanut Butter
- Water Melon
- Snack bars
- Trail Mix
- Jerky
- Rice
- Cooler
- Gum & Mints
- Cups and Plates
- Pedialyte



miscellaneous

- Notebook and Pen
- Pocket Knife & Multi-Tool
- Squirt Gun & Misters
- Permanent Marker
- Safety pins
- Cameras
- Walkie-Talkie
- Head Lamp
- Gifts & Trinkets
- Battery Operated Radio
- Guitars & Other Instruments



bike

- Bike Lock
- Spare Tired/Tube
- Tire Pump
- Bike Light
- Bike Decorations



kitchen supplies

- Cook Stove & Gas
- Water-Proof Matches
- Tupperware
- Eating Utensils
- Pots & Pans
- Sponge
- Small Tub
- Trash Bag
- Can Opener
- Zip-Lock Bags
- Biodegradable Dish Soap



medical kit

- Pain Reliever
- Antacid
- Band Aids
- Cold Pack
- Nasal Spray
- Antibiotic Ointment
- Prescription Medications
- Allergy Medicine
- Vinegar (for playa dust)



clothing

- Goggles & Dust Masks
- Sunglasses
- Glow Sticks
- Hats
- Jackets
- Body Taints
- Rain Gear
- Flip-Flops
- Blinky Flashers
- Comfortable Hiking Boots
- Thermal Underwear



[My own pack lists, of well more than 300 items, are in the Appendix: *Burning Man Pack List | 2015*]



Photo by Will Roger Peterson.

We had no idea what Camp OCD [Over Compulsive Dean] would be like, or even if we would be able to find it—there were 60,000 people on the playa, in at least 15,000 encampments, arranged on a circle grid.

I headed for the general coordinates Dean gave me: clockwise, 7:30 and Jolly, near the outer perimeter.

To be prepared—in case we never found the camp—Pam and I packed as if we were on our own. We brought a lot of stuff that turned out to be redundant, considering what was available in the camp.

That said, our Burning Man stuff also doubles as a disaster-preparedness kit, at home in Vancouver; I keep everything within easy reach, together with a propane stove, six-week food pantry and one-month drinking water supply.

Being part of a camp makes life considerably easier and more comfortable than trying to manage on your own at Burning Man. I can't imagine how you'd do it, alone. However, there are some in life that seem to make things work by the skin of their pants; not all of them are moochers; some just prefer to be rugged.

Having been at Burning Man before, I had an experiential knowledge base. I thought I knew it all, about what was needed for radical self-reliance. Then I read that Burners need to be ready to take care of all their needs during a prolonged traffic line-up, getting out of the event. Aha.

The report detailed one disastrous exodus when it rained, bringing everything and everybody to a standstill. Rain turned the clay playa to mud; it's not just any mud, either. Playa dust is so fine that the mud it makes is akin to potters' clay. Playa mud binds together well. If you walk on it, the clay sticks to your feet; with every step, the amount on your soles builds up; soon you are a foot higher, leaving shoe-shaped craters behind you, all of which damage the playa. So, when it rains at Burning Man, people are confined to quarters.

During that rainy exodus, people were stuck in their cars for 18 hours... without toidies. For that reason, Burners are advised to bring a five-gallon bucket with a tight-fitting lid and 10 pounds of *Kitty Litter*. Now that's what you call radical self-reliance, eh?

Tickets to Burning Man are hard to get; 60-70,000 sell out in less than an hour. By the time we were invited to join Camp OCD, the event was well past sold out. Our only hope was to score tickets from a scalper. Then, my lucky star intervened: I got an email from Richard Meyer and his wife Dana Sprinkle.

To digress for a moment about Richard and Dana: They purchased a bunch of my pictures before Vashon was eviscerated; they probably have more of my work than anyone other than myself. The first picture they bought—*Cleavage in Space | Burning Man 2004*—was themed on Burning Man (the burning man art was transposed to the locale of nearby Pyramid Lake, shot at sunset on the occasion of a summer party for the staff of QAV and their families and friends. But the picture looks like the playa, which is what attracted them to it.)

Their interest in *Cleavage in Space* prompted a discussion about the picture during which we discovered that we were all Burners. That established a special comradery and was why Richard and Dana were contacting me now—they had an extra set of tickets to Burning Man 2015 and wondered, would we be interested in them? You bet!

Not only that, they used our deal as an excuse for a Vancouver get-away and personally delivered the tickets to us. (!) It was the Law of Attraction come true for Pam and I.

Richard got the extra tickets by being part of a team producing a major (sponsored) Burning Man art project—an inter-active computer game, called *Simon II* (left) that controlled four giant flame throwers that shot colored flames.



Photos by Pam Swanson.

We arranged to see each other at Burning Man, but it never panned out; he was never at their exhibition when we were, and we couldn't find their camp.

It was in July when we got the tickets from Richard and Dana; that left us about six weeks to get all the stuff we needed. We were starting from nothing, so that was a lot of stuff—a tent, big water jugs, tarps, lights, batteries, bandages, bikes... it went on and on; our supplies list was a four-page Excel spreadsheet. The real challenge was making it fit into and onto the Civic; but that was part of the fun. The challenges added to our Burning Man experience; they turned our trip into a memorable project.

There were moments that I questioned whether I had overestimated the capabilities of our Honda Civic; it can hold an awful lot; but I never had bicycles on the roof! We bought the bikes at a Canadian Tire super store somewhere out of town and had to strap them onto the roof platform to get them back downtown to Lancaster Gate in the West End.

I was worried that the roof-rack platform supports could take the weight of both bikes; we were pushing the limits.



Photo by Pamela Swanson.

My confidence was restored as we managed to get through the bumps and turns of city traffic, and even got up to 60 mph [90 kmh] on the highway home. A spider-web of ropes held the bikes in place with nary a slip.

Except the loss of 10% fuel efficiency, due to the wind resistance of the bikes and 500-pound cargo load, the ol' '98 Civic behaved like the proverbial *Little Engine That Could*; maybe that's why it is rated as the most stolen car in the USA.

There was poor cell-phone reception at Burning Man in 2015 [a problem since fixed]. We had no way to contact Dean, who was already there. He had an early-entry pass and got to the playa three days before the opening, to get a good campsite and build the infrastructure (a considerable feat).



Dean gave us the playa address he was aiming for, and we found that; but there was no way to know which of many was camp OCD. The Blackrock City "Playa" was a jumbled mass of humanity; it looked like one of those refugee camps you see on the TV news—a sea of RVs, tents and foil-covered yurts. We arrived in the late afternoon, when Burners are usually out on the playa or maybe just out of it.

Luckily, Lucas Huff noticed us driving by, saw the BC plates, put 2 and 2 together, and asked if we were looking for camp OCD. Hallelujah! Lucas escorted us to our allotted space in the 100-foot-square campsite [9.2 square meters].



Our 10 X 10-foot [3.09 X 3.09 meter] Kodiak tent was tall enough to stand in and not much smaller than the bedroom in our condo. I rigged LED lights run from a computer back-up battery at night, when the generator wasn't running.

Photos by Pam Swanson

Explaining that I was retired seemed the equivalent of saying, I give up. Perhaps I should have said I was between gigs; that was more like the way I felt (NOT).

As a way of introducing myself, I brought along two dozen Pixies, of *Space Lady*; they were the real McCoy, original ones made and signed in 1972, in sealed envelopes. I asked people not to open them on the Playa, for fear that the dust could mar the finish on the miniature exhibition prints.⁶³

Our campmates were blown away by the fact that the Pixies were made nearly a half a century ago, before most of them were born. My ploy worked; the Pixies properly positioned me as some kind of historical character, like Willie Nelson. After that, our younger campmates wanted to hear what Pam and I had to say about things; we both became sort of gurus, especially Pam, who read Taro cards for our campmates, and expounded on the Law of Attraction, while I tried to explain the inner workings of the world's financial empire.

Being around Dean built-up my self-confidence; I got spellbound watching him unabashedly perform for people. Most evenings, no matter what else was going on, Dean got out his African drum set and just started playing. He brought a half dozen of his extensive collection to the playa, to play at the camp and in several Burner drum circles. Before long, other people would join in—our campmates as well as passersby and friends from other camps stopping by to say hello.

Dean had been to Burning Man nearly twenty times; he'd made a lot of playa buddies over the years. From the best of the bunch, Dean assembled an OCD drum circle. No matter that they were novices; Dean taught them their parts, rehearsed them, and in just a few days built an ensemble that performed so well that they were invited to play at the closing ceremonies surrounding the burning of the Man—the “inner circle,” so to speak.



Our campmate, Buddha, was the chef the year. He made custom gourmet omelettes and/or waffles for brunch every day between 10:00 and 2:00 pm [14:00], while people wandered into the commons area, usually dazed in any number of ways.

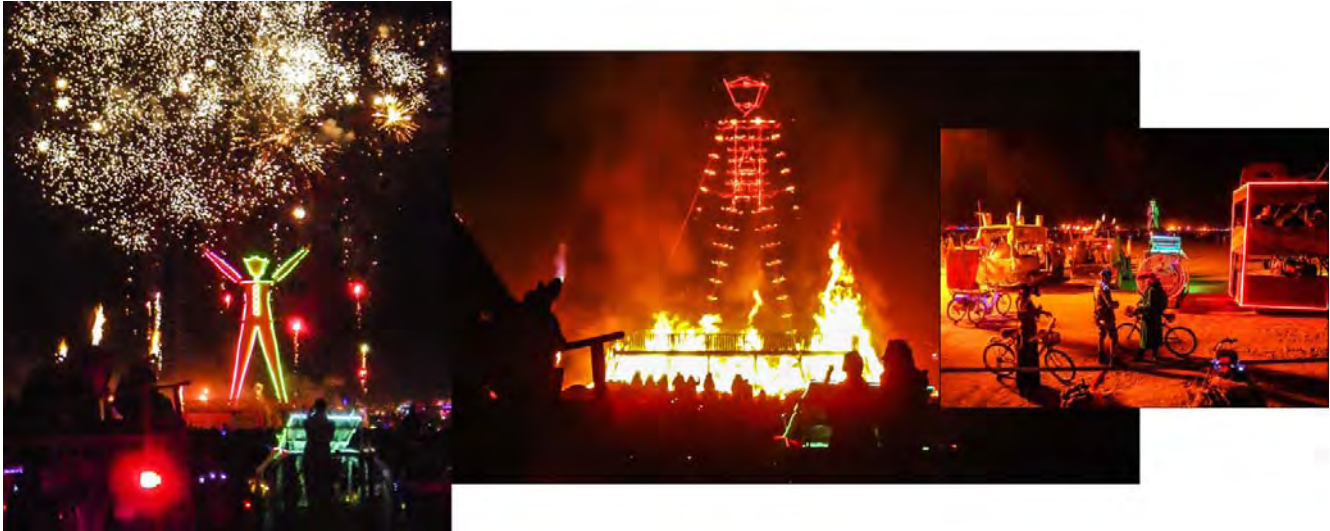
Buddha made dinner for us, too, most nights. Other nights either Jules or Lucas cooked up something and/or people did their own thing.

Being a foodie, I found the food management left something to be desired; the fridge and larders were filled with bits and pieces of everybody's favorite stuff; it was disorderly and inefficient, apart from Buddha's breakfasts. (Buddha kept his own cache.)

I recalled what Dean said about the gourmet meals of days gone by and volunteered to be the camp's dinner chef at the 2016 Burning Man Camp OCD.

⁶³ Pixies were printed on Kodabromide F2 (glossy, dried matte), processed in Dektol split 1:3.

Dean demonstrated the veracity of the maxim, “Build It and They Will Come.” Here’s another example: to help cover the costs of the Burning Man camp (a few thousand dollars), Dean organized a gala, private concert at his home—where he installed a stage in the backyard. About 100 friends and colleagues plunked down twenty bucks each to see Kate Cotter, The Novelists, and Dean’s drummers, with drinks included (from a fully stocked bar). The Burning Man fundraisers are thoroughly professional; Dean brings in a full rig of stage lighting for the gala events, which are always sold out. How’s that for gumption?



Photos by Pam Swanson.

2015 – Update Website – Captions Morph into Memoir

After the excitement of our Burning Man adventures, life in BC was b-o-r-i-n-g. I felt like I was back in prison, back in my cell. I needed a project and decided to update my website profile, with Pam Swanson’s help.

Pam writes the code and assembles my websites; I couldn’t do it without her. She was keen to include videos of my old slide shows; she thinks they are historically important (and tells me this memoir is, too—that’s what keeps me working on it. She is my rock).

At Pam’s urging, I got some ancient Watchout gear out of the closet—Show Sage machines, built by David Branson.

Branson, as you’ll recall, was made Dataton’s importer when Jim Kellner got pushed aside by that worm-tongued Ganiff, Fredrick Svahnberg. Branson had his bread buttered on both sides; besides repping Dataton, he made rock-solid gear—Show Sage servers; first built with Shuttle computers, then Antec *Aria* machines (which offered more card slots than Shuttles).

Branson also offered indescribably good customer service. His machines became the industry standard, until Watchout became old tech. He got out of the business just in time, in my opinion. Anyway....

Those Watchout computers had Osprey video-capture cards, used to digitizes analog video signals. I hooked one of those veteran computers to an even older 1980s VHS-video tape deck—a Magnavox VR8400 that once belonged to Doug Ethridge, at Avcon, in Seattle, in 1994, before he gave it to me, when he graduated up to broadcast quality gear.

My fingers were crossed when I fired up the antique kit. To my great relief, the lights lit and the tape player sprang to life. Even better, the tapes played, albeit roughly and were successfully converted to digital masters. The digital movies were small, rendered with the .mov codec (640 X 480 pixels); but hey, something is way more than nothing, eh? Plus, that small size is ideal for cell phones. Ha!

Before posting the slide-show movies on the Internet, I wrote captions to give current viewers some idea of what they were watching—why each show was made, how it was done and what it accomplished.

I quickly found myself in the weeds, trying to describe what multi-image was all about. To explain technical issues like screen and projection formats, to people who never saw a slide show in their lives, and never will. Yikes.

That was like trying to describe a flavor, like chocolate. Some things are indescribable; experiences fall into that category. Most everyone loves chocolate; but nobody can tell you how it tastes. Chocolate is something you have either experienced or not. Same goes for sex, it is totally experiential.

Multi-image shows, in their day, had the impact of IMAX; they could be “more than the eye could see” and/or more than the mind could process. Multi-screen slide shows were originally called “Multi-Media;” that was before the term was co-opted by Silicon Valley. Rusty Russel’s epic productions teased your brain with multiple screens together with a plethora of good, old-fashioned scenery, props, lighting and illusions; all to create synergy—the show is greater than the sum of its parts.

Good multi-image shows were jaw droppers; but the medium didn’t translate to video; videos of slide shows look *nothing* like the originals.

Contemporary viewers of my slide-show videos will get about as much sense of the original experience as folks my age (Baby Boomers) have watching 20s, 30s and 40s-era movies or 50s TV shows. Those legacy shows can give us a perspective of history’s arc—we get a sense of how we got to where we are—but they aren’t *experiential*.

There’s no place on earth today, that I know of, where a person can see an actual slide show. Maybe, before he dies, Richard Shipps will set-up his projection grid again. Shipps claims to have a full rig in storage; a relic from his days running Deaf Dumb & Blind [DD&B] studios, and says he’s going to do it, “...one of these days.” I’ve got a one-ounce gold coin that says that will never happen, at least not in my lifetime. Wanna bet?

To digress for a moment, about the videos of Incredible's multi-image shows: It's worth repeating here that when Rocky Graziano let me down (described earlier), I hoped that Fred would curate some of the Incredible Slidemakers' historical materials.

I sent Fred the master videotapes of Incredible Slidemakers' slide shows. Those were Beta transfers of the original U-matic tapes made at Incredible Slidemakers. I rescued them from 73rd Street, stored them in Hawaii, took them with me to Sweden, then to Vashon Island; and finally transferred them at Doug Ethridge's Avcon Studio in 1993. The U-Matic tapes showed their age; the images were faint, but there was enough to re-master.

Can you believe, Fred tossed them?

He won't answer emails on the subject. I am heartbroken of course. The only examples of so many people's efforts—pioneering work—was squandered, tossed on the scrap heap of history.

When I saw Fred, in New York, in January 2015, when Pam and I visited the Big Apple; I didn't realize that he had trashed the tapes; we didn't talk about that.

Now, I would smack his face, for his disregard and arrogance; for his forfeiture of Incredible's legacy.

Left: Fred Cannizarro in 1975 by Jim Casey.
Right: Fred and Yours Truly by Pam Swanson, 2015.



Having said all that, you can appreciate that it didn't take too long for me to realize that there was a lot more to say than could be packed into captions. Thus, I embarked on updating the story of my life. The last time I did that was in 2005, after climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, to mark my 60th birthday; the time was ripe; I was 70.

The story update got out of hand; it was too much for a website. That was when Pam suggested that I write a book, possibly as a blog. And so, I began. Little did I know that four years later [2019] I'd still be at it. If I did, would that have changed my mind? I hope the memoir has historical value, for AV aficionados and students of audiovisual history.

[Spoiler Alert: It's Christmastime, 2018, and I am a month away from being done indexing the book. What I thought would take a month has taken half a year; on my best days I was only able to index a dozen pages. The hidden complexities of making an index were further complicated by yet another round of rewrites, suggested by Pam, to quit using so many semicolons and open-up large text blocks. Creating a table of contents comes next; hopefully, that will be more straightforward and I can get on with illustrating this massive missive.]

2015 – Last of The Mohicans – Rivermill Gallery

"It's the thought that counts."

Mom

Michael Chan's Rivermill Gallery in New Jersey is the only place where my work still hangs, aside from the homes and offices of my few patrons.

Chan bought about a dozen pieces early on, back at the apex of my career [sic] in fine arts, the days of the Oh My Godard gallery and Eye Candy Design Solutions.

He once worked for me, at Incredible Slidemakers, where he assisted Jim Casey, running the photo studio. When Incredible Slidemakers was shuttered, Chan tried making a living as a photographer; but it didn't work out.

Around the same time that I began doing fine-arts work, Michael opened Rivermill Gallery in fashionable Westfield, New Jersey, to sell his own work and his wife's oil paintings. He got enthusiastic about my illustrations.



I sent Chan a set of prints from the *Undercurrents* and *Inuktuk* collections on consignment.

He did a magnificent job of framing them and displayed them for ten years—with zero success.

Photo by Michael Chan.

Recently, [2015] Chan contacted me and asked how I would like to have them returned, by the Post or by FedEx? Say what?

I couldn't fit another picture into our space for love or money. Pam would leave me if I did; besides, they certainly wouldn't sell here, either. So, I asked Michael to donate them to his favorite charity. That's when he said, "No way!"

Chan sent me \$500 and bought them all; it was his way of paying respect to my work. He said he was embarrassed to offer so little; but for me it was so much. Such generosity is seldom encountered in life, neither is such respect. My mom used to say, "It's the thought that counts." She also said, "It is better to give, than to receive."

That's the way I was brought up and the way I still feel. Values are relative; anyone who travels knows that. Each of the few people like Michael that I have met make up for a hundred others who would only take from you.

This afternoon [2016], Michael wrote to tell me about his latest sales efforts, involving eBay. That's a subject near and dear; I try to know all I possibly can about internet sales (and collections).

Michael is offering three of my pieces for value prices, especially considering the cost of the frames. For example, an 18 X 12-inch [45 X 30 cm] print is priced at USD \$250 [~CAD \$310]. Here in Vancouver, that money wouldn't even buy a frame of Chan's quality, let alone the print. So, I am interested to see if the buying public will take Chan's offerings. My theory is that they won't.

People either like a picture or they don't. Forget about investment grade or BS like that; a person likes an image or not; it either goes with the couch or it doesn't. The question is: what will the traffic bear? At what price will the art sell? Michael's foray into the world of eBay will be an education for both of us. The minute I sense that there is a market for my pictures, I will jump on eBay like a full-time job.

[Spoiler Alert: Now, two years later [2017], Michael has still had no luck selling my pictures. Nor have I. Lately; I have taken to giving them away.]

To digress for a moment, about Reality: Never in a million years did I think that *nobody* would want my pictures. However, after a decade of denial, I've no choice but to accede to the facts.

I feel that a change is coming; I fear that Pam and I will be financially forced from Lancaster Gate, if hyper-inflation kicks in from all the money printing; that has increased the urgency of getting this book finished and continuing to purge as much as I can.

There is an outside chance that—if I have invested wisely in gold—we'll get bailed out, when the economy crashes again. Some say that will happen by 2020. Only time will tell. So far, my investment in precious metals is a substantial loss; I am a long-term investor. Ha!

There are cycles to everything; that much I know. If we do get forced out, I'm all for trying something totally new, like my old idea of living in Kuching, Borneo. In a way, I am itching for a reason to make a change; but I resist because our current situation offers a comfortable stasis. Pam and I are receiving enough from government programs to cover our current expenses. That stasis will not last, at least according to my life experiences; what goes up goes down must come down (and vice versa).

I have been cruising on a high since the Vashon purge; nothing has gone wrong; but the economy is teetering. Having lived through the '70s, I know how whacky the value of money can get. I remember how, in those days, we used to chuckle disparagingly about how pensioners must be getting monkey hammered by the inflation. Now, I am the pensioner getting money hammered by rising prices.

I cannot survive without government handouts. I am not happy about that. I have always prided myself on self-sufficiency. I spent my formative years reading Ayn Rand. As one of her acolytes, to be sucking on the government's tit is almost an insult for me. However, when I consider that the rich are getting richer while I am on their dole, I don't give a damn.

There's so much talk, about how to get the economy going again. Yet, the answer is so simple—give money to poor people. Poor people spend the little money they get on the essentials of life. Rich people can afford to save, poor people can't.

When money circulates, it is a utility. Money that is saved, goes to sleep; nothing happens when money sleeps. When the "velocity" of money slows down, so does the entire economy. If money were dispersed more evenly, across all classes of society, instead of being hoarded by TBTF banks and the top 1%, the increased velocity would jump-start the stalled global economy.

The Canadian government has it right; they give ~~peasants~~ people like me a hefty monthly amount, referred to as a Guaranteed Income Supplement [GIS]. It's an income "top up" designed to bring the needy up to a specified minimum level, that supports a middle-class lifestyle (on an economy budget).

But you know what? Every month, I spend all that money—and more, from meager savings—not a bit of it gets to snooze. That is what I call Socialism that works. It's the way they run the economy in Scandinavia, the kind of Socialist agenda that has a proven track record of working well.

As the years pass, there will be less and less work for humans; robots will do more and more. What will money mean then? If nobody has a job, how will they get money? With no money, how will they provide for themselves? You can see where this is going.

I have no solution, other than my observation that the current Canadian system works for me, and for many others. It allows me a basic standard of living that is more than tolerable. As well, I can earn money, if I so choose, without jeopardizing my status on the government's dole. However, the more I earn the less I get from them. That's a bit of a disincentive to work.

The bottom line is: If I want to buy a new Corvette, I had better look for work; but if I want to hang at the beach and amuse myself writing this book, the dole provides me with the proverbial golden opportunity.

2015 – Intoxicating Hobby – *Condo Cooking*

For twelve years, I walked past a West-End shop on Davie Street (Vancouver, BC) called Neighborhood Wine Makers.

I never went in thinking that the stuff they made must be swill.

However, in 2014, Ron and Doreen Jacklin gave Pam and I a bottle of Malbec that they had produced there. It was terrific, but I thought nothing more of it.

Then, toward the end of the year, I got to thinking about what to get Pam for Christmas; she's a tough one. Unlike trying to choose a present for the person who's got everything, Pam has "nothing;" but it's the same problem, because she really doesn't want anything.

I ended up at Neighborhood Wine Makers, ordering Pam's Christmas present—a batch of her favorite white wine, Pinot Grigio. They had three grades, ranging from CAD \$120 to \$180, [~USD \$90 to \$135] for twenty-nine 750-ml bottles. (Not bad, eh?)

The \$120 version was fermented for 4 weeks; the \$150 version for six weeks, and the \$180 for eight weeks. I was forced to choose the cheapest, not for the price but for the time—it had to be ready before Christmas.

I called Pam's vintage *Christmas Spirits*. At the same time, I ordered a batch of eight-week merlot for my forthcoming birthday and called that, *Old Coot*.

The coupe du grâce was making custom labels. Geez was that fun. It was the first time I worked out with my design tools for a long, long time (since 2012, before Vashon was scuttled). The labels were like miniature magazine covers.

The wines turned out (very) well; Pam and I were both pleased with our respective vintages and everyone we've ever served them to has had nothing to say but good things.

Although polite guests always compliment the host on the wine(s), rarely do people say, "Wow." So, during the next years, I made ten more batches.



The holidays also inspired me to do some baking and use some of the kitchen tools I salvaged as the ship went down on Vashon Island. That kind of led me back into the idea of somehow monetizing my interest in cuisine, especially patisserie.

At the time, I was still cooking dinner for Pam and I. [Spoiler Alert: we reverted to cooking for ourselves.] It took a year to get used to cooking in a micro-kitchen, which is what we have in our Vancouver condos.

They are galley kitchenettes; standing in the middle, you can spin around and reach anything and everything. That's a far cry from my former 600-square-foot [55.7-square-meter] kitchen on Vashon Island. I couldn't make what I once did there; it was like starting over, relearning how to cook.

I couldn't help recalling the days at my 73rd Street studio in New York, when I cooked with a two-burner, electric-coil stove and a tiny oven. I reckoned that, if I could do it then, I could do it again... and I did, to the point where I considered some of my new dinner creations to be some kind of gourmet food.

The meals were certainly nutritious enough; most dishes average a dozen ingredients. So, I figured: why not become a celebrity chef? In today's Internet world, I could become the star of... Condo Cooking [© 2016 Douglas Mesney]. If that were successful, I might be picked up by the Food Network, or one of the other TV majors. Ha!

The thing is, I *could* do that. I have enough gear to get something like that going. Not just foodie gear, but also audiovisual. It would be easy to rig up a little studio in one of our two kitchenettes.

Condo Cooking would be all about one-pot meals. I have an unending array of recipes because I never do the same thing twice—although I have themes, like Indian, or Mexican, or Chinese, or Mediterranean; those are basically clusters of spices.

One-pot cooking is something I mastered on Vashon Island; it is a variation of East-Indian cooking that I learned in Malaysia. Sauces and ingredients are pre-cooked—either fully or partially, then assembled, as needed, for particular dishes.

It's a lot like Chinese cooking, where the dish is assembled in the wok. For example, Indian high cuisine relies on six basic *gravies* (sauces).⁶⁴ Nearly every dish starts off the same way—the key ingredients are fried in ginger and garlic. The sauce—one of the four, or combos of several—is added at the last minute.

Then, I thought it through and decided the whole idea was a no-go. Not for lack of value, but for lack of means. As a senior citizen, I have fewer opportunities. Who would invest in a relic, an old man about to plotz? I mean, really.

To get Web traffic, you gotta advertise. Consider how much a brand like Trip Advisor or Trivago spends on TV ads—to drive you to their hotel-booking websites.

The British celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver, is the closest thing to what I could see myself being, personality-wise; but how would I drive traffic to the site?

Without that answer, I decided not to go on with Condo Cooking.

⁶⁴ Onion-tomato; brown-onion; palak (spinach); goan (from Goa with coconut milk); salan and basic white gravy.

2016 – Loss of A Friend – Shocking Reminder

Out of the blue, Pam and I learned that Doreen Jacklin had stage-IV colon cancer; Pam caught the news on Facebook when Ron posted it.

We hadn't seen Doreen and Ron for a long time, since a Christmas coffee together at a Blenz café near our condo; that was when they gave us that bottle of the fine Malbec wine; the one they made at Neighborhood Winery; the bottle that started my wine-making (as above).

Doreen Jacklin signing as witness at our wedding on English Bay beach, 2009. Photo by Richard Legault.



They were cheery, especially Doreen. She was a gal who exuded optimism. Ron was more subdued. He was a naturally-reserved fellow; a real straight arrow; he hardly drinks and when he does it's wine. He never smokes weed or does anything like that.

I think he has a hard time letting go. I'm Ron's mirror image. He thought I was a bit of a nut; but I was successful; that made me a conundrum.

Then there was the disappointment at BCIT; the time that Ron brought me in as a Photoshop instructor, and I got fired by Ron's boss half way through the semester, for not following the teaching guidelines.

Things were never the same between Ron and I after that; we saw less and less of each other; Pam and I were clueless about what became of the two of them until she picked up that sad post on Facebook.

What made Doreen's news more impactful was having recently learned that Jennifer Myrans—the Canadian woman who bought Birdland—was also battling stage IV colon cancer.

I can't think of a better place to battle cancer than Birdland, even if you lose (which Jennifer did, on June 21st). Vashon Island was a healing place. It is where I intended to die, had Fate not pulled the rug out from under me.

I imagined myself, at the moment of my passing, lying in the forest fern glade behind the house, on a summer afternoon, dabbled in light filtered through the giant cedar and fir trees.

But the Fates had something else in mind for me. I was granted extra time, by virtue of living near medical facilities that would have been inaccessible from Vashon Island.

Within just a few months, Doreen was dead. I am sure (and so is Ron, I think) that she was killed by the cure—chemo. From what Ron told us, Doreen had been improving, until the hospital put her through another CT scan.

Ron said that she reacted badly to the contrast solution used to reveal more detail in X-ray images. Contrast solutions are radioactive isotopes; the contrast is improved because the radiation makes things brighter in the pictures.

Although the isotope has a half-life of six hours, the combo of the radioactive fluid and X-rays proved deadly and Doreen passed away two days after that scan. Wow.

Doreen and Jennifer, two for two, down for the count. Here today, gone tomorrow. Those sullen reminders of mortality made me attack my memoir with greater gusto and a renewed sense of urgency.

2016 – Vashon Visit – July 4th Weekend

Camping at Mike & Catherine Urban's place on Vashon Island, for the Fourth of July, was the high point of summer, and a chance for Pam and I to dust-off our tent and camping gear, in preparation for Burning Man, at the end of August.

Mike and Catherine (on the right, below) do estate sales, they know half the Island's population on a first-name basis.

Pam Swanson photos.



Each year, they host an annual Fourth of July bash for almost 100 people. It's held at Mike's father's house, built on one of Vashon's sweetest spots—the bluff overlooking Inner Quartermaster Harbor, with a sprawling 150-foot-wide [45.7 meters] front lawn—which is where we pitched our tent. We had a 210° panoramic view of Maury Island, Dockton, the Burton Peninsula, the inner yacht harbor and Burton town.

The Urban's house—one of the first built on Vashon and a Heritage building—was a veritable museum of antique furniture and furnishings; not only the Urban's, but also a huge collection of items cherry-picked from the Urban's estate sales. Mike was using the unoccupied house as a storage space. But once a year, he opened the place up for their annual party.

The July 4th blast was a potluck on steroids. Folks went out of their way to make extra special things. For example, Mike and Catherine's daughter made a yummy, epic-sized German whipped cream cake (made with almond flour and marzipan). And the owners of a new Vashon restaurant, called Gravy, brought 100-feet [~30 meters] of fresh-made sausages for the grill. Before anyone arrived, we took over the kitchen in the house on the morning of the Fourth. Pam made a big fruit salad. I baked a cake and made a chocolate-cherry compote—whipped cream, cherries and brownie chunks—the size of a hotel pan (about 12 X 21 inches [~30 X 53 cm]).

The guests started arriving around 6:00 pm [18:00]; but the Urban clan was there well before that, to get everything set up. There was a lot to do. Catherine and her daughter, Camryn, got the kitchen ready to accommodate the dozens of dishes soon to arrive; tables were set-up to handle to overflow of edibles. Mike stage-managed everything. He was assisted by his son, Kjell and two of his high school buddies. They set-up the infrastructure (outdoor tables & chairs; cooking grills and ice chests, etcetera) then turned their attention to the highlight of the party—Mike's big fireworks display. That involved setting-up about 1,000 fireworks—mostly rockets and fountains.

Around 5:00 pm [17:00] a couple of Mike's buddies arrived to help with the pyrotechnics. Mike built a 6-foot-diameter [~2 meters] turntable, used to rapidly launch rockets. Four guys sat around the turntable; in front of each was a rocket launcher. As the turntable rotated, one guy lit the fuses and launched the rockets; the second removed the spent rocket casing; the third loaded a fresh rocket and the fourth did a safety check. They managed to launch a rocket every four seconds, during the finale; 200 in all..

Photos by Pam Swanson.



Mike's fireworks show, although short (3-5 minutes), competed with the Island's "big" display, which was sponsored by Vashon's premier restaurant, The Hardware Store. Years earlier, Vashon's 30-minute fireworks spectacular was a (politically oriented) gift of Vashon's Black Angus cattle baron, Tom Stewart.

He left the Island and moved to Colorado, in protest of Washington State inheritance taxes. A few years later, he and his entire family died in a freak helicopter accident. Life turns on a dime.

After the Urban affair, we moved over to Anne Gordon's house and spent a couple of days with her. She's become one of our closest friends, one of just a few. It's funny how people drop away as time passes; who leaves whom? Life is so random. When we visit Anne, I feel like it's a family affair.

We visited Tom and Bea Lorentzen; we just popped in, unannounced (if Bea knows you're coming, she goes overboard with the preparations. As it was, she got their son, Karsten, to cook up some Reuben sandwiches. Reubens aren't easy to make—corned beef, swiss cheese, sauerkraut and Russian dressing are grilled between rye-bread slices—but Karsten got it together and they were the real thing, just like the Reubens I used to enjoy at the Carnegie Deli on 7th Avenue between 54th & 55th Streets in New York [now defunct].

Pam doesn't like meat, but she ate one, anyway. How's that for appreciation?



Photo by Pam Swanson.

Although friendly enough, it was weird, sitting around the Lorentzen's dining table.

Tom was fading, fast; he was a shadow of his former self. I remembered him mowing an eight-acre [3.24 hectares] field every month during the spring, summer and autumn, sometimes twice monthly in late spring and early summer.

He and Bea also kept a garden the size of a mini farm. They grew everything under the sun, in quantity. They gave me and a few other select neighbors "picking rights" in their garden.

One summer I gathered an entire row of basil plants that were being neglected; I thought I might be a bit of a pig; but Tom and Bea thanked me for taking the herbs! I ground the stuff down in a Robot Coupe food processor, together with Pecorino Romano cheese and olive oil, to make a year's supply of dynamite Pesto.

I picked corn there, too. Tom was a clever gardener; he used to plant three different kinds—slow, medium and fast growing (55 to 95 days). A "born again" horticulturalist, Tom also kept bees and made cider from his own apples, which included the antique Gravenstein and Rome Beauty species.

Bea was in charge of preserving their harvests. Half of the basement was used as her larder (the other half was her arts & crafts studio). There were three freezers full of food; dozens of Mason jars filled with preserves; and gallons of cider, both sweet and hard. Bea once told me how great it was to be able to bake a cherry pie at Christmas, with berries from their own fruit trees.

All that was gone now and Tom had not weathered well. He was a wasted version of himself; he needed help just to get out of bed and walk to the dinner table. A month after our visit, Tom fell down the stairs, broke a lot of bones, and needed home care after that. With Karsten's help, Bea managed to hold the household together. Throughout their trials, Tom and Bea funded their son Rolf's household; he had trouble keeping jobs.

From my place at the Lorentzen's table that day, I could see the driveway to Birdland. I knew that the pall of death still hung there. Jennifer Myrans' relatives were dealing with her recent death; her property was being disposed of, it was a work in progress. I saw a car go up the dirt road, leaving rooster-tails of dust behind.

I knew I could never go back there.

[Update, 2017: Tom is still alive. Bea had a stroke which, fortunately, left her only slightly more "ditzzy" than she was before, according to Rolf. He called to ask my help resolving a property-border dispute with a developer involving a stretch of land that involved a corner of my (former) property.]

2014-15 | Vashon Memories | Pamela Swanson Photos | Plates N^{os} 1-2

Should be called "Mostly Vashon Memories | Pamela Swanson Photos" (but that's too long).

Plate N^o 1: Top down, left to right:

Anne Gordon's cat and objet d'art suit of armor; Christian Codd & Yours Truly; the pier at Dockton Park; Eden Codd with the family's new pooch (who didn't last long); the dock at Gold Beach; view from Gold Beach Country Club pool; Puget sound fishing, Mount Rainier; objets d'art roosters at the IGA market in Vashon town; beach roses; Stas Kudla & Anne Gordon; Patrick "Einstein" MacManus; Tim Carney and his objet d'art rocks.

Plate N^o 2: Top down, left to right:

Our humble home at Burning Man; objet d'art illuminated face sculpture, Burning Man; vulture awaiting road kill, Ravendale, California; wishful thinking, but not my bike; well-fed heron at Lost Lagoon (Vancouver); drum circle at Dean Rossi's Reno home; wild horses in the hills behind Dean Rossi's hood; John Turner's Reno workshop where Dean Rossi built a solar-heated shower stall for camp OCD (Burning Man), seen at right; Anne Gordon & Yours Truly at Dockton Park; Anne Gordon & Eden Codd at Dockton Park; details of objets d'art in Anne Gordon's home including a peacock-goddess curtain, Tibetan caricature and part of her earrings collection; Axel Codd strumming the guitar with two anonymous friends.



2014-15 | VASHON MEMORIES | PAMELA SWANSON PHOTOS | PLATE N° 1

See caption for details.



2014-15 | VASHON MEMORIES | PAMELA SWANSON PHOTOS | PLATE N° 2

See caption for details.

2016 – Burning Man – Camp Cook



I was the camp cook at Burning Man this year [2016].

Last year, I enjoyed myself most on the three days that I cooked dinner; so, I volunteered to do it full time this year. I got plenty of kudos, not just for cooking but for cleaning up after myself.

[Rant Alert: Some other campmates, particularly Lucas Huff, had a habit of disappearing after they made something for themselves, leaving the clean-up to others. That wasn't very nice and certainly not in the spirit of Burning Man, which is about giving, not taking.]

Photo by Pam Swanson.

I wanted to do something that gave meaning to the whole Burning Man thing. My contribution was a big one; but I was doing something I like to do, so it added immensely to my fun—and shouldn't that be what life is all about, having more fun?

I mean, these days how often do I get the chance to cook for twenty people? Or, how often do I have a \$1,000 food shopping budget?

I love to cook on a social basis. The restaurant business sucks because you must cook the same thing time after time—b-o-r-i-n-g.

But, for the camp, I could cook anything I wanted. Of course, cooking in desert sand storms was a challenge; but Nomads do it all the time and it was certainly less challenging than when Dean and I put on that *Oceano* Watchout show at Burning Man in 2004.



Photo by Pam Swanson.

Pam and I went down to Reno three days early, to help Dean Rossi get the camp loaded for shipping to the playa and organize the camp's larder.

Dean's gal, Jennifer Miller, kindly let us stay in her apartment; it was just a couple of miles from Dean's house, where she was staying. Her pad was super convenient for shopping, and was adequately equipped, although Jen didn't cook much.

Her freezer was chock-a-block full; a big chicken took up most of the space. Jen told us to eat as much of it as we wanted, and bring the rest to Burning Man, which is what ended up happening.

For the first two days in Reno, Pam and I went shopping.

Dean came with us on the first foray, to Cash & Carry; Laurie Jensen came with us to Costco (and helped us in the camp kitchen). I also did a little shopping on my own, for specialty ingredients, at Indian and Asian food emporiums.

At my request, Dean bought a shelf system at Home Depot, to create an organized campsite larder, instead of a bunch of boxes with invisible—and therefore unknown—ingredients, as had been the case last year.

Photo by Laurie Jensen.



I spent a little over a thousand bucks on all the provisions; that was about 20% over budget, but Dean wasn't too upset; he appreciates good food. I didn't hold back, either, because between Craig Law, Laurie Jensen and I, we had a well-equipped kitchen. Craig brought a full camp kitchen with him, from San Francisco; it included a three-burner semi-professional, propane camp stove capable of handling big pots and pans. Add to that a large sized toaster-oven combo and Laurie's microwave and we were ready for anything.

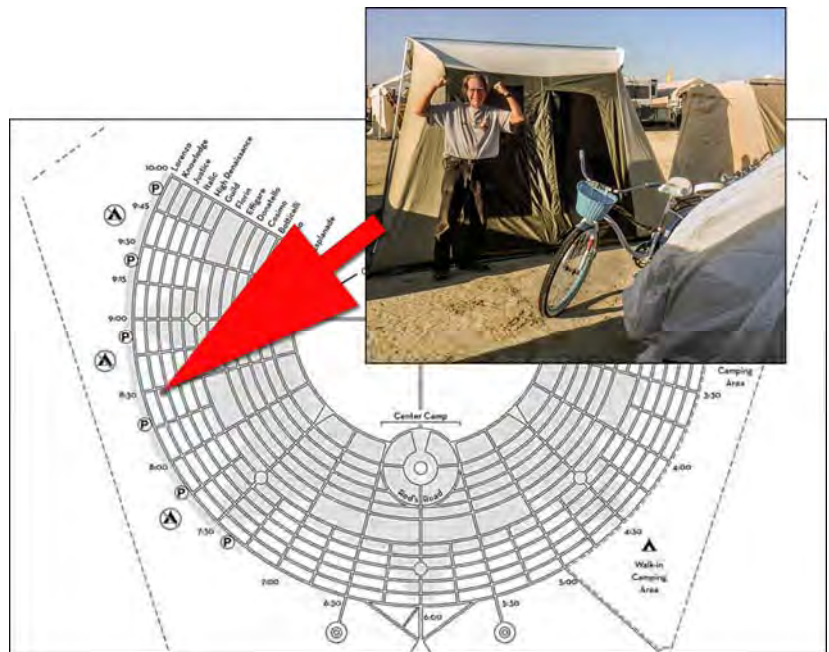
By agreement, Craig (Buddha) took care of breakfast, making deluxe omelettes and French toast between 10:00 and noon. Folks were on their own for lunch (few needed much after Buddha's killer breakfasts). Then I took over, to have dinner ready at 7:00 pm. That meant getting started by 3:00 pm [15:00] at the latest. Folks didn't like to eat any later, because it cut into their party-prep time.

At the camp, we were fortunate enough to have a large chest freezer in addition to a big, two door fridge-freezer.

We shared the chest freezer with Dennis Alumbach, with whom we shared camp space and facilities.

My half was loaded with veggies & meat; his half was filled with Eskimo Pies (a kind of ice-cream bar). Ha!

Diagram c/o Burning Man.
Tent photo by Pam Swanson.



Dennis' contribution was *Fjorgyn*, a giant-sized *mutant vehicle* in the form of a Norwegian Viking ship, which he spent three years building. Pam and I brought a Viking helmet for Dennis; I scored it at a sidewalk sale of theatrical props.



For the rest of our campmates we brought special gifts—acrylic prisms displaying Pam's great photo of last year's [2015] burning of the Man. I made a decoy prism, with a picture of a flower, to show US Customs, as an example of the twenty-four gifts I was importing into the States. That many of anything sets off alarm bells at the border. Can you imagine what CBP [Customs & Border Protection] would think of me, with two dozen pictures of a burning building? They'd likely take us for terrorists. Just the year before, we got pulled into secondary inspection because the decorated bikes on the top of our car were a dead giveaway that we were heading for Burning Man.

Photos by Pamela Swanson.



The picture prisms themselves were very special. Each was an original; no two were exactly the same. I bought them at Sam Flax, an art supply store in New York City, in 1974; I bought the store's entire supply—one hundred of them.

Most of the prisms were Christmas gifts for my clients; they displayed an illustration called *Four Eyes*, (left) that I made for Apple Records [a Beatles company] in 1973. Apple used the shot in a full-page *Billboard* magazine ad; I never got paid for the job; so, I had no compunctions about using for my own gift promotion.

Four Eyes, 1973

I had a couple of dozen prisms left over from that Christmas promotion. I carted them around with me for more than 50 years, convinced that I would eventually make a fortune with a limited edition of some great new picture. Ha! The prisms made it all the way to Vancouver, forty years later, where they just got in the way; that's when I decided to gift them, with Pam's picture, to our campmates at Burning Man.

To digress for a moment, about giving: Jane Fonda promoted her exercise regime with the catchphrase, "No Pain, no gain." The motto works equally well for the act of giving; the more it hurts to part with something, the greater the measure of generosity. That concept gets easier to comprehend as the years roll by—as does the truism that, "You can't take it with you." I must admit that after the prisms were given out, I felt like a weight had been released; I had one less responsibility; one less thing to deal with.

[Spoiler Alert: The prisms were the seeds that, once sown, bore fruit in my new [2017] mandate of divestiture: *The Great Picture Giveaway*.]



Mystery photographer. Back row, left to right: Dean Rossi & Jennifer Miller; Eric Andersen & Dustin Barbagelata; John Gunderson; Pamela Swanson & Douglas Mesney; Tim Ranalla & Lori Jensen; Jaymie Lowe; Jules Ackerson; Lucas Huff. Front row: Craig "Buddha" Law; Joel Ackerson; Jules Ackerson; Kate Cotter; Dave Madsen. (Dennis Alumbaugh was camera shy; Karen & Doug Kornbrust did not attend because of his health.)

The same core group that built camp OCD in 2015 were back again. Pam and I became part of that family; that was the most important part for me—making new friends; starting over with a new identity. Our other campmates (except for Dean) had no idea of who I was or what I did, except for the wildly exaggerated things Dean told them. They had to take me at my current face value, which was hard to discern.

By becoming the camp cook, my ambiguous persona morphed into a new character—my playa name became “Chef.” I worked hard on the meal plan, coming at it from several angles.

- Freshness ruled—things spoil quicker in warm climates; the most perishable goods needed to be used first.
- Facilities dictated the first and last meals on the week’s menu. While the camp was being built, and while it is being torn down, meals needed to be simpler to prepare. The most complex meals could be made mid-week, when all systems were go.
- Variety was important, with so many people to please. Every meal was completely different; I chose international cooking styles based on the cuisines of Italy, China, India, Bulgaria, Turkey and Morocco.
- Nutrition: every dinner had at least three courses, two for vegetarians and one for the carnivores; always with a rich desert (the camp favorites turned out to be chocolate-pudding cake and multi-berry shortcake.)
- Schedules: for the late-night stragglers returning to camp after God knows what, I had a 5-gallon pot of a hearty soup on hand.

Based on those criteria, I came up with this menu:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A.) Stuffed Peppers | G.) Moroccan Cous Cous |
| B.) Falafel / Fries / Salad | H.) Mexican Veggi Chilli |
| C.) Indian Veggie Curry | I.) Polish Perogies & Cabbage Rolls |
| D.) Pasta Prima Vera | J.) Egg Plant Parmesian |
| E.) Pesto & Tomato Noodles | K.) Veggie Meat Loaf |
| F.) Chinese Veggie Lo Mein | L.) Split Pea Soup |

Deserts included: Chocolate cupcakes; chocolate pudding; banana bread; mixed-berry trifle; cheese cake; assorted pies and muffins.



Left: Yours Truly with Laurie Jenson; center, with Dean Rossi. Photos by Pam Swanson.

Our campmates were blown away by the quantity and quality of the food. Most laughed about their original plans, to shed a few pounds at Burning Man, as they had in years past—that was such a compliment!

Plus, I get to do it again next year [2017]. Dean was so enthusiastic about the meals this year, that when I suggested sit down dinners around a table (instead of stools, chairs and couches) he said he'd bring a chandelier.

With this year's experience under my belt, I am already planning the menus for 2017; I've invented a new one—Braised Tuscan Turkey—and am reworking the Pesto Pasta and Indian Melange meals that were camp favorites.

Just the idea of going there again gives me a boost, a reason to keep going, a goal that is both substantial and possible.

Goals are what it has been about since the beginning. Life is a game of achievement. You set your goals and you either achieve them or you don't. That's why it's important to choose realistic goals—ones you can achieve, even if it means hard, nearly impossible work—as opposed to impossible dreams that one can realistically never achieve; we all know what those are; and they are guaranteed to disappoint. Being one's best is all one can do. Who wants to be disappointed?

Camp OCD and Burning man was a microcosm of my macro society, with a twist. Pam and I were the elder citizens there; but the younger denizens, ranging from '30s to '50s, who could have been our children, seem to totally accept us; and not just like grandparents—they embraced us as contemporaries.

Of course, that was impossible, philosophically as well as physically. The wisdom of age cannot be transferred backwards, only forwards. Because wisdom is experiential; wisdom is the net sum of life's experiences.

There is an arc to one's experiences. As you age, you perpetually experience new things particular to your age. For example, a young man hopefully won't experience the hair loss and erectile dysfunction, or the sense of withering mortality, that an older man would. Which of those two has a better understanding of Life?

Youth's narrower range of experiences restricts their basic comprehension—let alone understanding—of the wisdom offered by (some) seniors—like grapes trying to understand wine. My colleague, Kurt Boehnstedt, used to accurately lament: "We get too soon old and too late smart."

[Spoiler Alert: We didn't manage to get tickets to Burning Man 2017; the Fates had other things in mind. Instead, I will be spending that time in the hospital, having a kidney removed, and possibly my spleen. What concerns me almost as much is that, since we told Dean that we couldn't attend, and why, I haven't heard boo from him. He seems to have dropped us; kind of like how he dropped me in 2005. I'm disappointed, and hurt.]

2016 – Irrelevance – What’s the Use?

Motivation is my biggest problem now; dealing with the (self-made) fact that I am irrelevant and there is little I can do about it. The net result is that I feel somewhat like a prisoner doing a life sentence with occasional paroles.

OK, I started writing this book and that keeps me going... until it doesn't. When I consider that nobody is going to read this memoir (except you and a few others) it gets me down. The truth is, it's become a make-work project—irrelevant.

I don't like work without purpose. Pam reminds me that pleasing one's self is the only purpose that matters; but that doesn't cut it for me; my ego needs more; I need the respect of others, although I prefer to live in isolation.

I fear for this book because I have failed, in terms of its original purpose—to be a biographical history of the multi-image business, related not only by myself, but by others who also conjured and manifested a new communications medium, a new audiovisual artform; one that eventually collapsed under its own weight, vanquished by video and Powerpoint.

The book I began writing was to be a full-on documentary about the slide-show business. Told by those who made it happen. That's what I've done; but the number of other participants—"co-authors"—is less than I would have liked. Folks like me are hard to find; many of them are dead or demented... or just don't care. Why? It's irrelevant, stupid.

The numbers just aren't there. There are statistically zero potential readers. At the height of multi-image, there were about 5,000 members in the Association for Multi-Image. Those are the only ones who might remember me, at this point; they are the few who may have seen me at an AMI event; or read about me in *Multi-Images* magazine and the other trade magazines.

Sure, historians and students would appreciate parts of this memoir. But how would I ever find them, or they me? I reckon that publishing this memoir as a blog would at least perpetuate the possibility of people finding bits for their own stories buried in the pages of this tome. Ha!

Dare I publish electronically in this day of the #MeToo movement? Probably. I could release a redacted version on the Internet and for the full story, folks could buy the printed version. Hahaha.

[Update 2019: I've decided to publish on the internet and make my book available to everyone and anyone, free. Anyone who wants to sue me certainly could; but they'd win little financial gain; my assets are meager and beyond reach.]

Speaking of assets: "AV be good to me!" Bryan King once exclaimed, in mock Philippian style (pigeon-English). I can certainly say the same. Multi-image was a business that allowed me to grow in many ways. It was a business that facilitated entrepreneurship; it was a virtuous circle—as the shows grew, the staff expanded to fill the growing needs, which potentiated momentum-driven expansion. As my staff increased, so did my ambitions and the scope of my endeavors; shows got bigger and better.

Think of it as working with colors: the more colors you have, the more possibilities you also have. Translated into AV terms: more projectors mean more possibilities. But projectors cost more than colors.

Fortunately for me, the slide-show business expanded rapidly and dynamically. I always generated enough money to invest heavily in R&D; I spent a fortune on the latest and greatest gear; I even had gear custom-made when there wasn't a commercially available version.

Such was the case with my patented, rotating, rostrum-camera stage, propelled by rheostatically-controlled model-train engines, on standard, HO-gauge train tracks. And, of course, the ill-fated laser machine, which ~~nearly~~ bankrupted me.

As a result of all that R&D, I got a reputation for doing leading-edge shows for big audiences. That was its own virtuous circle; success begat success; fame begat fortune.

To digress for a moment, to romanticize the past: There was nothing quite like seeing your work projected onto a giant screen, being able to control the images on that screen, blending them together with music; it is as thrilling as flying a Learjet.

But like a Learjet, piloting a big multi-image rig also cost a fortune. In the end, it was the staging costs for big shows that killed the multi-image technique.

As the world's economic health went into decline after 1987, following the Savings & Loans banking collapse in the USA, expensive anything became hard to justify to the C-suite bean counters. Video and then digital projection offered a less expensive solution for delivering big-image entertainment for big audiences.

But I've admittedly digressed. The point was that this book has not turned out to be a useful historical document. Rather, it's just the recollections and conjectures of one guy. The little other material I collected can be found in the Appendix, for what it's worth.

Enough reminiscing.

When I started this project, I enthusiastically got in touch with some of the former AV bigwigs; I knew most all of them on a first name basis. Geez was I disappointed when hardly anyone got back to me. I'm wasn't sure what to think of that; instead, I moved on.

I decided to do my own memory dump. That seemed like the most useful thing to do, the most purposeful. As I mentioned earlier, my memory is definitely not what it used to be; nor is my physical strength and stamina. The bloom is off the rose; my vigor is fading. As a result, the book is way more autobiographical than was intended. It's more of a confabulation, heavily skewed to appeal to my own ego.

More prophetically, what *did* happen to all the old slide guys (and gals)?

Unlike old rock and movie stars, the few old slide people that I managed to get in touch with were living remarkably unremarkable lives; most of them were younger than I, and still working, in jobs they emphatically say don't compare to the good ol' days, of multi-image slide shows. They are the lucky ones, I thought: *still relevant*, each in his or her way; participating in life.

Ironically, they saw me as the lucky one, the one with time at my disposal, to do with as I pleased. They could be right; but why aren't I satisfied with a situation they desire?

When I start thinking about having no readers, I question why I am writing this. That's when I am most likely to shut down and devolve to a comatose state of ennui, of inanimate depression; nothing seems worthwhile doing; I sleep and watch TV. When I get like that, it must be hell on Pam. She is so light; I am so h-e-a-v-y; but I don't seem to be able to control that part of my mind.

When I smoke some dope (which is more and more infrequently [2016]) I can more easily block the Now and reach back into memories of Then. Just a puff or two of my Vashon Island homegrown releases enough endorphins in my brain to keep me out of bed and back at the keyboard. After a puff, life changes from gray to color.

That said: Aside from when I am writing this, I have come to dislike being high; that's funny, because I lived high 24/7 for so many years before and especially after the European chapters of my life. When I was living on Vashon Island, it was another world, a peaceful one where I could live high.

The whole scene is so much more complicated in cities that I get paranoid when I am high. [In the old days that wasn't the case; back in the '60s and '70s I could groove all over New York, or anywhere; but not today, in the Age of Terror when you can get incarcerated for anything, anytime.]

[Update, February 2019: I'm back to being high most of the time; maybe it's part of a seasonal cycle; in the winter, I internalize.]

Fear of failure has always driven me to make good on my jobs—even extra good. I've lived like one of Pavlov's dogs, jumping for rewards and awards. The older I get the more careful I am to avoid failure.

Have *you* failed at anything important to you? Then you know the hurt and humiliation, if only to yourself. But what do you do? If you are like a prize-fighter, you will get up and keep on trying; but what if there are no fights to get into? How do you create your own? That is why I call my current crisis existential; I must fight my own fight, make my own goals. I'm playing chess with myself.

I don't like what I am now. Aside from this authorship, I am nothing but a mooch on this planet. I should get out of the way, make room for a younger person. That was Hita's advice, twenty-plus years ago, about getting old. I kind'a believe that and wonder what will happen when this project ends? Or will life end me first?

After all, this is an autobiography—and I am still alive. There are chapters still to be written. In that sense, these most recent pages have felt more like writing a diary than an autobiography.

People are living longer than ever. It seems like 90 is the new 80, that 70 is the new 60. I feel like that, except for motivation factor. I am hoping to find a new career, a real one. This book is helping me get there. What comes next? A *Baby Bird* redux?

I am in a constant state of combat between two states of mind; one says, "What's the use?" and the other says, "Nothing will change by itself."

I know that one must make one's own future. I learned how to become what I want to be; sometimes that is by the process of elimination, especially if things are beyond your control. If you have control, you can move ahead; without control you can find yourself dead in the water.

The Winds of Life are shiftless, the tides ever changing; but there are patterns, cycles to everything; that much I have seen for myself, for seven decades, going on eight.

Eventually I get so far down the rabbit hole that I want to surface and think things over; maybe start over. I reach a red line and alter my lifestyle. I get out of the chair and start an exercise regime. I have found that exercise is the key to a positive outlook on life. If I don't exercise, I get depressed; if I do exercise, I get going again. It's a better way to live one's life.

However, booze and weed still play an important role. Whenever I stop using them, life turns grey. They are called controlled substances and, true to that descriptive, if you learn to control your use of them you can live in an altered state for as long as to want.

Except for a few periods during my travels, I spent most of my life high on one thing or another (no heavies, ever). Why? The reason is best described as the difference between Kodachrome and Ektachrome films—vivid colors versus pastels. I love being just high enough to stay in focus and locomotive, able to do things, like writing this.

Weed opens my mind to a plethora of possibilities that can be unmanageable; I can lose my train of thought. I don't like that. I like to stay on point, with a heightened consciousness. So far, I have managed to avoid heavy drugs. I have been successful overcoming rather severe depression using booze and cannabis, in combination with a supercharged diet and "enough" exercise.

Stay healthy and create your own world; one that you like. That is what living has taught me. Without health, you have nothing. With health comes choice and opportunity.

Remember: your world is what you think it is, what you make of it.



Big Blue Marble, 1974

Part Six

DÉNOUEMENT

The last sand trickles through the hour glass.



The shelf above my computer [2017]; loving reminders.

2016 – The End – NOT

My memory dump is complete, for now. I cannot say if there will be revisions or even future chapters. For now, I'm pausing writing and turning my attention to illustration, layout and design; I've been archiving a huge picture collection for half of my life, waiting for this day; as much as I look forward to it, I fear it will be my last hurrah.



That was the ending point for the first draft of *An Incredible Epic*.

Upon reading it through, I was dissatisfied and made a lot of changes, essentially re-writing the book. That took a year during which my story continued, recounted below, as a kind of diary. [2018: As I index the manuscript, it's being re-written a third time.]

2017 – Calm Before the Storm – Ups and Downs

The holidays were concluded with an email blast of a fun, Happy New Year picture.

Left, a selfie. Right: Photos by Pam Swanson.



The new year started out with record snow. That was fun; but a lot of our balcony plants froze to death. Then began the longest, dreariest spring in recent memory. The prolonged winter and late spring bloom were tough on the wildlife.



Our hummingbird feeders were overtaken by a flock of bushtits, who harbored the worst weather in the shelter of Pam's balcony.



Photos by Pam Swanson.

The animals and birds around Lost Lagoon were extra friendly, hoping for handouts from passersby. Chickadees would eat peanuts right from our hands; Pam even got a sparrow to grab a nut from her fingers, but only once.

While I continued with this memoir, Pam had fun playing with the super-long tele lens that I got her for Christmas—a Pentax 150 to 450 mm zoom which, with Pam's 4:3-ratio DSLR [Digital Single-Lens Reflex] Pentax cameras, has an equivalent range of roughly 200 to 670 mm; and with the 1.4-X tele-extender that I gave her for her birthday, that range extended from 280 to 940 mm.

Around the start of April, I finished the first draft. I reckoned that I'd give the manuscript a quick read-through, before moving on to the design phase. Ha!

It didn't take long for me to realize that a re-write was in order, a second draft. It took a while for that to sink in because, while I read, I was in a state of denial. I kept thinking that the writing would improve; but every page needed work.

Not surprisingly, my style evolved while writing the first draft. For example, my punctuation changed during those two years. I was tempted more than once to just let the small stuff go; then decided that my legacy was too important to be judged as careless.

So, I began the formidable task of writing a second draft.

Once committed, I jumped in with both feet and renewed vigor, spending sometimes five or six hours doing rewrites, instead of the usual two or three. I averaged about one page per hour—I know, that sounds incredibly slow. On the best days I might get four or five pages done, writing from 6:00 to 9:00 pm [18:00 to 21:00].

2017 – Ongoing Purge – The Great Picture Giveaway

I've thrown in the towel, as far as pictures are concerned; I've started giving them away.

During the summer and early autumn, I occasionally sat by the fence at the tennis courts across the street from our flat and gave them away, a few at a time. There was no sign; nothing that said "free pictures." Instead, I waited until someone inquired, then explained that there was no cost. That way I knew they were actually interested and not some other artist looking for a free canvas to paint over. Ha!

At the same time, with Pam's help I launched *The Great Picture Giveaway* on mesney.com. I haven't gotten many hits on that, though.

Most recently, I've had ample opportunity to give pictures to my doctors, as tokens of my very real appreciation, for saving my life.

2017 – Focus on Health – Bending Rules

For the last year, I've let things go. I've stopped pushing myself so hard.

The labor of life is becoming more difficult. I tire more easily. I don't have the stamina; now—due to batteries of recent medical tests, I know why: my leukemia is gaining traction.

I realized something was up more than a year ago, when running became a chore and I developed a persistent runny nose. Something was up. So, I started a new regime, walking instead, with a goal of 10,000 steps a day; it's time consuming, but it's gotta get done, to keep any semblance of fitness.

Fitness has become more important, more focused, than ever. Instead of just feeling fit, I'm talking about adding years to my life. I'm already living on borrowed time; every day has extra value.

But I am not going crazy over it. Quality of life is also important; that boils down to doing what I want, sometimes, even if it is bad for me. For example, having a martini before and some wine with dinner is important. The poison makes me feel good, and that is what I really want, to feel good.

About a year ago I came down with a chronic diarrhea. Whatever adjustments I made to my diet, nothing changed. I tried many approaches, including colloidal silver solutions, that I made myself (for assured purity), using a 30-volt DC power supply, two Canadian Maple Leaf silver coins (99.99 pure), and distilled water, from Wal-Mart.⁶⁵ [See pictures, next page.]

⁶⁵ . Believe it or not, Walmart's distilled water has one of the highest ratings.

To digress for a moment, about how I make colloidal silver

:



Above: 2015 version of my colloidal silver generator. From left: heating water for faster reaction; using red-plastic clothes pins to hold silver coins in place and prevent short circuits; underside of lid shows silver coins and 9-volt-battery power supply; finished product.

Now I use a 30-volt transformer, for consistent power and results. At room temperature the process takes two hours.

Left: plumes of colloidal silver can be seen descending from the two silver-coin electrodes suspended from the plastic (non-conductive) lid.

I don't heat the solution anymore; don't need to; with the transformer, there's no "need for speed" as when using batteries, whose power was too low after two batches.

Even before the onset of diarrhea, I knew that something was wrong; I was just too lethargic and felt too many odd pains. Recalling how healthy I felt living on Vashon Island, when I freely grew and ate massive amounts of cannabis, I decided to tempt Fate and grow some pot on our condo balconies, here in Vancouver.



As pot wasn't legal yet, I was careful to disguise the cannabis plants with plastic flowers and tuck them in between colorful flowering plants and tomatoes, which look remarkably similar and have a strong odor.

It was a simple decision: risk vs reward. Sure, I could get arrested (boy would I capitalize on that publicity!) versus wanting to eat cannabinoids, to fight the cancerous lymph cells living inside me.

But there's a lot more to it than simply upping the intake of CBDs and THC.

My diet also includes lots of anti-oxidant foods and spices with copious curcumin and a raft of other ingredients. For example, I start each day with a bowl of cereal mix that includes:

7-grain mix – 2 tbs	Lentils – 1 tsp
Wheat germ – 1 tbs	TVP – 1 tsp
Wheat bran ["red"] – 1 tbs	Hemp hearts – 2 tsp
Buckwheat groats – small handful	Turmeric – 1 tsp
Almonds – handful	Cinnamon – 1/2 tsp
Walnuts – handful	Cardamom – 1/2 tsp
Gelatin – 1/4 envelope	Banana – 1/3 large
Peanuts – small handful	Anise seed – 1/2 tsp
Sunflower seeds – 1 tbs	Coriander – 1/2 tsp
Flax seed – 1 tbs	Ginger – 1/2 tsp
Pumpkin seeds (Pepitas) – 1 tsp	Blueberries (frozen)- handful
Chia seeds – 1 tsp	Mulberries (dried) – handful
Quinoa seeds – 1 tsp	Cranberries (dried) – handful
Poppy seeds – 1 tsp	Cranberry juice – up to 1 cup
Sesame seeds – 1 tsp	Water – as needed

The amounts indicated are for one (large) portion. I make the dry mixture in bulk, without fruit, and refrigerate a one-month supply in four quart-size Mason jars. I eat a shy cupful of the dry mixture each day, bulked-up with some oats and/or additional 7-grain flake mix).

Because I only have 13 teeth,⁶⁶ I finely grind all the dry ingredients using a coffee grinder (a Magic Bullet also works). Mix in enough juice to make the cereal mixture like thick soup. Grinding also unlocks the nutrients; seeds pass through the digestive system, as evidenced by birds, who deposit fruit and vegetable seeds far from the place they ate them.

After adding the fruit and juice, I let the soup mellow for an hour or two before eating; the dry fruits and ground grains suck up most of the juice; the result is like porridge. I don't cook it, although you could; however, cooking reduces the nutritive value of foods by up to 80 percent.

For dinner, I try to include at least three veggies, together with mushrooms, a soy product, rice or pasta. I'm including more meat lately, as my leukemic anemia worsens; I used to take B-12 pills but am staying away from anything produced by Big Pharma; if it doesn't grow from the soil, I don't want it.

⁶⁶ Don't feel sorry for me. I choose not to wear a denture; I had one made at great cost but wore it just two days before putting it on the back shelf; when I wore it, food had no flavor; the top of your mouth is loaded with taste buds that the denture plate covers.

As mentioned, I took the risk and grew some forbidden plants on our balconies. I'd been wanting to do it; to have fresh grass to eat during the summer. Eating fresh marijuana has always made me feel more vital, more vigorous.

I used seeds that I collected from Vashon crops between 2009 and 2013. Some of the seeds were frozen and some not. Amazingly, the germination rate was quite high—more than 50 percent of the seeds sprouted. I ended up with two dozen plants. They were disguised with fake flowers, as I used to do on Vashon Island; people always look at the flowers, never at the leaves (without reason to).

Interestingly, for your horticulturalists, the balcony crop had a preponderance of female plants. (Hooray!) Was that from freezing the seeds? Or was it from their diet of chemical plant food and souped-up Miracle Grow soil? Maybe we're onto something!

2017 – 🍀* Curve Ball – Not So Gentle Reminder

Life has thrown me a curve ball; I am having my left kidney removed in September. A piece of my spleen may go with it. Apparently, I have a transitional cell carcinoma that is blocking the ureter. Yikes!

I'll have more to say about this later (unless something goes terribly wrong). Suffice it to say that, for now, although scared and a bit depressed, I am holding up, thanks to Pam's support. Actually, I am lucky that the kidney disorder was discovered. They found it when, after a year-long bout with the shits, I was scanned to determine the cause of my chronic diarrhea. The investigation determined that I have a mild form of colitis. The back story?

After half dozen visits to Anthony French, my regular M.D. at the Denman Health Center, he finally agreed to pass me up the chain to a specialist—gastroenterologist Jack Amar. Amar was the same doctor who performed a colonoscopy on me in 2006; that was my third such procedure and by far the most comfortable. The doctor and I chit-chatted while waiting for the anesthetic to kick in and put me under, for the operation. Amar joked that he preferred being anesthetized with Lagavulin Scotch whiskey. Ha!

That was my favorite drink for years (when I could afford it). I still have an unopened liter of the elixir; I brought it with me from Sweden, in 1990. If I have my say in the matter, I'll drink that bottle on my death bed. Anyway....

I always remembered Jack Amar for his love of Lagavulin. Now, I found myself sitting before him, discussing another colonoscopy. The minute I mentioned Lagavulin, he remembered me. (How fortunate.) I thought of giving him my Swedish bottle of Lagavulin; but I gave him a picture instead (*Coral Hibiscus*); something of lasting value. When he heard my symptoms, Dr. Amar ordered up some blood and urine tests. I thought nothing of it until his office called to say they had ordered an ultrasound examination for me at St. Paul's Hospital. After that they sent me in for a CT scan. That's pretty thorough, I reckoned. I thought it was all part of the good service.

However, when Dr. Amar called me personally to report the result of the scan, that's when I got scared. He told me that the CT scan showed a growth blocking the ureter of my left kidney, which was non-functional as a result. Amar booked me an appointment with Dr. Ercole Leone, a urologist.

He investigated further via cystography (something you should avoid, if possible) at St. Joseph's Hospital [Vancouver]. The procedure was to send a scope with a nano camera up my dick, through my bladder and on up into the ureter, to look inside my kidney. (!) Fortunately, they put me under for that procedure. When I came to, Dr. Leone told me that I had a transient cell carcinoma for which there was only one remedy—excise the kidney, ureter and its connection to the bladder, a procedure called nephrectomy. Leone did not do a tissue biopsy because it would involve bleeding and cell shedding; and that could spread the cancer into my bladder. Wouldn't that be a pisser? (Sorry.) He said they would test the tissues after the kidney excision to determine the stage of the carcinoma—Stage I being benign and Stage III being super aggressive and requiring chemo therapy.

[Spoiler Alert: Post-op, they scope my bladder every few months to make sure the cancer hasn't spread. Fixing bladder cancer is much easier, Leone explained; they can "simply burn it out," he said. Thank God, I live in Canada; I'm not sure I could afford such care in America anymore.]

Dr. Brian Mayson will be the surgeon; he is Dr. Leone's partner and former student. Mayson was specially trained in laparoscopic surgery, which is what he is going to try to for my nephrectomy. That method is much less invasive (five small incisions instead of a massive foot-long cut). I should heal in two weeks, half the time it would take for a traditional excision; however, Mayson may resort to the old way if my spleen presents problems; it is four times the size it should be, 10 inches [23 cm] instead of 2-2.5 inches [5-6 cm].

I learned about the spleen problem when I was examined by ultrasound for possible bladder cancer, back in 2007; it was diagnosed by Dr. Jorge Denegri as marginal splenic cell lymphoma, a rare form of leukemia. Denegri's examination was prompted by ongoing bouts of UTIs [urinary tract infections], which are rare, for men.

Since I had been celibate for some time, the only reasonable cause was something(s) bad that I ate or drank in India. I reckon it's possible that my current kidney condition may date back to that episode. However, Drs. Leone and Mayson told me that the current theory is that smoking and exposure to toxic chemicals are the two culprits identified by the statisticians who investigate such matters.

I smoked for thirty years and handled photo chemicals for just about as long, some of them were pretty toxic (potassium ferrocyanide and formaldehyde, to name just two). And I worked extensively with Fiberglas for five or six years, doing custom body work on my '63 Corvette Stingray as well as while building a series of big darkroom sinks that were lined with Fiberglas and a resin thinned with acetone, a super-bad chemical readily absorbed through the skin. Geez, I used to wash my hands in acetone, to clean off the resin; same thing as washing paint off with turpentine (I did a lot of that, too).

Another time, in Stockholm, at AVC, I accidentally swallowed a mouthful of Speed-Opaque, a concentrated lead solution used to spot Kodaliths. That was a funny episode: I kept a working solution of Speed-Opaque (one-part concentrate and ten parts water) in a coffee mug. The problem was, the stuff looked like coffee; that's how I came to drink some, mistaking it for my morning cup'a Joe. They rushed me to the hospital where I was told that it was too late to pump my stomach.

Then there was rubber cement thinner (acetone, hexane, heptane or toluene). I went through gallons of that stuff during the decade I spent making mechanicals, breathing fumes, rubbing-off excesses with my fingers. Add episodes like those to a lifetime's worth of booze consumption and three bouts of amoebic dysentery—the most recent of which, acquired in Cambodia, sent me to the emergency room, thinking I was having a heart attack—I guess that I shouldn't be surprised by these sudden medical challenges.

[Update: August 2017, the plot thickens. Now it is recommended that I use the "opportunity" of the nephrectomy for a splenectomy. I remember telling Anne Gordon, when her brother was undergoing a liver transplant, that, once "they" (Big Med) get their hand on you, they don't let go. That's how I feel today.

[One thing has led to another; Anne-Marie Madden, the anesthesiologist assigned to my nephrectomy, discovered things in my past which lead her to send me back to see Dr. Jorge Denegri. He's my favorite doctor of all time; a specialist hematologist/oncologist with a sense of humor, from Buenos Aires.

[Denegri diagnosed my marginal splenic-cell lymphoma in 2009. He told me then that my chances of dying from that were less than from being hit by a bus. But this afternoon he changed his tune; he told me that blood cancer was everywhere in my body, that my spleen was "...full of cancer." Yikes!]

Anyway, all that, plus some pricey recent dental work, on my thirteen remaining teeth, has left me feeling quite "mortal;" The pressure is on, to finish this memoir and dispose of my art—to save it from the scrap heap of history. It seems somehow symbolic and prophetic that I should be having these thoughts on the eve of the 2017 solar eclipse (August 21).

2017 – Survival – Terminal Velocity

Here lies a man who asked, "What if?"

My epitaph. (Not yet, please.)

Well, I survived the surgery, and they didn't need to remove my spleen. The procedure I had—a laparoscopic nephrectomy—has a 3% mortality rate. I won't bore you with details. Unless you've had serious surgery, you wouldn't, couldn't understand. Suffice it to say that I am totally impressed with the health care profession here in Canada; the system works like a well-oiled machine, to a high professional standard.

Up and down the line, every step of the way, the level of care and service I was afforded was the best I could have hoped for. BC's Medical Services Plan [MSP] was right up there with the Swedish system.

Big Med has their business down to a science, here. I can't imagine having that operation twenty years ago, before today's laparoscopic surgical techniques, advanced anesthesia and a bunch of different pain killers. They had me well doped up, so when I came to I was in a haze, I wasn't all there; thoughts were foggy and I don't remember much except that I was all hooked up to a catheter and three intravenous lines through which hydration and drugs were infusing into my body. I was in pain, especially if I moved; hiccups were the worst; but the drugs made it "easy" to sleep.

Pam's visits were the high points of the days; the nights were long and uncomfortable. I never realized how much I moved around in my sleep, until I couldn't. Lying in a bed without moving became insidiously uncomfortable; like an itch on your back that you can't reach. The first night was made more tortuous by the old woman in the bed next to mine. Just a curtain separated us. She had a cough that the Guinness people should record; it was enough to rattle the dead. Every time I managed to doze off, she'd have a coughing fit that snapped me out of slumber. Plus, she like to watch comedy shows late at night; laughter triggered even more long bouts of coughing. Fortunately, she left on day two.

They sent me home in the morning of the fourth day. I couldn't believe that I got out so fast and was a bit worried about how I'd manage at home. Fortunately, Pam and I had gone out to IKEA and bought a bed the week before the operation, when it dawned on me that I might have trouble getting up from our floor-level arrangement of mattresses. It was a wise investment; as it was, I even had trouble getting in and out of the new bed. Even now, five weeks later, I have to sit down gently and move about the bed gingerly. The wounds are still sore, but they are not interfering with my life any longer.

I fired up the computer last week, after Pam and I took a sight-seeing drive to Cypress Mountain and Horseshoe Bay, to exercise the car after a month off. Now its full steam ahead on this memoir.

There is a ton of work still to be done—thousands of pictures to go through; then, designing and producing the book. I've targeted autumn 2018 for release; I hope I can generate the vigor needed to make that date.

Coming out of the operation, I have half the stamina I had going in. In addition, my new family doctor, Michael Lee, is now telling me that my immune system is beginning to reject my liver. Yikes! Maybe that's what is sapping my strength? It could also my other, inherited condition, marginal splenic-cell lymphoma. While that is a slow-moving condition, it's nonetheless progressive. We're all mortal.

2018 – Life Goes On – Back to The Future

The year got off to a positive start: a cystoscopic exam of my bladder, made on January 18th by Dr. Leone, revealed that my kidney cancer had not spread.

So far so good; my next cystoscopy is in April, and they will do a CT scan of my remaining kidney in the summer; so, fingers crossed on those further examinations. Meanwhile, I have upped my intake of curcumin [turmeric], reduced my consumption of alcohol to near zero, and gone back to a mostly vegetarian diet; what's missing is exercise. I've got to get a handle on that; got to, get back to working out with my weights. (That's a love-hate thing, if there ever was one.) I walk three miles a day, along the Stanley Park seawall, but that's not enough. My upper body is a shamble. Nonetheless, the clean bill of health from Dr. Leone has restored my confidence and I have resumed work on this book with renewed gusto and enthusiasm.

While I thought I was done writing this tome—that I could get on with its layout and design—I keep recalling more episodes. As I go through my image archive, with an eye towards illustrating the book, I'm finding that the pictures evoke additional memories.

Why should that surprise me? That's what pictures are for; and they do it so much better than words, eh? There are so many pictures—after all, I was a photographer and photo illustrator—that I've decided to "let it all hang out;" I'm not going to concern myself with trying to fit a traditional book length or format. That would be the Procrustean thing to do; not for me. The book will probably end up being 3,000+ pages, spanning several volumes, probably a dozen, containing 200 pages each.

Over the course of my career, I had a dozen different portfolios; plus, there are the pictures from scores of slide shows; and that's not to mention seven decades worth of happy snaps. I want *An Incredible Epic*. to be as much a picture book as it is a written narrative. It will be like a "coffee table" book annotated with an autobiographical confabulation about the slide-show business. It's a relief having the manuscript basically done, being able to get back into picture production; that's my foremost skill, my comfort zone.



I've spent the first weeks of the year digitizing the print portfolios of my work in the late '60s and early '70s; the days when the studio was known as Mesney's Mad Medicine Show, first, and then Mesney's Third Bardo. To accomplish the digitization, I am photographing the printed work using my Nikon D1 and D2 cameras as scanners. I have them rigged up in my condo studio, as copy stands; I shoot with available light, as there is not enough room for copy-stand lighting.

Yours truly writing this book; the photo-copy stand is behind me. Pamela Swanson photo, August 2018

I'm mastering the copy-work at the equivalent of traditional 8 X 10-inch photos; that's big enough for full-page repro in the book. If I worked bigger, that would slow me down, and I would need many more hard drives to store the digital files. All was going well; however, last week two impediments slowed me down considerably.

2018 – Flood! – Dampening Disruption

February 7th (Valentines Day), was a day that will live in infamy at Lancaster Gate. There was a major flood in the condo next to mine (306). The hot-water feed to the kitchen sink and dishwasher let go after the suite owner did some DIY plumbing alterations. The culprit was a pressure-fit type of valve (those kinds are neither soldered nor threaded). The valve was ~~likely~~ either improperly installed or just gave up the ghost. High-pressure hot water shot across the kitchen at a horrendous rate—20 gallons a minute or more. The water rapidly filled 306 to a depth of three inches [~7-8 cm] then seeped into the two adjacent condos (305 and 307) and poured down into six of the suites below (206, 205, 206, 207, 103, 104 and 105).

It took a half hour to find someone who knew how to turn off the building's water supply; by then more than a thousand gallons flowed through those apartments.

Fortunately, we were home at the time of the incident. The delinquent owner of suite 306, Cynthia Weberg, came pounding on Pam's door with a desperate cry for help: "Call Jack!" she implored. (Jack "The Dane" Larsen, our building manager) "Call Jeff!" (Jeff Lavigne, the building's plumber.) "Hurry!"

I heard the ruckus and stuck my head out the door during Cynthia's demands. Panic was written all over her face.

Pam got right on the phone; but the manager was miles away and so was the plumber; it was going to take them the better part of an hour to get here; so, we were on our own. That was hugely ironical because for months I had been harping to the Lancaster Gate Tenants Committee that tenants needed to know how to turn off the water (and other procedures) in order to be prepared for such emergencies.

As the flood spread, more and more people got involved in the effort to stop it. The situation turned into a real Chinese fire drill. While I helped find someone with access to the boiler room, where the main shut-off is located, Pam ran around as fast as she could, concocting containment dams with every towel she could find, and our linens as well. We wrung the towels into buckets emptied as fast as they filled, out the window and down the toilet. The water seeped from 306 into 307 through the bedroom wall. At first, it looked like the water could be contained in the bedroom, where a large, faux-Oriented rug (that I inherited from Thomas Lagerqvist in 1985) absorbed most of it; but when the rug got saturated, we couldn't keep up with it and the flood spread into the bathroom and kitchen. Fortunately, the water never seeped into the hallway, where many of my big canvases are stored, or into my studio, where there's a rat's nest of electrical and network wiring servicing six computers, office machines, a photo copy-stand, sound system, and TV.

There's also a 2,400-watt transformer that converts 110-volt local power to the 220-volt electricity I need (for the specialized photo and kitchen gear that I imported from Sweden and Europe). The ingress of water into the hallway and studio would have been a disaster; that transformer would have made quite a bang, if it blew.

The upshot was that our floors needed to be replaced in the bathroom, bedroom and kitchen. That was highly disruptive. We had to cram the contents of those three rooms into our remaining space—my studio and Pam's apartment. It took 137 days for the insurance companies—ours and the building's—to come to an agreement between themselves, about who would pay for what, and get the restoration work done. For nearly six months, I was surrounded by shelves full of stuff with barely enough room to get to my desk. What a drag.

The Valentines Day debacle was the second time our suite was flooded at Lancaster Gate. The first flood was in 2014, while we were away, in Vietnam and Cambodia. That time, the automatic-ice machine in the refrigerator of suite above us (608) went on the fritz while the owner was out.

Water flooded down five floors, damaging all the suites under 608, including ours (308). We arrived home to find all our stuff stacked in the middle of the living room; it was quite a shock. However, our suite was hardly damaged and none of our stuff was impacted. All that needed to be done was some plaster work on the ceiling, and some baseboard replacements.

There was a plus side to the February 7th deluge: In the months that intervened before the new floors were installed, the dining area in the kitchen, having been cleared, was an open space that I converted into a little photo/recording studio, perfect for talking-head work. I set-up a Sony, ECM-50 lavalier microphone, and my Sennheiser shotgun mike; we connected those to Pam's Pentax K1, and did some tests which yielded acceptable video.

So, I got to work on making a new voice demo using the script that Larry Spasic sent me for his proposed film about the construction of the San Jacinto Monument at the Texas Museum of History.

Unfortunately, I wasn't too pleased with my performance. I nearly fell asleep, listening to myself drone on. Geez, while I was laying down the tracks, I thought I sounded as good as Peter Thomas. Ha!

But I have gotten way ahead of myself....

2018 – Acting – Fantasy vs Reality

"There is no Royal Road to Success."

Peter Mesney (Dad)

One thing led to another; they always do.

Pam came to me in early January with the idea of taking voice-over classes at the West End Community Center and taking a stab at getting narration work to supplement our meager pension incomes; you know, maybe be able to save-up for vacations.

Funnily enough, Pam's thoughts coincided with my own—about getting into voice acting. Those ideas that had been floating around in my own mind ever since I learned that a Lancaster Gate neighbor, Doug McCorquodale, had taken the same voice-over course and was now earning a tidy sum. I reckoned, if he can do it, so can I. Acting is something I always figured I could do. I acted all the time, anyway. Whenever I made a sales pitch, I was acting, for example. Although I was not born a "salesman," I could become one when need be. Plus, acting ran in the family.

My dad was trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, in England. His mother was a ~~promiscuous~~ prominent London actress. My mother was a wannabe folksinger. She and Dad performed in the local, Douglaston Community Theater [DCT]. They also wrote scripts for hit TV shows, like *Captain Kangaroo*, as well as the script for a movie called *Here Comes Harriet*, based on a hurricane we lived through while on vacation in East Marion, facing the storm in the Mosbach's seaside cottage.

That hurricane was a thrilling experience. Before the storm unleashed its full fury, I went out and sat in the middle of the potato field next to our cottage. I wanted to experience the wind, lightning and thunder. It was awesome in the truest sense of that much-abused adjective.

My sister ~~Kathy~~ Patti was a wannabe actress, too. She played big roles in small theaters; but it didn't click for her; she never hit the big time. To make money, she taught voice dialects to budding actors and actresses at Cornish College of The Arts, in Seattle. Her husband, Lou Hetler, taught there, too, (principles of stage direction) and was himself a playwright. Hetler was legendary on Vashon Island for his direction of theatrical productions staged by Drama Dock. My other sister, Barbara, is an über-successful Hollywood-film designer; her partner for many years, until he died, was John Graysmark, the designer of such blockbuster movies as *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago*.

With all that theatrical DNA in my blood, taking voice and commercial-acting classes made sense. However, there was another reason for going to the classes, a more important one: to support my wife.

I truly believe Pam has what it takes to be a model/actress, for age ranges 55-70; she's beautiful, smart and so fit she glows. Pam exudes optimism, but she is shy, unsure of herself. I reckon that somewhere in her past, some important person put Pam down, hard, and she never bounced back. She's also got a slight lisp; that presents marketing challenges—unless a *lispy* read is needed. (A realistic-sounding lisp is almost impossible to imitate—go ahead, try.) Anyway....

The classes we took were run by Sonja Bakkar, a local, Vancouver gal. Sonja is a self-made woman; she worked her way up the ladder as an extra and then as a successful voice talent of national caliber; she has a terrific natural range and does a few good character voices.

All was going Sonja's way until the traditional voiceover business got disrupted by digital technology and on-line marketing. Sonja didn't keep up and the world moved on; so, she retired—until she got a \$40,000 assessment from her condo building, for big-ticket maintenance items, e.g., upgraded windows and a new roof. Sonja needed a way to pay for that assessment; she chose teaching—coaching wannabe voice and commercial actors, like Pam and I.

Sonja turned out to be a bit ditzzy, and totally out of touch with current reality. She taught us how to prepare sales materials that were germane two decades ago—things like printed resumes with 8 X 10 glossy photos stapled to them. Ha!

Someone else told us she saw a talent-agency clerk shredding the printed stuff given to them by wannabe voice and commercial actors. And the special list of prospects that Sonja gave us was so out-of-date that more than 70% of the phone numbers were no longer assigned. That's when I realized that, in terms of finding our way around the current market, Pam and I were on our own. We'd have to do our own due diligence, make our own contacts. However, I reckon that Pam and I got what we paid for. (Isn't that the way it always works?). Sonja's competitors charged thrice what we paid.

An amusing episode occurred in Sonja's commercial-acting class. As advertised, we were recorded by a videographer. Sonja said that we should use that material as the beginnings of a demo reel. Ha!

The videographer turned out to be my neighbor at Lancaster Gate—Doug McCorquodale—the guy who had taken Sonja's course, who was actually making a career of it and who motivated me to take Sonja's classes. He was no videographer; he showed up with an old Apple iPad on a tripod and shot with the existing classroom light—overhead fluorescents that produced deep shadows under our eyes, making us look like zombies. His stuff was utterly unusable; but I think he got paid.

My dad—who's last career was doing voice-overs—used to say, admonishingly: "There is no royal road to success." How right he was. This new venture, if it was going to work, would require commitment and effort.

After finishing Sonja's voice over and background performing classes, Pam and I had our voice-demo tapes professionally made by Sonja Bakker's colleague, Kirk Douglas (not the movie star). We posted the demos to our websites and signed with the Hollywood North talent agency; they book talent for work as movie extras. In tandem with those efforts, I researched the Vancouver market and prepared a list of all the major talent agents and agencies, as well as casting directors; there are a lot of them here, as Vancouver has a sizeable film and TV production industry.

All that was going on before, during and after the Valentine's Day flood. As I mentioned, the cleared-out dining area was converted into a temporary photo & sound-recording studio, so that we could make additional voice and video demos. The plan was to send out a new demo every month or so, to the 100+ agents and casting directors on my list. That was before Pam got cold feet.

Self-confidence is not Pam's strong suit. She decided to "see what happens" with Hollywood North. Then, I became reluctant, too, having heard from a colleague that he auditioned dozens of times before getting a decent-sized (\$2,000) job. Well, considering all the time he put into landing that gig, his pay worked out to something less than minimum wage. (!)

I also decided that I wasn't good enough to continue pursuing a career in voice-over work. I came to that conclusion after listening to the demo I recorded of myself reading a script by Larry Spasic for a film he wants to produce about the construction of the San Jacinto Monument, at the Texas Museum of History—about which I have more to say in a forthcoming chapter. [See *2018 – Texas Redux – Hi Ho Silver.*]

To succeed as a narrator, one obviously needs a good voice: it must be unique while also being dialectically neutral; colorful without calling attention to the narrator (unless directed to do so). Good voices have an emotive style befitting the subject, e.g., forceful for a political speech, gentle for babies and Nature; you get the idea. Credibility is also necessary; some voices are more believable than others. Documentarian dialogue should be read by an authoritarian-sounding announcer. Describing the subtle qualities of someone's voice is as hard as describing flavors; but your ears can hear the differences, just as your palate can taste them.

Over the years, many people have told me, “You sound like an announcer.” That started in my college days, when I read the news and hosted a music show on KSLU radio. I learned to modulate my voice, to sound bigger without being louder. The British have a talent for doing that; so did my dad. I guess it rubbed off on me. After college, I acquired a lot of experience directing some of the top narrators of the late 20th century; talents like Peter Thomas, Brad Crandall and the others mentioned throughout the book. Directing them, I simultaneously learned from them—about inflection, when to use it, and how much. A good narrator can read a line in more ways than you can imagine.

Taking Sonja Bakker’s voice-over classes confirmed to me (in my own mind, at least) that I could make it as a narrator.⁶⁷ There was almost a dozen of us in those classes. Sonja would pass out a variety of short scripts for us to read; they were bits of actual commercials that she and her colleagues had worked on, once upon a time. Her *schtik* was to coach and critique us on our reads. Well, she had most of the other students read their scripts several times and some never got it right. However, I usually nailed it on the first try, if not the second. The same thing happened at the recording studio when I read for my demo tape.

I paid extra to have two demo tapes made, instead of just one. The first tape was a 90-second montage of material selected by Sonja.

The second was a dozen quickies I wrote myself, called *one-take wonders*. The idea was that I would do only one take of each.

Sonja and Kirk rolled their eyes and glanced at each other, as if to confirm that they each thought I was a bit over my skis. But by the time I was done, I could tell that they were both impressed.



Pam Swanson photo.

So, it was with great confidence that I sat down to read Larry Spasic’s script, in the comfort of my new home studio.

To digress for a moment, about scripts and narrations: There is a world of difference between reading a short commercial and a ten-minute documentary. It’s the difference between a sprint and a marathon.

To prepare myself for the read, I poured through the script and marked it up—annotating key phrases and highlighting key words. That was followed by a series of rehearsal reads, to get a feel for the pacing. Those were procedures I had watched Peter Thomas go through many times and now found myself emulating, in the role of narrator rather than director.

⁶⁷ I am easily convinced; especially when talking with myself.

As I rehearsed the script, I felt good about my reads and comfortable with the material. Everything went smoothly while I recorded myself. Laying down the tracks, I thought I sounded as good as Peter Thomas. But when I played back the recordings? *Oy vey.*

I sounded flat. There was no emotion in my voice. After the first two minutes, I was putting myself to sleep, for lack of vocal excitement and enthusiasm—even though, while it was being recorded, I felt I had overdone it more than once.

After a second read failed to produce anything better, I sat down and had a long talk with myself; I decided to postpone sending head sheets and demo-tapes (website links) to my list of agents. Instead, I made a test mailing to a few close colleagues, ones who I reckoned would give me honest evaluations. Two of them were complimentary; the other two quite critical.

Tom Scherer really tore my presentation apart and said nothing about my voice work. Ron Jacklin said I sounded tired, that my voice lacked emotion. I had to agree with both of them. So, for now, I've cancelled my order for a new Cadillac car and have returned to working on this memoir full time.

That was three months ago. Since then, Pam's gotten two gigs as an extra—now called background performer—on a feature film and a TV show. I also got hired for one of those TV shoots; we got to go together; that was fun.

Were those jobs the start of something, or just flukes? Time will tell. Meanwhile, I've ceased working actively on that new career. Like Pam, I want to see what happens with what we've done, so far. That's almost as good as saying that I quit; because nothing happens without any effort. The projects that get the most attention fare the best; as the Law of Attraction states: you are what you think.

[Update: as 2018 draws to a close, I have worked three times and Pam six. We've both earned about \$1,000 dollarettles (Canadian dollars). That's just enough to wipe out our government income subsidy—a motivation not to work. Now, with that subsidy gone, we've got to work, just to stay where we are, where once we didn't have to work. Oh well, working in the movies is interesting and fun; and they feed you real good. (Burp.)]

2018 – Auld Lang Syne – Déjà Vu

"Life teaches everyone the same lessons, in different ways."

Dorothy Mesney (Mom)

Last Saturday (February 17th), I reconnected with Marc Rosenthal, a show designer whose company, called Personal Creations, Inc., is located in Los Angeles, California.

Marc was in Vancouver performing with the Ezralow Dance Company at the Chutzpah Festival, an annual two-week cultural event held at the Jewish Community Center of greater Vancouver.

No, Marc is not a dancer; he is a well-seasoned producer of multi-image content for theatrical productions, theme parks, concert tours and events, large and small. Marc is among a small group of multi-image producers that create scenic projection as well as complete multi-image productions; most big-screen content is produced for business-to-business meetings and events; the public rarely sees multi-image productions, except at major auto shows and international events like Expos.

The last time I saw Marc was back in spring of 2004, at a Dataton *Watchout* training session held by David Branson at a Marriott hotel in El Segundo, California. That was just after David took over from Jim Kellner, as Dataton's US importer.

The class was attended by about two dozen of the first Watchout users. Everyone was keen to tap into Branson's mind, to learn some of his secrets; but he didn't really have any, at least that I didn't already know.

In fact, I felt I knew more than he did; and maybe I did; after all, I had been messing around with Watchout for a couple of years, had ten Watchout keys [license dongles] and had produced my own five projector demo, as well as several Nike shows for Dave Frey [Sound Images, Portland].

At the training session, Branson had a half dozen Watchout work stations set up. The participants split up into groups. We were all given the same sound track and visuals—cartoonish graphics of rocket ships and space elements, recalls Marc. We had an hour to come up with a show using those elements.

Although I didn't learn anything at the training session, the comradery was worth the price of admission. If I hadn't attended, I never would have met Marc. He and I subsequently tried to organize a reunion at Burning Man, in 2004 and 2005, where Marc presented big, environmental work, combining Watchout with programmed, special-effects lighting. But we never managed to connect there.

The show-content Marc screened at the Chutzpah Festival was used both as scenery and props with which the dancers interacted. There were four screens, each roughly 8 X 8 feet [2.44 X 2.44 meters]; they were set on wheels, easily moved about by the dancers as part of their choreography, and invisible to the audience.

As the show began, the four screens were butted together downstage. The curtain opened in total darkness. The audience was left in the dark long enough to let their pupils open wide enough to see the images Marc projected—a panoramic collage of syncopated slides.

The style of the intro reminded me of my very first shows, using big graphic images of alphabet letters, to make words—in this case, four-letter words, e.g. HATE or LOVE—as well as light-designs, patterns, color graphics, *etcetera*—a real *pot pourri*.

Leaving the audience in the dark to adjust their eyes was a clever trick, on Marc's part, because an 8K projector [8,000-watt lamp] was being used, where a 20K should have been; so, the slides looked dark; the stage lighting overwhelmed them.

Rosenthal's style was straight out of a 1970s playbook. That makes sense when you consider that Marc was making slide shows back then, and has, ever since. Only a screen designer who is over 60, who came of age in the '60s or '70s, could have designed and executed what I saw. No Millennial could do it; some have tried; but they succeed only with imitation retro. Understanding multi-image is like understanding the soul of rock-and-roll or trying to. What a Millennial gets from a Rolling Stones song could not be compared to what ~~old geezers~~ mature people like Marc and I experience.

[Marc adds: "FYI- I started doing multi-image in the early '80s, trying to catch up to folk like you! Also, to be clear, while I have adjusted this show and modified it a bit, most all of what you saw was designed, produced, and programmed in Italy about six years ago when the show was created. Certainly, there are styles that I would use now, and I probably would employ more old tricks we used to use, but I don't want to claim credit for, nor give the assumption that this is my work. And I have no idea how old the producers were; keep in mind that Daniel Ezralow is about my age (59), and of a generation that has always experimented visually; I am sure he has a lot of inputs although I don't know specifics."]

That might have something to do with the high-quality imagery produced these days, digitally. Film slides produced an entirely different look, one that was too "experiential" to describe in words. Today, even the slickest of my old shows looks clunky compared to what people have come to expect, from digital media. Using cars as a metaphor, my shows look like Model A Fords. That is why I say that a young person could not have produced the content that Marc made for the dance show.

Another example of Rosenthal's retro style⁶⁸ was the solution to the challenge of projecting on moveable screens; if the projector cannot follow the screens—an expensive feat—the screens will move through the projected image; you never see it all; various parts of the picture are revealed as the screens pass across them; the effect can be deemed clever or annoying, possible both. Marc's solution was to project patterns—just as they used to at rock shows and dance halls, during the '60s and '70s; when people or screens move through patterns—in this case simple black and white line patterns—they look groovy. In one dance routine, the performers pranced through squiggly white stripes; the effect was something 3-dimensional looking, like the light patterns you see at the bottom of a swimming pool; the effect was dead-simple, but effective. Later, when we were chatting, Marc commented that he worked with what he had; I concurred; you can only make dinner with what's in the pantry.

The cleverest trick⁶⁹ was having the live performers move in and out of the screens—was also one of the oldest, going all the way back to Josef Svoboda's "black theater" technique, used at the Laterna Magika theater in Prague.

In this show, Marc arranged two of the four screens in a row, down stage [toward the audience], with wide spaces between them. Walking behind them, the live performers were synchronized with matching, pre-recorded video sequences. So, as the live performers walked behind the screens, videos of them appeared on the screens. But that was not all.

⁶⁸ Rosenthal: "The following was actually Danny's [Danny Ezralow] idea...."

⁶⁹ [Rosenthal: "...also Danny's concept."]

While crossing the screens, at the midway point, one performer would morph into another (a video trick). Behind the screen, the same two (live) dancers were swapped, and the replacement appeared between the screens. And, they didn't just walk through the screens; they performed acrobatic dance routines. That part reminded me of the work done by Dave Frey [Sound Images, Portland, Oregon] for Nike; he produced extravaganzas involving projected scenery for athletic fashion shows performed by teams of acrobatic dancers.

The performance I saw was the Saturday matinee. After the show, Marc and I went over to the Oakridge Mall. He was hungry and I wanted some caffeine. Our table talk revealed that we had more in common than we thought, starting with the fact that we're both Aquarians. Rosenthal and I approach life with the same question: "What if...?" We've both been tossed about in the sea of life; blown over by tail winds; shipwrecked. And, we've both resurrected our careers, more than once.

My mother used to say that everyone learns the same lessons, but in different ways. Marc and I are living proof of Mom's maxim.

While Marc chowed down on an East Indian sampler and I sipped a large, black Starbucks, recollections of our personal experiences were interwoven with tales about our multi-image exploits.

Marc was researching for a book he wants to write about the history of contemporary slide shows, called *Projections*. The reason for our get-together was actually for him to interview me for his book. After lunch we spent the two hours left before the evening performance in room 103, adjacent to the theater, where I did my best to relate highlights of my five-decade career.

I had a good understanding of what Marc needed to hear from me, because this book was originally supposed to be the kind of treatise that Rosenthal contemplates undertaking—that is, one that chronicles the history of contemporary slide shows—the who, what, when, where, and why of it all. My saga became more autobiographical than was intended when certain key producers failed to provide me with any information about themselves, their companies, or their work.

Marc may succeed where I failed; he says he is actually going to meet with people and interview them, as he did with me; whereas I asked prospects to send me write-ups, because I haven't the funds to travel, for live interviews.

Marc says he will return my favor and provide me with an account of his career;⁷⁰ I look forwards to that. From what he told me about his work last Saturday, he is one of the best-kept secrets of multi-image who, like Dave Frey, produced landmark multi-image productions that the world never heard about.

⁷⁰ Update, 2018: Rosenthal never sent me that account of his career, or anything else, for that matter. Makes me wonder....

Dave told me that he never wanted any publicity because that risked motivating competitors to pitch Nike, for their lucrative business. I'm not sure why we never heard about Marc's productions, some of which were equally impressive. Jim Kellner told Marc that he (Rosenthal) was the only producer who mastered both multi-image and show control—an awesome accomplishment that facilitated outstanding achievements, like designing a show-control system for Disneyland in the '80s, using the Dataton Trax system; he got the gear to do things that Trax's progenitor, Mike Fahl, never dreamed of. I could relate to that, having watched John Sacrenty milk Dataton Watchout—another piece of revolutionary AV software written by Fahl—to perform seemingly impossible tricks.

(Sacrenty was able to do that because of his understanding of Medialon, a show-control programming system. He used Watchout as a subset of Medialon, to manage an interactive image database.)

Marc also produced the biggest Panni-projector⁷¹ show ever made (I think); that show, sponsored by Reliant Energy, in the City of Houston, Texas, used 21 of the giant Panni projectors. The skyline of Houston was Marc's screen for that show; he projected imagery onto 21 buildings; can you imagine?

Marc explains: [We used] "...a combination of Pannis, PIGI and Hardware Xenon projectors imported from France. All are large format, using 18 cm x 18 cm slides, with some of the units having automated and digitally calibrated scrollers that allowed long movements of imagery across the screen areas; the PIGIs and Hardware Xenon use 6000 and 7000W Xenon lamps."

Rosenthal also used Panni projectors to create scenery for operatic productions and big events. His rival in Panni projection was Bart Kressa, whose specialty was image-mapping the buildings upon which projections were made, thus tailor-making images to fit the architectural surfaces they would be projected onto. For example, a mansion with turrets or towers might be transformed into a magic castle.

Marc adds: "I'm sure there were many others; PIGI in France and Hardware Xenon for instance were doing this same thing, and I'm sure Yves Pepin was as well; there must have been others in Europe; Disney I think was also playing with this, and Paul Sangster in LA, who owns a number of Panni projectors was doing guerrilla projecting on buildings as event stunts from his truck."

Rosenthal was also among a handful of producers who mastered the use of Polaroid instant-slide film; he used it to create his *Instant Memories*, a type of candid-module show; those were shows that featured pictures of the people watching the show. Candid shows were typically used at the end of conventions. During a convention, photographers would shoot candid pictures of everyone attending, during the meetings and events; those pictures were fashioned into an upbeat slide show presented at the closing general session, or banquet. Audiences went wild for candid shows; people love to see pictures of themselves. Marc first came up with the idea of doing a candid module at the 1976 Association for Multi-Image [AMI] convention.

⁷¹ Pannis project huge, 7 X 7-inch [17.78 X 17.78-centimeter]-slides, using a brilliant, 6K (6000-watt) xenon lamp.

He wanted to enter it into the slide-show competition, which was the feature event at the three-day meeting. However, he was barred from the competition because a prerequisite was being able to have shows pre-judged (by submitting videotaped versions). That was a conundrum—you can't make a candid show before the event (although you can make the soundtrack and program the image choreography beforehand, which, in fact, is what Marc did). Long story short, he was allowed to screen his show, at the convention's closing banquet; but it wasn't allowed into the competition. Although it was probable that every producer at the AMI convention had made a candid show at one time or another, what made Rosenthal's AMI show unique was that candid shows were taken up to five minutes before showtime. Using Polaroid film, he was able to capture images of the audience sitting in their seats in the auditorium.

That was a first, for which he got a standing ovation, replete with loud whistles and shouts of, "Play it again!" Those words are music to a producer's ears.

Marc modestly clarifies: "I don't recall the AMI folk shouting play it again, LOL. But- I distinctly remember the head of advertising at Lucky Food Stores, a man never without something to say, being dumbstruck and utterly at a loss at the podium after their show, asking the group, 'Shall we play it again?' to which there was thunderous agreement. That was a first for us-playing any of our shows a second time in a row.

"Interesting (to me) factoid- in 1985, we produced a wide screen multi-image show for Lucky at the Disneyland Hotel ballroom. There were about 1500 people in attendance. At the end of the show, as part of a seamless transition connected to an actor on-stage picking up a 'future Memory Card' that looked like a business card, we showed an 18-projector INSTANT MEMORIES! show. The instant slides were loaded into the back end of the main show trays- not for the faint of heart! I had a team of 10 photographers shoot 1200 pictures in 2-1/2 hours; we processed, mounted and edited everything and were ready to go within 5 minutes of the last picture. As part of this we had two portrait booths with standard 2¼-inch [~70 mm] Hassy's [Hasselblad cameras] shooting high-quality negs, that were co-triggered with the 35mm cameras loaded with instant slide film. This way you could get a high-quality copy of the exact same portrait you saw in the slide show.

"One of my things has always been, since I am a lighting designer, to combine lighting and projection in my shows. I got a hold of the very first production run of something called the *ShowPar*- a moving light wash unit. We had the first 6. During the show we discovered a problem when it sounded like a machine gun firing a couple of times. Scared the hell out of us and we had no idea what was happening. I kept looking up to see if the lights were falling!

"We found out later that the inventors of this light had forgotten to put in a software buffer- when we sent lighting cues to go one way and then another, it simply jammed the light in the other direction without stopping and sheared off all the gears! That was the noise we heard. Ah~ to the pioneers! OMG!!"

One question that Marc asked, during the interview, was about my relationship with Kodak; before answering, I momentarily thought, did he already know I had one? No matter, either way. Thus, I began a fifteen-minute spiel recounting my history with Kodak AG, the global arm of Eastman Kodak, headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany. In modesty, I found it somewhat embarrassing to explain.

I got hired by Kodak because I was a star, which qualified me as a brand ambassador; my name appeared in ink frequently; Kodak AG wanted to piggy back on my notoriety. Heh heh, no problemo!

My close relationship with Kodak was with the marketing department, in Stuttgart. Peter Grunert was my sponsor, my advocate, my wannabe. Grunert thought I was a God; in his eyes, I could do no wrong. He was like clay in my hands, waiting to be [in]formed.

Grunert's boss, Ranier Schulte, was another matter; he was more reality oriented; he had a hard time signing off on my ideas for the show, *Got to Be, S-AV!* But, Ranier had the good sense to trust me. What likely got me past Schulte's scrutiny and doubts was his realization that I was succeeding in Sweden, a country even more conservative than the *Vaterland* [Fatherland, i.e., Germany].

The way I dressed during the *Got to Be* pitch likely helped, too; I made sure to wear my most conservative suit, tailor-made at Old England, in Brussels—a finely-woven, gray-black herringbone, wool worsted; I wore it with a light gray shirt and a boldly-striped, maroon and silver necktie, tied with a double-Windsor knot; I veritably reeked *credibility*. However, my appearance didn't square with my reputation; I was known as a renegade [and was one]. However, people do judge a book by its cover; that's why people wear suits when they appear before judges.

Another motivation for Kodak's solicitation was likely the fact that I had been quoted in the trade press as having complained about Kodak's projectors. I didn't like the performance differences between the European and US projectors. While the Euro-Global S-AV projector was built like a tank, it was slow, compared to the cheaply made US Carousel and Ektagraphic projectors. The problem was in the translation—shows programmed on European S-AV projectors didn't play well on American projectors; they had to be reprogrammed. Although the changes amounted to tweaking, that was reprogramming nonetheless, start to finish—a tedious, boring exercise. Such reprogramming was an unnecessary and expensive inconvenience, in my estimation; and I wasn't afraid to say that in public.

Interestingly, it was Kodak AG who listened, who decided to hear me out. As mentioned earlier, I was invited down to Stuttgart to discuss an update of the S-AV projector being considered by the top brass. After the publicity and whoopla celebrating production of their 1,000,000th S-AV [the *Got to Be* show], the time was right to launch a new model. Unfortunately, they were late to the party; multi-image was in its dog days, about to roll over. Nonetheless, they listened to my plea to align the performance speeds of their various international projectors.

Kodak USA seemed largely oblivious to the multi-image market. Either that, or they were staffed with morons. The upgrade from the Carousel to the Ektagraphic, lauded in the trades, was, in my mind, a disaster. I did not like the new projector. It was less compact and had a lot more plastic content. It couldn't support heavy, optical-glass lenses. (Kodak's lenses were made of plastic—light weight, but without precision resolution or magnification—no two Kodak lenses projected the same sized image.)

American producers had little choice but to use Carousel or Ektagraphic projectors. They could have ordered S-AVs—and should have. S-AVs were universal projectors; they operated on all voltages, 110 through 240. However, American producers probably never even knew S-AV projectors existed because Kodak Rochester only promoted their own cheap shit. That pissed me off, but I wasn't surprised.

Years earlier, when I was a photographer, I wrote to Kodak (Rochester) with some suggestions about their film emulsions. When I didn't get a reply, I was miffed. I told Eddie Buchbinder about my off-putting experience; I complained that, as a professional photographer, I used thousands of rolls of film. (Eddie was the son of the owner of Alkit Camera; he was my go-to guy for gear, from 1964 to 1998.) He explained that professionals didn't matter, in Kodak's eyes; at least, they weren't on top of the agenda. He went on to say that during the Christmas and Easter holidays, Kodak sold millions upon millions of rolls. Ha!

2018 – Photographic Memory – Restoration & Prepress

I keep thinking that I am finished with writing; however, the photos I am editing keep triggering new memories, more detailed ones. As I prepress the pictures, I have plenty of time to explore those memories.

Some of the pictures bring back entire chapters of my career. For those, I'm going back into the text and adding pertinent details and case histories; that's especially true for the pictorial collages I am assembling to illustrate shows and major shoots. For example: EJA, Falcon Jet, ALIA Airlines, and Arab Wings, among others. The collages, presented as color plates (because they are too big for the Microsoft Word file of this book), are my digital equivalent of traditional contact sheets.⁷²

A lot of the pictures haven't been seen for decades; others have never been seen. Many are from digital conversions of old slides made in 2014. Before moving out of the Vashon house, while it was being staged by Nancy McAlister, there was a three-month period before the house sold and I had to leave. I occupied those days and weeks getting a head start on what I thought would be my number-one project in Vancouver, after the move. My plan was to re-compile years and years of digital files; to get them organized into a searchable, useable archive. As I described earlier, there was [still is] an archive of fifty-plus hard drives; they range from 60 gigabytes to more than 1,000, which gives you an idea of the age range of the archive.

It covers nearly two decades of digital imaging; from the mid 90s, when I first started scanning images and dabbling in Photoshop; to images made with the first digital Nikons (D1 & D2), in the early 2000s; to the sophisticated photo-illustrations made during the mid to late 2000s. The quality levels are all over the map; so, I have my work cut out for me, bringing them all up to today's standards, and normalizing them—standardizing their color range, relative to one another. But the real fun has been re-making the pictures. The digital copies of the slides I transferred on Vashon—about 600 in all, including all my best aviation pictures half of the primo car shots—were made using a Bowens Illumitran II.

⁷² To make a contact sheet, negatives were contact printed on to photo paper. That is, the negatives were laid on the paper, then covered with heavy glass to flatten and press them into close contact with the photo paper (or film). Contact sheets were also called "proof sheets."

The Illumitran was a camera stand made specifically to copy slides. The slides were positioned under a close-up lens—a Micro-Nikkor 55 mm flat-field lens) on a backlit stage (3 X 3-inch [~8 X 8 cm] milky Plexiglas) illuminated by an electronic flash [strobe]. The device works like a scanner, but is way faster. Unsurprisingly, compared to today's standards, the pictures look "old,"—like the faded snapshots they are. That's the bad news; the good news is that the pictures look terrific when they are restored using Photoshop. That recovery work is an extension of prepress. Prepress is getting media ready to be printed. For pictures, that involves normalizing as well as maximization; that is, getting the most out of every image. In the past, maximizing pictures involved painstaking manual darkroom and retouching techniques. For example, consider this picture done for Executive Jet Aviation [EJA].



Mother Nature didn't cooperate on the day we photographed EJA's new 1123 Westwind flying in formation with one of their Lear jets. The picture was destined to be the cover of Executive Jet Aviation's annual report, so the client didn't mind spending the money needed to improve the pictures appearance (\$800 in 1975—a bit more than my \$500 day rate back then). To squeeze extra value from the added production expenses, Don O'Neill also used the picture for a direct mail piece—a jumbo post card sent to EJA's customer mailing list as well as O'Neill's contacts in the press and a list of VIPs compiled by Burson-Marsteller.



The picture was retouched by Thad McGar at Wellbeck Studios [New York]. The original image was a 35 mm Kodachrome 64 [6033] transparency. The slide was enlarged onto an 8 X 10-inch [20.3 X 30.4 centimeters] sheet of Ektachrome 5071 duping film.⁷³

To improve the colors—especially the sky—Thad first wet the film’s emulsion layer(s) with water; then he applied diluted dyes using fine brushes, cotton swabs and cotton balls for large areas. The color was built-up with many applications of diluted dyes—one hundred or more.

Multiple applications of (very) diluted dye was the only way to get an even wash of color across broad areas. Using concentrated dyes risked an uneven, motley appearance. For clear, open whites, the aircraft were chemically bleached before an appropriate blue tint was added to their shadow areas.

It took Thad the better part of two days to turn my pastel picture into a saturated sensation. Today, using Photoshop, I can do the same work in less than an hour.

However, while the work I am doing includes such retouching, I am also making some pictures for the first-time. That’s a throwback to my illustration work.

Geez, do I love working with pictures. It’s easier to get up in the morning now. I always look forward to days spent playing with pictures and/or making picture stories.

Making the collages mentioned above was kind of like re-making the original slide shows. The sequencing of pictures printed grids presents a story board that recreates, in shorthand, the image contents of shows that can never be seen again.

2018 – New Teeth – Big Budget Bite

For a second year in a row, my operating budget has been severely crimped by dental expenses.

Last year, I needed to have a double crown installed, to save the right two of the seven upper ones I have left. One had broken in half when an old filling gave way; it needed a crown. The other had developed some mobility.

I reckoned that fusing them together was the best solution; that was what my Swedish dentist, Dr. Lennart Hubel, used to do, using carbon fibers. Dr. Starks agreed; he did the procedure last July [2017]. The dental work cost north of \$4,000; travel expenses to and from Seattle added another \$500, including a two-day visit to Anne Gordon on Vashon Island.⁷⁴

⁷³ Ektachrome 5071 duping film had a low D-max; that is, the blacks were less dense than normal Ektachrome, to reduce the contrast build-up inherent in every photo-mechanical reproduction process.

⁷⁴ Truth told, a bit more than \$200 of that money was spent at Cash & Carry, a restaurant-supply and grocery store in South Seattle that we shop at whenever we visit Vashon or Seattle; I load up on stuff that is either unavailable in Vancouver—for example, liverwurst and canned cherries—or much more expensive. Dairy products are particularly expensive in Canada; they are half price in the States, comparatively speaking. Canada Customs protects the Canadian

Those expenses wiped out my vacation budget, much to Pam's chagrin. She was hoping I would travel overseas with her. When I declined, she booked her own trip; her brother, Dave, ended up going with her.

This year, the exact same set of dental problems occurred, with the same two upper teeth, but on the left side. I had another double-crown installed by Dr. Starks in early April. That involved two visits, as crowns always do. So, we got to visit Anne Gordon twice.

I wasn't such good company on the first visit, having just had two teeth ground to stumps and wearing a temporary crown made of plastic. I was extra careful not to eat anything tough or hard because the temp crown I got last July wore out after only one week and, during the second week, I was going around with half a crown semi-detached, hanging on by a thread. So, for dinner, I made a deluxe *farfalle* pasta (bow ties) beefed up with Portobello mushrooms fried with onions and fresh Roma tomatoes, roughly chopped, together with a generous amount of shredded parmesan and mozzarella cheeses. Anne said it was the best pasta she ever had; even Pam went back for seconds.

For our second trip down—when the porcelain crown was installed (and a cavity got filled)—we agreed to play Monopoly; we played our first game last July and it was a hit. Anne suggested we have a salon at Stas Kudla's new studio. Salons are what Anne calls get-togethers of our group of regulars; they usually include Stas Kudla; Tim Carney; Rod Smith and his partner, Sally Ammon and her son, Gabe; as well as Keri & Christian Codd and their kids, Eden and Axel; and, of course, Anne, Pam and me].



Left, Yours Truly with Pam Swanson. Around dinner table: Rod Smith; Eden, Christian & Kerri Codd; Sally Amon; Ron Ada; Anne Gordon. Center, Stas Kudla. Right: Axel Codd, Tim Carney on harmonic; Ashraf Hakim, cellist; Rod Smith on guitar.

Stas hosted several salons at the mansion he used to rent. Then Vashon real estate got caught up in the madness going on in Seattle, where, the expansion of Amazon and Google *et al*, together with Paul Allen's development of the south Lake Union district—into a medical research park—have tripled the size and population of the city in the last decade. They can't build housing fast enough. The median price for a home is now [April, 2018] north of USD \$850,000. (!)

dairy industry by limiting us to a \$20 limit (each) for dairy products; I use my allowance for "exotic" cheeses like crumbled feta and shaved parmesan as well as shredded smoked gouda and pepper jack. Another \$70 is spent on booze, which is way less expensive than in Canada; like 40% cheaper; we're allowed to bring back 1.1 liters (each); Pam graciously lets me use her allowance, so I can bring back 2.2 liters; I effectively double that again by importing *Ever Clear*—190 proof (95%) alcohol; I bring back two 750s [750 ml] together with two mickeys [375 ml bottles, aka "pints"] one of rum and one of vodka; I drink 50 ml of one micky while in the States, so my total is 2.2 liters [750 + 750 + 375 + 375 - 50 = 2,200 ml]; back in Vancouver, I split the Ever Clear with an equal amount of water to obtain four 750s of 90-proof [45 percent alcohol by volume] "vodka."

Can you guess what happened to Stas?

Last summer, just a month after a fabulous deck party, the owners of the house—who lived overseas—sold their McMansion out from under him. They gave him a two-week notice, after living there almost ten years. He was heartbroken; but I'm told that after a desperate search he found a cool new place in Burton—a converted barn overlooking the yacht harbor. However, nobody's seen it; Stas has been keeping to himself. Anyway...

I told Anne, I wasn't up to a salon; that I'd rather just have a Monopoly game between the three of us and Stas; she agreed. I emailed Stas and invited him for drinks at 5:00 pm [17:00], dinner at 6:00 [18:00] and Monopoly at 7:00 [19:00]. The party was going to be on a Thursday night, the day after we arrived at Anne's and the day before her art-show opening at Vashon Intuitive Arts—more on that, later.

I went all out to make a mini feast for the Monopoly party. After our champagne, I served Chinese-style barbecued pork (marinated in Char Sui sauce) accompanied by roasted sweet potatoes, curried spinach and papadums, with chocolate-cherry cake for desert.

That night, I opened the wine—a merlot by Charles Shaw—and put the pork chops on the grill; while they cooked, I got the potatoes out of the oven, the spinach onto the stove and the papadums into the microwave; the cake was ready; I brought it from Vancouver, frozen, and put the cherries on top before the champagne.

It was raining but that wasn't going to stop me from barbecuing. Geez do I miss my old Texas-smoker grill, the one I cooked on once a week or more during the long Vashon summers. We're not allowed to have barbecues at Lancaster Gate, where we live now. For that reason, I barbecue whenever the opportunity arises—which is basically every time we visit Anne. I make dinner the first night: usually barbecued steaks with roast potatoes.

At five minutes past 5:00 [17:05], Anne said she had a feeling Stas wasn't going to show; I said, give it time. But at 6:10 [18:10] I had to agree with Anne; so, we began without Stas and enjoyed the sumptuous repast without his company. Anne kept saying I should call him, or that she would. I asked her not to, explaining that Emily Post wouldn't approve. But in retrospect, we probably should have.

We saw Stas the next night at Anne's art opening. The way he said hello told me that he was clueless about what happened—or what didn't. Stas said he didn't get the email; he said it would never happen again. I said, you're right... never again. Ha!

I tried to act nonchalant but I was burnt up. After curtly greeting Stas, I collected Pam and we left Anne's show, saying that we were going see what the rest of the Vashon galleries were offering. But the real reason was to avoid having to talk with Stas. I was also avoiding Tim, who has turned into a loser. I don't suffer fools; never did and don't now.

2018 – Vashon Revisited – State of The Arts

“What else am I going to do?”

Anne Gordon (about her art)



Photo by Pam Swanson.

Anne’s art show at Vashon Intuitive Arts [VIA] was a terrific success. She is amazingly prolific. Her show included two dozen new pieces made between November and March.

Rod Smith played music, accompanied by Bob Koch on the musical keyboard.

Koch played the latest Casio model, with all the bells and whistles. However, he was relegated to second fiddle (hahaha), playing fill chords for his excellency, Rod.

To digress for a moment, about Rod Smith: He’s a living manifestation of pure narcissism; the world revolves around Rod. When it doesn’t, he can go off the rails. More than once, he’s committed himself to the loony bin. Yet, the guy is no slouch.



Yours Truly with Rod Smith in 2016 (left) and 2012. Photos by Pam Swanson.

Smith is a smart monkey, but very diffracted. On the one hand, he makes (made?) & sells (sold?) dynamite tie-dyed cloths. On the other, he’s charted relationships between musical notes and colors; and sells a neat wheel-chart that correlates m chords and colors.

Nonetheless, it’s an oxymoron to refer to Rod’s stuff as music; it’s more like a soundscape, a trippy one; a page out of Electronica’s song book, on LSD. If you recall, Electronica was very mechanical; it was also known as “trance” music; beat and chord patterns were repeated endlessly, with occasional variation.

That’s kind of what Rod does. I think he tries to emulate the sound of Pink Floyd, in their *Dark Side of the Moon* album; the difference is that Floyd made complete songs, with lyrics, like poems; Rod’s stuff is amorphous.

Even so, Lorna Cunningham, the grand matron of Vashon Intuitive Arts, noted more than half the people in attendance at Anne’s art show opening were there to hear Rod, not to see Anne’s work. Anne herself told me later that at one point she was confronted by a woman who was surprised to hear that she had made the artwork on the walls; her comment was, “Did you do *all* those?”

There were a lot; 24 new pieces, plus art printed on wearable fashions—a pullover dress and three skirts—modelled by Christine Phillips, who goes by the name Azula.

For the show at Vashon Intuitive Arts, Anne had made a huge effort; she showed a whole bunch of new work, including a collection of about a dozen abstracts that Anne calls *Mandalas*; the motifs are circular, printed on 10-inch-square canvases. It feels like Anne has hit her stride making that collection; they are not for everyone, but they are definitely Anne; she does well with pure abstraction.

I was surprised that Anne was mounting another show, two of them, in fact. In addition to the VIA show, she also sent three new pieces to a juried show in Ocean City, a seaside town about a two hour drive southwest of Seattle, where she rents an A-frame get-away home that's a five minute walk from the beach.

I say surprised because, when we last saw Anne, four months ago, we helped her hang a show at a local credit union (PSCCU—Puget Sound Cooperative Credit Union); that resulted in just a few sales that covered only 30% of her production costs—to say nothing of her time and effort.

Anne was depressed after that. The implied rejection spurred discussions about art; how hard it is to make money. I told her about my experience: that I earned just enough to keep going with a small loss.

I always hoped I'd cash in with the next show; it was the triumph of optimism over rationality. She agreed; said she'd never do it again; but there we were, at yet another Anne Gordon show opening. Oh well; I can't argue with her motivation; as she says: "What else am I going to do?" That's kind of like why I am writing this book.

I hadn't seen Lorna Cunningham, the founding owner of Vashon Intuitive Arts, for years. She hadn't aged an iota; glowing was still the best way to describe her. A decade earlier, she was kind enough to give me a show at VIA. Like Anne, I put my all into it; there were a couple of dozen pieces hung throughout the studios; but zero sales.

I only know two *real* artists, who have been able to keep producing work most of their lives and still produce to this day: Chris McDevitt and Wayne Olds. Oh, I know plenty of others who call themselves artists; but they clothe, house and feed themselves by means other than art. They are hobby artists; that is not meant to denigrate their work.

I already told you about McDevitt. He lives by rote in the French countryside; in an unheated, century-old stone farmhouse (there's a fireplace; he cuts and splits logs). McDevitt lives on the dole, which in EC countries ain't bad. When he sells a painting, he goes to Paris to buy new paints with the money. That's kind of how Anne Gordon lives, but on orders of magnitude more magnanimously. Anne gets an annual allowance that's probably ten times what Chris lives on; she can easily afford her materials.

The difference between Chris and Anne is that he knows what he is doing; he's on a mission to create works in the classical vein, using traditional oil and acrylic painting techniques. By contrast, Anne is a hack—I mean that in the literal sense, no slight intended. She messes around with software until she gets something she likes; the result in both cases is art; but Chris's stuff is Art.

Wayne Olds—who's business was called Olds Masters—made real art, too; he was an expert at Trompe L'oeil and a muralist at heart; the bigger the canvas, the more it suited him.

Olds once painted the inside of a church, in its entirety, with Biblical scenes. His credits also include panoramic, floor-to-ceiling murals at several of Steve Wynn's Las Vegas Casinos. The style of those is similar to Norman Rockwell; that is, they are illustrative more than they are *painterly*.

I met Wayne back in the '70s, when he and my sister Barbara were going out together; they worked for me one summer, during their school holidays. Barbara was my receptionist and Wayne ran the Forox camera; that was during the World Book show fiasco, in 1975. As far as I know, Wayne is still at it. That said: Ten years ago, Barbara reported that Wayne had become a bit of an alcoholic and that his career was suffering.

2018 – Family Life – David Swanson Visit

Pam's younger brother, David Swanson, just paid us another of his week-long, semi-annual visits, from Winnipeg, where he's lived most of his adult life. (Brrr.)

David is a complex guy, hard to read, he's so utterly different from me. He's a scatter brain, but the kind of guy you gotta love, for his openness, honesty and generosity.

Pam and David have a special relationship; there's only two year's difference between them. She served as his protector during a period of intense family disfunction, when their mom went off the rails and their father was unable to spend much time at home, given his work as a free-lance civil engineering consultant.

While only in her teens, Pam became a little mother; she [like me] missed out on an important stage in a person's development—the carefree teen years. When it comes to interpersonal relationships, we are handicapped; that is, our emotional and social development was in some ways capped around the age of sixteen, or maybe eighteen.

David has had more different jobs in his life than you can count on all your fingers and toes. Most recently, he worked for Manitoba Hydro as an operator at one of their fifteen hydroelectric generation stations. That must have been a lonely job; only two guys tended to the dam. Dave kept a small apartment near the dam site, where he lived during the week; it was a long drive to and from Winnipeg. He took early retirement three years ago (2015), at age sixty.

For the first two summers, he got work as a maintenance man at a municipal-park swimming pool. Last summer he didn't work. This year he's looking for summer work again; he says his lifestyle has become too inert. [I can understand that.] Dave must like to drive; it's a 1427-mile [2,297-kilometer] drive between Vancouver and Winnipeg. Plus, Dave tours through Kamloops, to visit family and friends. To be sure, Dave is the glue that is holding the Swanson family together. His twice-a-year visits bring him together with Pam as well as their younger sister, Anne and her clan, in Kamloops.

Their brother Lloyd, the youngest in the Swanson family [11½ years Pam's junior] and his family also lived in Winnipeg, about 45 minutes from David. But the two brothers only met one another a couple of times a year, on major holidays. Lloyd took early retirement from his bomb-squad job with the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), moved to Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, and got a job with Service Canada, the social-services division of the Federal government. His son, Conrad, attends university in Victoria. Lloyd's establishing a beachhead on the Island and hopes to entice his wife, Sabrina, to join him. However, she apparently still prefers life in a "big" city, like Winnipeg, despite its frigid climate.

Dave talked of taking the ferry across to Nanaimo from Horseshoe Bay in West Vancouver, to visit Lloyd; but that trip never materialized because of Pam's work, as a background performer. It was ironic that she got that gig the same week of Dave's visit. Anyway.... As David's brother-in-law, I look forward to his visits with hopes of getting to know him better. We seem to get much closer, but I'm never sure. I guess that's natural enough, given the differences between our ages, temperaments, and experiences. Still, I enjoy his company; he is a chatterbox who knows something about everything; he (and Pam) can keep a conversation going for hours; all I have to do is ask a question, then sit back and enjoy the ride.

During his week in Vancouver, I rarely see Dave. He stays in Pam's flat and the two bury themselves in books, reminiscences, and with Pam's circle of friends at Shenanigan's bar. I know I'm welcome to join them at any time; but their interests are not mine; besides, I have my work—this book. Although I can set my own agenda, I make an effort to treat the book as a real job. It's as close to a 9-to-5'er as I can get. It's been during our trips to Kamloops that I've gotten to know David. Pam and I ride up there with him on his return trip, to Winnipeg. It's a five-hour drive; that's plenty of time for conversation. We typically overnight in a cheap motel—literally on the other side of the tracks—get together with the family clan on day two, then take the bus back to Vancouver, while Dave continues, to Winnipeg. However, on this visit, we did not accompany Dave to Kamloops because Pam got hired as a movie extra (ahem, background performer). As it turned out, she got cancelled the day before Dave left, so we could have gone with him. But I think the cancellation knocked the wind out of Pam's sails; she's kept a stiff upper lip about it, but I can tell she's disappointed. It's a blow to her ego, to her self-esteem, which is fragile.

Pam's eyes lit up when she got called for the part. She went to a costume fitting and took part in a six-hour shoot one day, in one of those humongous studios. She was supposed to work four days; then came postponements and finally the cancellation. It became an emotional roller-coaster ending on the down side.



Monopoly night in my studio; David & Pam Swanson, 2017.

Playing Monopoly taught me a good deal about David. You can learn a lot about a person, by the way they play that game. It may only be a board game, but Monopoly is remarkably true to life. The three of us played our first game during David's autumn visit, last November. Pam won that game, without really trying.

This time, Dave won, hands down. Importantly, he won by executing a perfect strategy—acquiring properties and developing them, to generate income.

Dave made the right decisions at the right time; watching him made me wonder if I should amend my will; and make him the executor, instead of his brother, Lloyd. However, I hesitate.

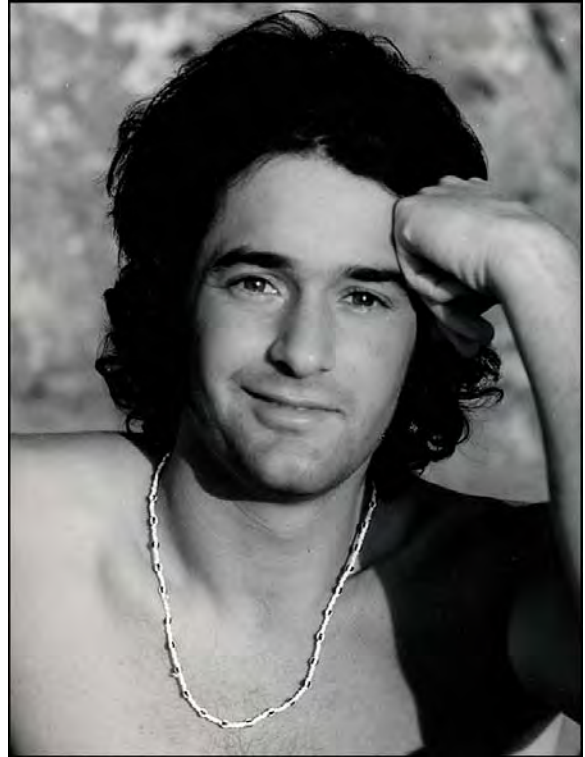
While I like David's Monopoly strategy, I wonder if he'd apply that to real money, in the real world, given the opportunity. And I wonder if Lloyd is the conservative, I believe him to be. I know less about him than any of the Swansons. (!)

2018 – Old Friends Reunited – Allan Seiden Visit

*"You can't change other people; you can only change yourself."*⁷⁵

Lorraine Bracco

Allan Seiden is due here in less than a week. I am struggling to get a proof-reader's copy of this book printed before he arrives. Even though it is a work in progress, the text is 99% complete and ready to go into proof reading (or so I thought) while I carry on with picture editing and prepress work. I'm hoping he will want to read my book. By the time Allan leaves, in mid-May, it will be the cusp of summer. Pam is already preparing for our first beach day. In the summer, we go to English Bay beach almost every day from around noon to mid-afternoon. I love the leisurely lifestyle, soaking up the sunshine; but it really chops a hole in my "work" day. It's OK for doing picture editing and prepress, which is more like piece work. Writing requires more concentration, less interruption. With a proof-reader's copy of *An Incredible Epic* off the press, I'll be able to spend sunny days at the beach without unfinished business nagging at me and a cloud of guilt hanging over me.



1980 portrait of Allan Seiden, in Hawaii.

[Two weeks later...]

Allan has come and gone; it's taken nearly a week to digest what happened; I discovered new things about Allan (or *recognized* old ones) that turned me off. During his visit, that threw me off; and my reticence must have thrown him.

Since he left, I've been stewing in my own juice. Finally, this morning [May 23rd], responding to an emailed question from Anne Gordon about Allan's visit, I managed to organize my thoughts in a reply to her. To wit:

An old friend visited last week; I was all excited beforehand, but disappointed now; I never realized what a narcissist he is. Whatever subject I brought up in conversation, he turned the talk to focus on himself, recounting stories I'd heard many times before—b-o-r-i-n-g. Maybe his narcissism is why I befriended him originally, in Junior High School.

⁷⁵ "You can't change other people. You can only change yourself. Everyone's got problems. You learn from them, you live with them, you move on. It's choice you make if you want to have a happy life. Nobody's perfect. People are different and that's what makes them so interesting. You only get one father. The quicker you accept him for who he is, the better your life will be. Your father is who he is. Nobody can change that. Find your self-esteem from the inside." From www.goodreads.com/quotes/115708-you-can-t-change-other-people-you-can-only-change-yourself

My mother was self-centered; I guess I was used to that pattern, in matters of love and friendship. Now, I see right through it and it turns me off.

Although the visit went well enough, I didn't have much to say to him. Pam kept the conversations going—it was all new for her. Allan must have wondered: what happened to Doug? Is he getting senile? However, I was astounded that Allan had nothing to say about my illustrations, which he'd (obviously) never seen. I have several giant ones hanging in our apartments; he didn't even notice them; and when I pointed them out, all he could say was how much one of them reminded him of a picture he had made somewhere. Anyway....

It's been nice and warm here, too; Pam and I have been to the beach a few times and are beginning to get some color; and my balcony seedlings are sprouting nicely.

I'm still living like a pack-rat; they haven't replaced the floors in my flat yet, having ripped out the damaged ones over two months ago; the delay is due to some conflagration between the insurance companies involved in the February 7th flood; all my furniture is still piled up in my studio, making it hard to work; so, I've been concentrating on table-top, copy photography of old pictures and small objects, for the book (the text of which is now approaching 1,200 pages). Allan didn't have anything to say about that either. (!)

Frustration is best word to describe my feelings; there were so many things I wanted to tell Allan, to show him. We hadn't seen each other since the Millennium, when he visited me on Vashon Island, with his daughters, Martine and Sonja. So much has changed since then; my life has turned upside down and inside out. I put myself through the wringer; the experience left me dry (hahaha).

The only thing about me that Allan seemed interested in was my health. He brought up the subject in conversation several times, despite the fact that I had specifically told him that I don't like to talk about it, or even think about it, because, according to The Law of Attraction, with which I concur, you are what you think—you draw to yourself that which you think about (consciously and unconsciously).

Can you believe that Allan knew nothing about The Law of Attraction? How ironic that he should be talking to one of the world's foremost authorities about Seth and Abraham—Pamela Swanson; I left it to Pam to explain Abraham's tenets and amused myself listening to him turn each around, to tell us more about himself. Where once I thought Allan and I were so alike, I now realize we are more like Narcissus and Goldmund: total opposites. I now realize that Allan is a narcissist. As mentioned, my mother was a narcissist; maybe that's why I got along easily with Allan; his was a personality type I was familiar with, knew how to deal with. Today, I have no time for that. There is a fine line between Egotism and Narcissism; the former is a shield to protect oneself from insecurities, especially inter-personal relationships; the latter simply assumes that he or she is the center of the Universe; no one else is as important as them.

There was little to talk about, because we have nothing in common anymore. Plus, trying to converse with a narcissist is annoying; they never seem to be listening; they seem distracted; they pass judgement on what you said and turn the conversation back to themselves. I realized I was talking to myself. Why bother?

To digress for a moment, about listening: It is amazing how many people don't listen. I have Leslie Shirk, my first wife, to thank for bringing the *importance of listening* to my attention. We were still happily married when she looked me in the eye one day and told me flat out to shut up and listen to her—and others, when they spoke.

Leslie made me aware that I was so self-centered that I didn't seem interested in what anyone else had to say. And she was right.

That insight was the spark that began a process of change. It wasn't easy to turn my attention outward; I had to force myself to listen to people. But Leslie's advice—that I resist the urge to talk—was a simple solution. To this day, I consciously work at keeping my mouth shut. I try to repeat back what was said as part of my replies.

Ironically, that was simply a matter of practicing what I preached. It was the same advice I gave those I interviewed for my shows. I told them to begin each answer by repeating the question. If I were to ask, what kind of car do you drive, your answer would be: "The car I drive is a...." By adhering to the same technique in conversations, I forced myself to listen carefully, to know how to reply. None of the above applies to narcissists, of course.

Becoming more aware of Allan I have simultaneously become more aware of myself. Analyzing him, I analyzed myself. Allan (and everyone I know) is my mirror—what he is, I am not (any longer).

I have changed, he hasn't. He is still the happy-go-lucky guy I've known for six decades; he's still living a charmed life; skipping across the surface of life. Nary a care has Allan; he denies the existence of problems until he can't any longer; then he finds the easiest way out.

Allan's perception of himself may be the key to his stasis; he perceives himself as conservative. Ha!

Here's a guy who took out a reverse mortgage on his house, to spend the money on travel adventures. That's hardly conservative, fiscally speaking. Seiden keeps the little gold he has in an unsecured vault managed by a small-time wealth management company in Maryland or Delaware. (He can't remember which!). And he keeps his cash in a bank's safety-deposit [sic] box. He never heard of bail-ins. He didn't know that money you deposit in the bank becomes their property and your chattel, that you are a creditor to the bank for the funds you give them—at the bottom of the creditors' priority list. He never heard of the Financial Crimes Center (FINCEN), a department of the Federal government; yet he has run a black-money business for almost as long as I have known him, renting rooms in his house. Hmm. Some conservative.

Allan feels safe and secure and lives that way; all I have to say is: more power to him. I wish at times that I were a free-spirited, carefree spendthrift; but I am the squirrel that spends his time preparing for winter.

Can enthusiasts say that your ride says a lot about you. Allan told us that he's owned 17 cars in his life; he drives them to death and replaces them with other second-hand models. The one's I remember, all sporty convertibles, were shambles, inside and out. What litter didn't blow out of the car filled the floors. He says he drives 12,000 miles [18,000 kilometers] a year. If you do the math, he owns his cars an average of 2.5 years and gets maybe 30,000 miles of service from them.

By contrast, I have owned 8 cars.⁷⁶ 30,000 miles [~48,000 km] is the *least* mileage I've clocked on any of them. I clocked 122,000 miles [~196,000 km] on the Isuzu Rodeo before I sold it; and I've logged 137,000 [220,000] on the Honda... so far. (My mechanic—Doug's Auto, Vashon—says the Civic should go another 100,000 miles [160,000 km].)

I'm afraid to say that Allan and I have reached the end of our road.

Rant Alert: As I explained to Anne Gordon: What really put me off, right from the start of Allan's visit, was when he blew off my pictures; he didn't even notice them. When I pointed them out he briefly glanced at them and made some inane comment like, "Oh, that one's nice."

Inuktuk Orators held his gaze the longest—maybe five seconds—and drew a more substantial response: It reminded him of a picture he had taken. Ha!

Then, when he saw my 1,250-page manuscript for this book, his only comment was that it was, "...another Mesney production."

I suppose that was some kind of compliment, given that Allan is a writer (a Hawaiian historian of some note, actually). But I was blown away that he had nothing more to say, that he didn't want to see it and had zero questions about it. After that, there was no more wind in my sails.

There's little in common left between Allan and I any longer, except a long friendship. I guess that counts for something.

Maybe I won't see Allan again. Time will tell.

I recall that my aunt, Francis Taylor, never came to visit us. Aunt Fanny lived in Bronx, about a half-hour away from Douglaston. My mother always volunteered to chauffeur her back and forth; but Francis still would not come over.

Every time, she used the old excuse of not feeling well. I got to thinking she was a hypochondriac; but, now I reckon that my old auntie just didn't want to listen to Mom talk endlessly about herself.

⁷⁶ My eight cars include: Corvette Stingray; Land Rover 109; Volkswagen "Bug;" Datsun wagon (in Hawaii); Saab 900 Turbo 16 (in Sweden); Isuzu Rodeo (Vashon); Ford F-150 van (the Luxury Liner, Vashon); Honda Civic hatchback (Vashon and Canada).

2018 – Older Friends Reunited – Childhood Revisited

Out of the Blue, in comes an email from Noel Howard. He's going to be arriving in Vancouver in two weeks [July 14]; can we get together? I lost track of Noel after I saw him the last time, in 1992, right after moving back to the States from Sweden, during the transcontinental photo job for I did for Isuzu. That time, I visited Noel at home in New Jersey; he was still married to Pam. Born and raised a Catholic, Noel married his high school sweetheart when she got pregnant. They were a family of four when I saw them, living in an upscale suburban home in a lovely, tree-filled, suburban setting (there's a reason New Jersey is nicknamed The Garden State). Pam made dinner; I stayed over; the three of us got pretty lit (probably why I don't remember many details).



Recall that I've known Noel since I was two years old and he was one. The Howard family were our next-door neighbors in Brooklyn; the Howards lived at 510 Third Street; the Taylor residence was at 514; Alex Clark and his wife lived at 512.

One of the only things I remember from those days was the "Stinky Behind Club," described earlier. Those seemingly innocent, impish episodes are probably what later turned me into an exhibitionist. I would likely still be an exhibitionist, if there were something to exhibit. But time has taken its toll, despite my regime to stay in shape. As muscle mass shrivels, the skin sags in unsightly ways. I still flaunt it, but much more conservatively.

When I was five (1950), the Mesney's moved out of the Taylor residence and into a new house in Douglaston; After that, I didn't see much of Noel or his older brother, John, who was one year my senior.

I reconnected with Noel and Pam in 1967, in Milwaukee, where the two were attending classes at Marquette University; Elisabeth, their first child, had been recently born.

I was in Milwaukee on business, reconnoitering with Roy Reiman, at Farm News Bureau, organizing case-history stories about steel buildings for the *Farm Facts* newsletter I produced for American Iron and Steel Institute, together with mentor Burt Holmes. During that visit, Noel told me the story about his arrest, for drugs. A synopsis of that story follows. To wit:

A friend sent Noel a pound of weed, as a gift. It was sent in the US Mail. When Noel went to pick-up the unexpected package, all hell broke loose in the Post Office.

The narcotics squad of the Milwaukee Police were there in force to arrest him. The arrest made front-page news. Suddenly, Noel, who had already been put on probation at school once before for radical behavior, was nearly thrown out of school. After five long years, his graduation was put in jeopardy. Long story short: with the help of his father—who paid the judge a personal visit in his chambers, to plead for a good boy—Noel beat the rap and graduated.

The next time I saw Noel was when he came to visit my office, at Basford, a year later [1968]. That time, Noel told me how impressed he was with me—in my Brooks Brothers suit, working in the advertising business. I had become Noel's role model.

Leslie and I were invited to dinner at Noel and Pam's; they lived in a huge apartment in upscale Park Slope, Brooklyn, paid for by Dr. Howard. The four of us became friends and, following in my footsteps, Noel got a job in the advertising business, at Albert Frank Gunther Law, a financially-oriented agency. Neither of us remembers much of that visit. We were both heavy drinkers (and smokers) by that time. Shortly after that, when I quit Basford [1968] I lost touch with Noel again, this time until 1992, on the Isuzu odyssey, which is where this story began.

In 1992, Noel had the enviable position of speech writer for the CEO of Merck, the (in)famous drug manufacturer. Merck was in its heyday then; their miraculous heart medications were raking in millions. Noel worked in a new office dubbed the Taj Mahal; I was impressed.

Once again, the Howards wined and dined me; I stayed over and we got tight again, but not for long. We lost touch again, for want of communications. The internet wasn't mainstream yet and we lived thousands of miles apart. Plus, I got super busy; first in the restaurant episode, then with digital slide shows, etcetera; so, I hadn't seen or heard from Noel Howard for 26 years.

Noel was supposed to arrive on a Saturday, but never did. Instead, on Sunday morning my phone rang at the un-Godly hour of 8:45. An agitated Pam, late for her yoga class, answered it and abruptly woke me with the news that Noel was at the Sylvia hotel for just a few hours.

We met at the Sylvia Hotel. Michael wasn't there; he and his dad had a fight the night before; Michael left and went ahead on his own to their next destination, Victoria, on Vancouver Island. I thought that was odd until Noel readily revealed that he, like me, was a drinker; that alcohol had destroyed his life more than once and he was abstaining.

We compared notes during a three-hour catch-up over coffee at the café in the Sylvia Hotel, overlooking English bay on a glorious summer afternoon. The beach was buzzing; the clear blue skies were dotted with white seagulls; but we hardly noticed the natural beauty. While we traded stories of yore, my wandering mind split in two; one part was listening to Noel, the other was reliving the past. My early history came to the forefront of my mind. One of the clearest memories I have is about when I was invited to spend a few days with the Howards at their summer house in the woods on Beaver Lake (New Jersey); that was the first time I experienced terror.

The Howard's summer house was built in the style of a lodge. The entrance opened into a spacious living room flanked by the dining room and kitchen on the right, and the master bedroom on the left. The second level was a partial floor. There were two small bedrooms, which is where we kids slept. It was a kind of mezzanine, with a balcony overlooking the living room. It was from that balcony that me, Noel and John watched in terror as their father had a horrific argument with their mother, Florence.

The part I remember so clearly was Dr. Howard in the nude, crossing the living room below us to accost his sobbing wife, in the kitchen. He was an imposing man with a bulging belly and a burly temper; a raging bull; his balls hung low and his huge cock swung from side to side as he swaggered. I'm not sure if the doctor actually beat-up Florence; I've blotted that part out.

Noel and Pam sailing Beaver Lake.



I had never seen anything like that burly man's explosive anger; although I seem to remember either Mom or one of my sisters telling me that Grandpa Taylor beat-up Grandma Taylor when he got drunk. I have no recall of anything like that. However, the fact that I can't remember any of my earliest childhood leads me to believe that I've repressed it; so, there might have been some domestic violence. Curiously, ever since that episode at Beaver Lake, I have harbored vague apprehensions about being in the forest. After coffee at the Sylvia café, we went back to our place and smoked some vintage Vashon bud; that was when we both let down our guards. I think that Noel was impressed with the fact that I had a.) quit drinking for a decade and b.) were able to drink with control now. I explained that it is all about control; about getting to a zone that frees the creativity—and staying there without going too far and losing control. Noel seemed to have forgotten about weed; he hadn't smoked any for a l-o-n-g time. However, on the trans-Canada train trip someone turned him on to some BC bud. That experience was almost too much for Noel; it scared him while also being enthralling. I explained to Noel how I use cannabis as medicine, to keep the Devil of Depression at bay; I think he got it; I hope he did. Taking it another step, I further explained that if you use cannabis, you don't need to drink as much; that your liver will thank you. Noel didn't need much persuasion; he readily smoked with me and we got close once again, or tried to. However, Noel seemed fried; it was like his brain was firing on three of four cylinders. It wasn't Alzheimer's; there was nothing wrong with his memory. He was just a bit slow; that made it hard to get close.

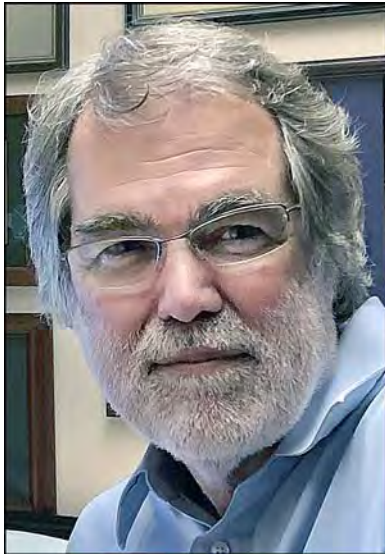
Another problem was that Noel had become (continued to be?) religious; he told us that he is memorizing the Bible or trying to. He told us that the Bible has become a huge part of Noel's life. As the conversation turned to all things Jesus, Pam and I got turned off. I reckoned that Biblical ideology had become a crutch, but didn't want to say that in so many words. Instead, I explained to Noel that we had fundamentally different creeds: while he looked outward for reasons and support, Pam and I have learned to look within (the Law of Attraction, etcetera.). We dropped the conversation at that point; Noel had to leave, to catch the ferry to Victoria, to meet his son Michael, overnight somewhere (he didn't know where; he only had Michael's cell-phone number) and carry on to Seattle the next morning, where Michael would board a train to Los Angeles. Noel had no idea of what he was going to do after that.



Michael had organized the trip; but Noel had no itinerary (say what?). Without his son, Noel was clueless. (!) I ended up driving Noel to the Vancouver-Island ferry terminal in Tsawwassen. During the 45-minute drive (and even before) I realized more fully how much of a toll alcohol had taken on Noel. I meant to, but didn't, ask Noel whether he, like me, had any exhibitionist issues, as a result of the Stinky Behind Club. But that will have to wait until our next close encounter.

A young Michael, in 1992.

2018 – Texas Redux? – Hi Ho Silver!



Larry Spasic called today (April 26th), from the Texas Museum of History, of which he is the director. You may recall that I produced a major show for him—*Texas Forever!*—back in 2003; that show has been playing at the San Jacinto Monument ever since then. (!) When I first heard Larry's voice on the line, my heart skipped a beat. Oh no, I thought, there must be a problem with the show; but that wasn't the reason. Larry was calling about a project that he first told me about as long as ten years ago—a film he wanted to produce about the history of the San Jacinto Monument, how it came to be. He was inspired by historical film footage made during the construction of the world's highest obelisk. (The San Jacinto Monument is 13 feet taller than the Washington Monument).

Photo of himself courtesy of Larry; likely shot by Barry Evans.

Larry Spasic is a unique melange of optimistic and realistic personality traits. Even when he is upset, he has his say with a smile. He has a way of charming people, of winning them over. His latest call was no exception. I had long forgotten about the documentary that Larry wanted to produce, having gotten my hopes up a long time ago, only to be let down when Larry was unable to raise the funds necessary to produce his documentary. Back then, it seemed that production was imminent; I even contacted my former *Texas Forever!* production assistant, André Wirsig, in Radebeul, Germany [near Dresden], and asked him to pencil in some dates on his calendar, to come back to Canada and help me produce the new show. But it all fizzled out.

Then, about two years ago, I got an email from Larry out of the blue, and a phone call "just to say 'hi'." We spent most of the call talking about his dream show; he was still seeking the funds, and still wanted me to be ready. That call came right after Vashon, when I was living in Vancouver, in a state of upheaval that was driving me deeper and deeper into depression.

We talked for an hour; it was like a glint of light far off in a long dark tunnel. But nothing else happened and the light went out. So, I began work on this book and the only time I thought about Larry was when I wrote the chapter about *Texas Forever!* That was until he sent me a script for the film, last winter.

Larry called to discuss the script he had written for the new San Jacinto Monument film. It wasn't half bad. What hooked me was his description of the opening shots, made by a drone. The idea was to have the camera approach the San Jacinto Monument from a mile away, flying over the surrounding oil fields, bayous and battlefields. Arriving at the Monument, the camera-drone would spiral around the obelisk up to the top, revealing the 220-ton Texas star that crowns the Monument, set off by a panoramic view of the land where the State of Texas was born. What a shot!

I responded to Larry's request; I said I would read his script and comment. My comments were mostly word changes designed to simplify. Larry writes with a Texas twist on English. While every region has its own flavor, the best narrators are pure vanilla; dialectically, they are regionally neutral.

For example, in Europe and Scandinavia, the ideal voice is called *North Atlantic*. In America and Canada, there are so many regional dialects that finding a vanilla voice can be difficult; nearly everyone's got a bit of an accent, of one kind or another.

In his most recent call, Larry spent 75% of the hour schmoozing me. I enjoyed the banter, especially the high compliment he gave me, about the design and programming work I did on Texas Forever! Larry said that he was convinced that Ken Burns saw the show and copied my style.

I must say that when I have watched Burns' documentaries on PBS—including *The Civil War*, *Baseball* and *Jazz*—and I've had had the same feeling. Not that I am accusing Burns of stylistic plagiarism, not at all. That Larry feels that way puts a smile on my face, because I think Burns is a genius in his own right. I'm glad that Larry—and I am sure many others—feel that my standards and style are equal to that cinematic master.

(Larry is a storyteller; his stories are like fables and parables, containing deeper meanings. On the phone we both talked in tongues because we knew that we were probably being recorded by any number of governmental surveillance departments.)

The other 25% of Larry's call was spent quizzing me about my availability as well as my current status as a media talent—did I have a company, etcetera. I explained that I have adapted to the "Gig Economy" by working as a *consultant*, under my own name, and declaring all income as personal. I'm defining my role as consulting creative director and, if I get the opportunity to produce the show, I'll be a consulting producer.

To assuage Larry, I reminded him that Vancouver is called Hollywood North for good reason. To produce his show, I have world-class production facilities at my fingertips.

Today, (June 14th) I sent Larry an MP3 audio file his script, narrated by myself. That narration had two goals. The primary one was to let Larry hear how his writing sounded; to demonstrate that some of his prose sounded cluttered. However, I also wanted to produce a sample of myself reading a documentary script, to add to my reel of voice-over samples; this seemed like as good a chance as any to make that doco demo.

So, I spent a day organizing an in-suite audio studio, downloaded and learned an audio production software suite (Audacity), and read Larry's script.

The end result is that I will continue to pursue Larry's film while writing my memoir, (which has become more like a diary). However, I'm going to drop voice acting; because I was totally disappointed with my performance reading the script for the San Jacinto Monument film. I don't have what it takes. My reading was flat, without color or feeling. Funny, before I listened to it, I reckoned I had done a good job; but when I heard my read, I knew the jig was up; that I better get back to what I do best.

[Spoiler Alert: After finishing the manuscript, I decided to index it. That was in July. Now it is December 30th; tomorrow it's New Year's Eve; and I have just finished the indexing (~200 pages). The version I am saving today is 6.6. Let me tell you, the devil was indeed in the details!]

[Hahaha. It's February 23, 2019; I'm wrapping up the text tonight—version 6.6.6.]

2019 – Looking Ahead – Light at The End of The Tunnel

I spent most of the first half of the year adding pictures and illustrations to *An Incredible Epic*; they have brought the tome to life. Now, the book is being wrapped-up for the time being (it's July now) and sent out for proof-reading. It will take another year to finish the work of illustrating it as completely as I'd like; but I don't want to wait that long to discover any major problems.

My wife, Pamela Swanson, read version 5.5 of the manuscript last May and June—and we are still married. (!) Her comments have been incorporated into (6.2), which will be read by John Grinde, a friend and colleague my days in Sweden, at AVC. John asked if he could read my book; I'm not sure he knows what he's gotten himself into; I think I warned him that it's more than two thousand pages.

An Incredible Epic has grown so big that it cannot be contained in one volume—well, it could, but that would be a heavy lift, way too inconvenient for most readers. [The proof-reader's manuscript is contained in eight 2-inch loose-leaf binders.] The new plan is to print the story in as many volumes as necessary (likely seven) and make them into a boxed set.]

2019 – Salvation in Sechelt – Closer to Home

Pam and I went on a vacation in July; it was what they call a “stay-cation” because it was local, more or less.

As usual, I combined business with pleasure. The core mission was to bring a load of gear to a camera shop in on Vancouver Island, to sell it. There simply wasn't room for everything in our set-up at Lancaster Gate.

I sold the gear reluctantly, being a firm believer that with time the gear would become more valuable as antiques. Then I had a reality check; eBay was selling so many of these things that their value was low and would likely be for a long time; and even at low prices, the old stuff wasn't moving. The new generations have moved on; nobody has time for hobbies or antiques except the rich and famous... 1% of the population. So, I felt lucky when Camera Traders, in Victoria [British Columbia], agreed to take a look at the gear I was offering:



A Nikon 250-exposure motor drive outfit [the one I used to shoot Saab animations] consisting of a Pelican case containing a Nikon F3 with two motor backs, eighteen 250-exposure film cassettes, and a Nikon bulk-film cassette loader.

A Pelican case full of filters; a couple of hundred of them in three sizes [52 mm, 72 mm, 95 mm]; all sorts of colors and effects.



Two aluminum cases containing rigging gear; camera-clamps of all kinds including Magic Arms, car mounts custom made by David Trotter (not shown) and Mac McKenzie (left) ; and a half dozen assorted useful others that you can't even find on the market anymore.

It was all stuff I'd never use again and it is becoming increasingly clear that none of the people I might leave the stuff to has any interest in it let alone storing it for twenty-plus years in hopes of fetching a buck. By then people may not be using bucks anymore.

So, our first vacation stop was Victoria. I booked us into the Days Inn, a place I had stayed at before, with Anna. It's a comfortable, harborside hotel right across the inner harbor from the iconic Empress hotel. It was pricier than I expected, but I took the deal for two nights, just for the convenience of being able to walk anywhere in the compact capitol city.



Photo by Pamela Swanson.

That turned out to be wise move because it turned out that the two nights we stayed there were during *Deuce Days*—a major event involving ~1,400 pre-1952 classic, collector cars, almost half of them *Deuces*.⁷⁷ Every hotel in town was booked solid. The event draws gear-heads from thousands of miles away; there were cars from Nevada, Texas and Florida, in the south and from all over Canada. And our hotel (right) was like the home base for the whole shebang. Pam had a ball, taking pictures of the cars. Our trip got to a good start, from her POV. Amazing good fortune, eh?

We took in a Mayan exhibit at the Royal Museum of Anthropology; even I got interested to the point that I couldn't help noticing that all the back-lit transparencies—which dominated the scenery—had faded to ghostly mono-color images. This exhibit had been around; I would have liked to have seen the exhibit when it opened, maybe twenty years ago because, compared to painted scenery, the concept of using back-lit trannies is *brilliant* (hahaha).

Importantly, we managed to find the right places to wine and dine ourselves. Those moments plus long walk-about around the city filled our time in Victoria. The only disappointment was that the Indian restaurant at the Empress Hotel was no more.

Next overnight was a comfortable drive up the coast, to Courtney. I had been there a half year earlier, on a background performing gig. There was no time to see the town then, but my interest was piqued. So, I booked us in to a motel next to the Plates restaurant, a fabulous place I ate at during the movie gig.

It turned out that Plates was closed the night we were there. That led us to find a whole other part of town, right on the waterfront. There was a big pier where people went to fish and crab, or just promenade; it was surrounded by a good-sized marina with a couple of hundred pleasure craft and commercial fishing boats. I thought, this would be a nice place to live.

I struck-up a conversation with an old dude fishing on the pier. He told us that a lot of old timers were being pushed out by affluent retirees from the east, particularly Alberta. That reflected in real-estate prices of course. But for the hell of it I stopped at a realtor's office and looked at a model of a condo in a new development that would be within our price range.

⁷⁷ Wikipedia: A Deuce Coupe is a 1932 Ford Coupe (*deuce* being for the year). This was considered by many to be the definitive "hot rod". The Model B had four cylinders and the Model 18 featured the Ford flathead V8 engine when the car was introduced.

Next stop was Campbell River which was, essentially a *wash, rinse and repeat* experience, like Courtney. The town was bigger, but so were all the problems—of rich retirees and the new developments built to accommodate them, which were transforming the landscape and culture of the Island’s fishing capitol. We took a look at some real estate in our price range and discovered it was so far from town center and so suburban, so blah, that I dismissed the place and we moved on.

After an hour-long ferry ride from Vancouver Island back to the mainland, we arrived in Powell River. It’s a small town, kind of an outpost, the last town along BC’s celebrated Sunshine Coast. I’d heard a lot about the Sunshine Coast insofar as quite a few people I knew in Vancouver moved there. That also piqued my interest.



Photo by Pamela Swanson

Straight-away, we found a real-estate agent. This guy was part of the ReMax network. His office had a sweeping view of the harbor and nearby islands with and Vancouver Island in the distant background. During our warm-up chit-chat, he pointed out the ferry approaching Powell River and told us his next client was aboard; that time constraint truncated our conversation.

I told him our two primary conditions were that our new home be walking distance to all major necessities and no fixer-uppers. He scanned ReMax’s offerings on this computer and gave us two places to look at.

The first would have required \$100,000 to get it shape; and the second was five miles out of town, up a dirt road into a forest clearing where a new development was being carved out of the forest; our unit would have been the third in a future community of thirty condos [aka “town homes”]. Ha! It didn’t matter really, that the guy was so oblivious of our requirements; it was (still) just a vacation trip.

We overnighted at a motel Pam found online. She’s a bargain hunter and the place fit that description. It was in the middle of nowhere and if it weren’t for their long-term RV-hook-up clients, they’d be tits up. [That place and many others like it are testament to the fact that a lot of people or living in RVs and vans.] That said, the place was clean, the TV worked and there was hot water. The nearest restaurant was a 20-minute drive south; I reckoned it would be kind of a burger joint or bar, but it turned out to be a gourmet meal.

The next day we moved on to Sechelt. It was a long drive involving yet another ferry, from Saltery Bay to Earl’s Cove. It was an up and down windy road through the woods following the coastline—a really fun drive reminiscent of US Highway One through southern Oregon and northern California—the kind of drive that puts you and your car through their paces, if you want to have fun.



The drive took longer than anticipated; we got to Sechelt at precisely 5:00 pm. Again, we headed straight for a real estate agent and again it was the ReMax office we found first. They were just about to close, but the receptionist referred us to Elaine Kupka and Nicola Kozub. Those two, a mother-daughter tag team, turned out to be the best real estate agents I have had the pleasure of dealing with. Talk about understanding their customer's needs; They killed it!

Photos by Pamela Swanson



After scanning through their offerings, Nicola suggested two places, but it was too late that day to see them; so, we stayed overnight in the best room at Cozy Court Motel (right), right in the heart of downtown Sechelt. We ate at Daphnie's, a Mediterranean restaurant. I had their paella; it was tasty, but too dry and over-priced.



Next morning, the ReMax ladies took us on a tour of Sechelt. It's a seaside town of about 11,000 situated on the Sechelt peninsula; on an isthmus between the Georgia Strait and Sechelt Inlet. The town (left) is the heart of the Sunshine Coast. It's like living on an island insofar as it's only accessible by boat or seaplane. Yet, it's only three hours from the heart of Vancouver and seniors ride the ferry free most of the week—that proximity (to major health facilities) was the big draw.

<http://knowbc.com/var/knowbc/storage/images/books/encyclopedia-of-bc/s/sechelt/gallery/sechelt1/32977-1-eng-GB/sechelt1.jpg>

The two condos recommended by Elaine and Nicola were smack-dab in the center of the town; everything we'd ever need—from food and pharmaceuticals, to doctors and dentists, to the local pubs—is only a 10-minute walk away; and the ferry, just a 40-minute bus ride. The first condo, at Ebbside Village, was close, but no cigar. The second, at Ebbside Place, hit the nail on the head. Suddenly, a new life seemed possible—an escape from my little Vancouver "cell." [If I didn't mention earlier, I felt like a prisoner in a golden cage in that tiny condo.] Plus—get this—the night before, the price had been reduced by ten *large*. (!) I took that as an omen.

But we had to act fast. Not because the ladies were pressuring us; far from that. They simply mentioned, matter-of-factly, that another agent had organized an open house starting the next day and there were three couples signed up already. Hmmm.

I told the ladies to put in an offer for 15 K less than the asking price; instantaneously they got a text reply from the sellers' broker who explained that there would be no more price reductions because the sellers had already capitulated and were committed to buy a property in West Sechtelt.

Well, I knew that anyone with half a brain would recognize that the condo I liked was a good deal—in an inflationary environment.

[Without considering the prognosticated "Super Crash," which may never happen (in my lifetime) given our contemporary *Command-and-Control* economy, assets like this condo will continue to gain value [sic] simply due to money printing (inflation). The Vancouver flat, by contrast, will lose value because it is a leasehold, not a *real* property; you know, *real estate*.]

So, true to my character, I made an instant decision and life turned on a dime.



Photo of Yours Truly in studio by Pamela Swanson.

Now, I'm writing these last words in my new abode (above). It's thrice the size of my Vancouver condo. Finally, all of my stuff is at my fingertips, not stashed inaccessibly; and I have a big kitchen here, where I can work out.



Equally important, Pam has her own space that's nearly as big as her Vancouver studio. As I write, I've been here two months—long enough to know it was the right decision; I don't miss Vancouver one iota; I can go there whenever I want and stay with Pam, but besides her, there's nothing there for me, anymore.

I think Pam realizes that and is doing her best to adapt to Sechelt (so far by not being here, but I expected that, after what happened on Vashon Island). She's such a city girl. It's all good whether she's here or there, not much different that our routines at Lancaster Gate. We are fast friends, two loners joined at the hip. It's a dream come true.

To digress one last time: There are fundamental differences between city and country lifestyles; the contrasts can't be appreciated (or understood) unless you've lived in both worlds. The differences are so basic and so polarized that they account for major divisions among people resulting in so-called red and blue states ...and wars.

One's choice of place is based on needs; it is the desire for change that propels us forward. Needs change over the course of a life. Pam still wants the distractions of a metropolitan world; I can dig that. Solitude is what I am after, and enjoying life to the fullest, while I can, with the means available to me. The leitmotif of my current life could be described by the Swedish word/concept, *lagom*—enough—the lifestyle of the country. I can walk to get whatever I need; the air is clean and clear; I can see the stars again. And people care for one another (they need to); it's not like downtown where problems are “somebody else's job.”

In the country, one is closer to Life; likely to experience more dramatically the effects of climate change. In the city, one is insulated against direct contact with the Elements. That said, if I were young, I'd head to the city (I did, once upon a time) because that's where opportunity knocks. The bigger the city, the more "knocks."

Why do I feel closer to home here? Maybe it's because I grew up in a similar seaside community, albeit considerably more up-market; and it reminds me so much of Vashon Island, where I left a big piece of my heart.

Thinking back, about all the things I thought I wanted, I got them all—especially my partner, Pamela—a smart Swedish blonde with her own interests and assets. As for wealth,

I managed to get copious amounts of the most valuable assets of all: **time** and **control** (over one's circumstances).

So, you see, the *Incredible Epic* has a happy ending, after all.

And yes, I think this is the end. It's been five years writing this memoir and I don't have many years left.

Now it's time to start editing all those pictures that I've been meaning to get around to, lo these many decades. Look for those in bonus plates in updated versions of the unabridged versions of *An Incredible Epic* and its sequel, *Long Live the King, The King Is Dead*.

Meanwhile, the beat will go on. I'll keep adding updates at least until *An Incredible Epic* has been illustrated and a "final" version printed.

Should I die before that happens, I hope that Pam, John Grinde or some other kind soul will take it upon themselves to complete what I couldn't.

On any given day, I try to leave this project in a state of readiness for anyone to take over, should the need arise. For now, it's "back to the drawing boards." Thanks for reading *An Incredible Epic*.

Au revoir!

* * *

POSTSCRIPT

November 2021

Volume Two of *An Incredible Epic* was completed in December 2019. The eight volumes went online on my 75th birthday (January 28, 2020) and single, black-and-white proof copies of each were printed (at The Print House, in Vancouver) and bound later that year. The proof copies were delivered from the bindery (Rasmussen Bindery, (in North Vancouver) a year ago, in November, 2020. Those proof copies revealed myriad problems of all sorts. After the holidays, I set about making the necessary corrections and decided to add more pictures. That work was interrupted for nearly five months, when I moved back to Vancouver from Sechelt, as you'll read about, below.

Sechelt turned out to be not quite the Camelot I longed for. That was mostly my fault, for choosing to live in a retirement community inhabited by geriatric bigots. Talk about ideologically-driven small-minded people; they all watch CNN and the CBC. Then, too—and more importantly—Pam didn't take to the place and seldom visited. Without her, it was a lonely place.

Then I had a health thing. On New Year's Eve, 2020, Pam and I danced our asses off at The Lighthouse Pub, Sechelt's premier restaurant and lounge. The popular waterfront club is situated at the southern end of the Sechelt Inlet and is the "anchor" of a small cluster of offices for their marina, which included docking for several seaplanes (see picture top of page 1889). Our townhouse was a short, ten-minute walk away, through a nature preserve. I was a regular there nearly every weekend, when they had live bands and pulled enough tables away to make a dance floor. About once a month the featured act was *Disco Mamma*—Tammy and Walter Endert. She spun the digital "discs" and Walter did the rigging, sound reinforcement and lighting. Together, they managed to transform their corner of the Lighthouse into a Sechelt-sized version of New York's Studio 54; or so it seemed after a few beers. That was before Covid; the place was packed and everyone was having a blast. Well, I danced too hard too long. The next morning (Wednesday), I couldn't walk; my right knee was swollen and it was just too painful to move.

Suddenly, I needed a doctor; but I didn't have one in Sechelt; my family doctor (Michael Lee) was in Vancouver which, although only three hours away, was too far, in my condition. That day and the next was spent searching for a doctor, with zero results except an opportunity to call back Friday, at the Arbutus Medical Clinic, run by Dr. Ali Sarabi, who accepted me into his practice and gave me an appointment for the following Monday. Upon examination, he diagnosed me with "faux gout" – false gout, for which he prescribed a three-day course of Prednisone, a potent cortical steroid. [Gout is the accumulation of uric acid crystals in joints; usually, it's the big toe. Faux gout is calcium carbonate crystals that grow in the knee.] Sure enough, by day two, my knee was good to go... but the lower half of that leg, below the knee, blew up like a balloon. Now, Dr. Sarabi referred me to Sechelt Hospital for an ultrasound examination. Fortunately, Sechelt has a modern, well-equipped and well-staffed hospital. The hospital was having a slow day [in the midst of Covid]; I got serviced right away... and was sent to the emergency room! There, I learned that I had a "DVT"; that's a deep-vein thrombosis (blood clot).

DVTs are taken seriously because they can kill you if a clot migrates to the lungs, heart or brain. I ended up in the ER the entire day during which I was injected with blood thinners and instructed how to shoot myself up with them. I forget the name of the stuff, but it cost \$80.00 a day (!). When I left the hospital, around 7:00 pm [19:00], I treated myself to a feast at A&W; I didn't want to cook that night. Ha! Next morning, I was on the horn with my Vancouver hematologist, Jorge Denegri; he's the best doctor I've ever had.

To digress momentarily, about Dr. Denegri: As I related before, in this volume [Seven]: Jorge is a specialist. I was sent to him in 2008 after a series of GPs (general practitioners) were unable to determine why I was having UTI problems; those are unusual for (straight) men. His intensive analysis of my blood revealed a rare, hereditary leukemia called Marginal Splenic Cell Lymphoma. He told me then that the conventional treatment would be to cut out my spleen; but that I was more likely to be run over by a bus than to die of my (so far) s-l-o-w moving chronic illness. And, a decade later, my good health has proven him right.

When I called him, I explained what happened and that I could not afford an \$80/day treatment. He prescribed an alternative blood thinner that cost "only" \$4.00/day. That was a break.

But the biggest break was Pam's surprise visit. She dropped everything and arrived mid afternoon. I broke down in tears; we talked about it. The whole episode had shaken me. I concluded that isolation and immobility are not a good combination. Reinforcing that conclusion, a neighbor had told me about her being airlifted to Vancouver General Hospital after experiencing heart failure crossing the condo-complex lawn. I was not interested in following her, despite my love for flying in helicopters.

Thus, I decided to move back to Vancouver a year ago this November. Now, I am living in Lancaster Gate again—the building I left, to go to Sechelt, in 2019—in new digs, on the ninth floor (Pam lives on the third floor). How I scored this place is another story, as is the move itself, which involved disposing of all my photo and audio-visual gear, framed artwork, housewares and appliances, etcetera, in order to downsize from 1,450 square feet to just 600. [When I lived next to Pam, she let me use her bedroom for storage; but that would no longer be the case.]

In early December, I put out the word with my former friends and colleagues at Lancaster Gate, that I was looking for a place there. No units had been available for a couple of years. However, the head of the Lancaster Gate Tenants Committee, Doug McCorquodale, Told me that 903 was in probate; and the guy that lives in 803, Jerry Miller, happened to have met the sons of the deceased former owner, Dave Calvert, when they came to assess the situation; and he had their phone numbers. The younger of the two sons lives in Calgary, Alberta; I left a message and dialed the second number and was delighted to discover that the older brother, Ken Aldony, lived in Sechelt, of all places!

Ken and I met for coffee at the Trail Bay Mall, in Sechelt town. I explained my situation and interest in purchasing his father's former suite. Ken, who's in his mid forties, was wary, but agreed to let me see the place and make an offer.

The place was a disaster zone.

When the building manager, Paula Mija, let us in, we couldn't believe our eyes. The suite was totally full of tools and equipment; it had been gutted and partially restored, with great attention to architectural details. As Ken explained, his father, Dave Calvert, had been a master cabinet maker. Among his specialized tools was a table router with more than 300 different bits, used for ornamental woodworking. So, Dave was pimping out his apartment. In the kitchen, there were free-floating plate-glass shelves; they were 1-inch [2.5 cm] thick and sunk into the walls on two sides, for support. Beautiful, but totally useless for someone like me. My problem was that everything in the place was custom made but only half finished; there was no way to get parts at Home Depot, IKEA, or anywhere else. Oh, and he also did his own wiring and plumbing; and none of it was to Code. Thus, everything he did had to be demolished, the place gutted and totally rebuilt to its original specifications.

My other ~~problem~~ challenge was that 908 was in probate. In the best of times, there's no telling how long that will take the courts to process; and in the age of Covid, the processing of legal matters ground to a snail's pace. Ken's lawyer kept telling us it was imminent; "just a few more weeks," he said; but months dragged on. Finally, at the end of June, Ken and his brother received authority over Calvert's estate; they were then able to enter into a contract with Pam and I. Officiating the property transfer would take another two weeks; but Ken let our contractor, Florian Mija, to begin work on July 3rd. In a three-week full-court press, Florian and his crew—Silvius, Bogdan and Marius—totally restored the suite, top to bottom, with all new fixtures and appliances.



Downsizing from 1,450 [~135 m²] square feet to just 600 [~56 m²] was painful. Every wall is lined with Metro (metal) shelving and every shelf is full; even in the bedroom (right).

The crew were under pressure to finish before the end of July because I had sold my Sechelt condo and had to be out by August 15th. As it happened, we were out of Ebbtide Place on July 28th, four months ago the very day I am writing these words.

The move-in was done in two stages. Florian finished the living room first; that provided enough space to store one third of the stuff coming from Sechelt. That move was made on July 21st and the rest of the stuff a week later. Pam and I did it all ourselves, with U-Haul trucks and assisted by a dynamic young man called Israel Slone. We had a 10-foot truck for the first haul and a 15-footer for the second; each was packed to the gills. In fact, the 15-footer was overloaded by 6,000 pounds; the load bottomed out and the rear wheels scraped the fenders when the road was lumpy and on turns.

Israel Slone was a godsend. We met in January, 2020; that's when I started downsizing and purging stuff. Having learned about selling through eBay and Craig's List when the Vashon Estate was dismantled in 2012 and 2013, I decided to just give stuff away; had neither time nor temperament to waste.

Like most who come into my space for the first time, Israel was incredulous as to how much stuff I had. As I explained to him, *that* was my problem—half of it had to go. He had come in answer to an ad in the local paper, the *Coast Reporter*, for two video projectors and related video gear (splitters, adapters, cables, polarizers (for 3-D projection) etcetera). He was happy with the gear and while loading his car half jokingly said he'd take anything I didn't want. As it turned out, he meant it.



Israel Stone fell in love with my pictures; he inherited just about all of my remaining framed artworks.

Between January and June, Israel and his girl friend Dixie carted off nearly everything I no longer wanted. Among other treasures transferred to them were: the ice cream machine; a service-for-twelve, Swedish, stainless-steel flatware set; the Indian dinner-service set; the four JBL 4311 studio monitors together with amplifiers; all my garden pots, tools and supplies; three chests of drawers; and, best of all, my entire collection of framed artworks—including a dozen very large panoramas—save a few small ones I kept for myself.

Downsizing was much less traumatic than the Vashon episode, because so much had changed. As I was packing-up Sechelt, the Covid “plandemic” was unfolding. By February, I realized that life would be fundamentally different from then on (I have more to say about that, below); it was an existential awareness—the realization that I was never again going to give anymore big dinner parties; that I would never have enough land for a garden or enough wall space for my pictures; and that any thoughts of producing more artwork or the Baby Bird book series were exercises in futility. I was actually happy to see all the stuff go, knowing that it was going to a fine, upstanding and enterprising young couple. Dixie was an entrepreneur at heart who sold iconic fashions in her own boutique in Gibsons, the largest community on the Sunshine Coast, about 20 miles [30 kilometers] south of Sechelt. She was in the process of building a large, multi-purpose space to house her store as well as a yoga/dance studio. The large artworks and sound system were destined for that space. And, Israel’s abode now had wall-to-wall Mesney pictures, throughout.

The move was not without incident. While backing the 15-foot U-Haul truck into Ebbtide Place, I managed to wipe-out the front end of a neighbor’s leased SUV. It was just a glancing blow, more of a scrape that tore off the front license plate. I reckoned the repairs would be an expensive repainting job. Ha!

Turns out that new cars have dozens of sensors buried in the front end, monitoring myriad car functions while sensing the environment and trajectory of the car; so, the entire front end had to be replaced. Yikes! Fortunately, I bought the extra insurance policy offered by U-Haul and they took care of everything.

By the end of August, 2021, I was re-settled at Lancaster Gate, ready to resume work on this book. However, I didn't begin work until late September. The summer weather was too good to miss and the BC government gave folks a holiday from the Covid restrictions (masking, social distancing, etc.). Plus, I needed a mental hiatus and some physical rest.

Before I shut down Sechelt, I had updated Volumes One through Four of An Incredible Epic; those third-edition volumes were uploaded to my website last June. Now, completing the updates to Volumes Five and Seven and printing the eight Third Edition volumes is paramount, before any surprises impede the completion of the memoir.

After that, I'll start Volume Nine, which will be more of a picture book and include many shots that didn't fit into the earlier editions; those were more oriented to the narrative. You could say that Volume Nine is the stuff that fell on the editing-room floor; that never made the final cut; but is nonetheless great stuff. We'll see how far I get. It's now November, 2021. Pam and I have not taken the Covid "jabs" and there is talk of interment camps for folks like us. Hmm.



The view from my balcony.

I'm glad to be back in the city (Vancouver). Sechelt was stifling; there was no stimulation. Life there was monochromatic; same 'ol same 'ol, day in day out, month in month out. Hell, the town center is seven blocks long from one end to the other. And, before Covid, there was only one dancing place, the Lighthouse Pub. Post Covid, there was no more dancing and the pool table is gone too. So, there was no reason to stay in Sechelt, especially without Pam. Having a life in the country requires an estate, like Vashon, where one can grow food and live in Nature. But, living in a country condo is nowheresville; all you get is isolation. That was OK for a while. In fact, Sechelt was a good place to hide from the ongoing tyrannical hysteria swirling around the hoax called Covid. The isolation provided incentives to work on this book.

Now, back in the city, there are so many options. The beach is just four blocks south (and it's a sandy one, compared to Sechelt's rocky, uninhabited coast). Stanley Park is six blocks west featuring Lost Lagoon and Beaver Lake set in an immense forest with myriad trails. North of us, Coal Harbour (think yachts) is a five-minute walk; and a ten-minute walk lands you in the center of the business & banking district.

Best of all, the West End, where we live, is a tree-filled neighborhood with an infinite variety of architecture ranging from historic houses and apartments to modern high-rises designed by name architects.

In short, there's always something new to discover. And, to get our 10,000 steps a day, Pam and I take a new walk nearly every day. By contrast, you can walk all around Sechelt in just 4,000 steps. Well, you get the idea; I don't miss the Sechelt gulag and am happy to be home again, close to Pam.

Of course, I'll miss the big, 30 X 15-foot [9.1 X 4.6 meter] patio I had in Sechelt.

I grew a fabulous garden in 2020 with tomatoes, Japanese egg plants, climbing beans, two kinds of peppers and, of course, cannabis. I reckoned I'd be confronted by the Strata for growing weed; but nobody said a word. Though, the stuff was a bit embarrassing and had to be hidden as well as possible when my upstairs neighbors—Judy McDonald and Bruce Randall—were showing their house, for sale



Photos by Pamela Swanson.

And I'll sorely miss my barbeque; it's my number one preferred way to cook. However, the BBQ got me in Dutch with the new neighbors, who moved into Judy and Bruce's condo, above me. They didn't approve of the smoke, a certain amount of which was unavoidable given that I used newspaper, egg cartons and forest branches to ignite hardwood charcoal. Had I converted to using those "easy start" briquets and or propane—like everyone else at Ebbtide Place—that would have been OK. Instead, I gave the two outdoor grills to Israel and closed the book on that chapter.



Barbeques are banned at Lancaster Gate; but the 13 X 4-foot [4 X 1.2-meter], southeast facing balcony gets plenty of sun and proved large enough to grow a bumper crop of some dynamite weed last summer.

2021 – Surprise! – Unlikely Reunion



Photo by Pamela Swanson

A highlight of 2021 was a surprise visit by Sandra Sande and her husband Julio Campos. I thought that would never happen. Sandra was angry with me for a very long time after our break-up in 1986 and divorce in 1992; I owed her money and still do. But you'd never know it; she was all smiles and so was he. They took Pam and I out for lunch at a very up-market restaurant; the bill came to several hundred dollars. That, and the success story of their company, led me to realize that they were (very) well off.

They had driven up from Santa Monica in a super-cool, Swedish-built camper, to stay with Sandra's mother, Herta, in Langley, BC; she was not doing well and was going to be getting the Covid jab. The camper was better equipped than my condo; they justified the cost by money saved on hotels. How the other half live, I thought to myself.

A week later, they came to visit me in Sechart. I made my Mediterranean Pasta, a dish I learned from Frya Trost back in the late 60s. It's a pasta sauce made with fennel-spiced ground meat, diced tomatoes, peanuts and raisins; and one of Sandra's favorites. The first time she had it was aboard Filip Järnehag's sailboat when I made it for dinner during a weekend cruise through the Swedish archipelago, in 1985.

They stayed over night in their camper, down by the Lighthouse Pub marina. I didn't expect to see them until lunchtime; but they rang the doorbell at 8:00 am. They had been awakened at daybreak by a large search-and-rescue operation looking for a missing old man last seen rowing across Sechart Inlet; and the early seaplane departures added to the audible commotion.

They brought some breakfast rolls and we had coffee together before they left, heading north to a place they own on tiny Hardy Island, just off the coast from Powell River, where they stayed until the end of October, producing a major corporate event from there, by phone and internet. (!)

2021 – Another Surprise – Not So Nice

In the Spring of 2021 came news that Pam's cousin, Bob Anderlini, had died in his sleep (lucky guy). She has a special affinity for the family, having lived with them and helping out with the farm, when she came to back to Vancouver after leaving Toronto, as a young woman just out of nursing school. I first met them when we were invited out to the farm; they wanted to meet the newest member of the family (me).



Lftt to right: Alexi (Boni's daughter), Boni, Frank (Boni's husband, Sue, Bob, David Swanson. Photo by Pamela Swanson.

Bob and his wife, Sue, ran a 28-acre dairy farm for many years.

Although they tired of that, for tax reasons the property had to remain an operational farm.

When I met them, they were raising about three dozen sheep and tending to a huge and exceptionally productive vegetable garden. Of note, they built their enormous A-frame cedar house, where they raised three kids—Justin and Tia by Sue and Boni from Bob's first marriage. Those kids are grown now; Boni and Frank have their own daughter, Alexi.



Clockwise, lower left: Frank, Boni, Sue, Alexi, Justin and David Swanson.

2021 – Resurrection of the Dove Show – Good as New (Almost)

Kudos to Steve Michelsen: He is bringing slide shows back to life.

I became aware of Steve as I began writing this book. He popped up on internet searches and at one point Noreen Camusa (former AVL staffer) mentioned him. Sure enough, he was posting old AVL manuals online. We made some early contact, but nothing serious.

As time passed, we kept in touch and I saw that Steve was earnestly trying to get an AVL system resurrected from the dead. He succeeded and now has a multi-image studio in the garage of his Delaware home; he pays for it working as a video geek on big productions for meetings and events.



Photo courtesy of Steve.

Steve became a means to vicariously fulfill a dream that I had to abandon when life's circumstances betrayed me (or I betrayed myself – I haven't figured out which yet). In the dream, I built a multi-image museum. Oh, my plans were elaborate; the museum would feature demonstrations of every facet of slide-show production. There would be working models of the gear; e.g., Maron Carrell rostrum cameras, Agfa-Gevaert photostat cameras; and, of course, working projection systems playing vintage shows.

Whereas most of my surviving AVL gear lies somewhere in the depths of Vashon Island's original land fill and the projection gear in the hands of those high school students to whom it was donated (along with 90% of my AV and photo-studio gear), Richard Shipp [DDB Studios, Detroit] managed to keep all his. Richard was a fearsome competitor back in the day. He was AVL's fair-haired boy long before I was. David Fellowes and Richard Shipp's made AVL's reputation at the early stages of the multi-image business. Then I emerged (forced myself) on the scene along with Chris Korody [Image Steam, Los Angeles] and Duffie White [Photosynthesis, Denver]. AVL's founder and CEO/COO, Chuck Kappenman, played the four of us against each other.

Fellowes disappeared into other things, having married Martha Jovanovich, an heiress to the Harcourt Brace Jovanovich publishing fortune; but the rest of us carried on. AVL showered us with their prototype gear; we were the Alpha test sites and as such had marketable advantages over the competition. Fast forward two decades (I produced my last slide show at Sound Images for a Nike show in 2001; after that it was all digital) and now the antiquated world of slide shows seems quaint compared to what's possible today. But I digress.

I turned Steve on to Richard, and vice versa. Shipps was wanting to resurrect a multi-image rig himself. He had all the gear to do it squirreled away in approximately 800 square feet of storage space in three States (Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois). However, after the demise of multi-image in the 90s, he reinvented himself as a creator of “carved paper” artworks that now have an international reputation. Richard was unwilling to part with his past. I understood that, having been there. However, when he learned that I had shed myself of the past and felt good about it, perhaps that was liberating for him, as well. Perhaps my “throwing in the towel” made him look reality (and his wife, Pat Billings) in the face.



Photo and carved-paper wreath courtesy of Richard.

We'll never know and it doesn't matter. What matters is that Steve Michelsen inherited a huge chunk of Richard's gear and shows! This just happened (August, 2021), during a breather from the Covid madness. Now Steve is beginning to realize the depths of what he's inherited. All the slides need deep cleaning. [Even in sealed boxes, slide film outgasses oily vapors that fog glass slide mounts. So do cheap slide-viewing pages (they are even worse).] The gear needs cleaning and service also; rubber components harden; analog electronics oxidize and fail. For my part, I've sent him all my last slide supplies (mounts, view sheets, AVL discs, etc.) as well as a ~2,000 slide collection of my best photos, in Wess mounts—stuff that he can use to make his own shows. He also has the original *Bumbles* and *Dove* shows (*You Can't Stop a Dove!*), which I had sent to Richard when Vashon went down, in 2014.

Steve's a clever guy; he's been teaching himself how to program; being able to reverse-engineer existing shows has no doubt been helpful. *You Can't Stop a Dove!* Is a perfect example. When he ran the show, things fell apart at the end during a continuous run of 122 slides at 9 slides per second. His Kodak E3 projectors couldn't keep up and the result looked choppy, with a lot of blackouts. Originally, the show was programmed on B2 projectors, which advanced slides in slightly less than one second. The E3s behaved more like the European S-AV projectors, which advanced slides in slightly more than one second. Removing 36 slides from that sequence solved the problem.



Steve solved the problem by removing one slide every second and reprogramming the sequence, which was itself quite a chore because he didn't have a copy of the original program. However, by playing the show tape cues into an AVL computer, he could capture and save them. The new version looks very much like the original. Fortunately, many of the animation steps were small enough that the pulled steps are hardly missed.

Steve sent me this picture of the 18 slides he pulled from the original 51 used in this sequence of audio tape being stretched..



Left: A slide from the Dove show finale. Right: An original out-take image from my archive.

Another problem was that slide mounts were badly faded and the mounts fogged, as mentioned above. There's not much that can be done about the fading; but cleaning the slide mounts would clear the fog; so, he began cleaning them. That was taking too long (~3 hours per tray). Then he realized that he could simply remount the film chips in the glassless Wess Mounts that I sent him. Though time-saving, remounting is also a sizeable commitment of time. One thing that would speed things up for Steve is financial support with which he could hire assistants to clean stuff and rent a proper space for a studio; a storefront would be ideal; it could become a theater. I recommended to Steve that he seek sponsors. The companies that created the equipment and supplies for multi-image productions back in the day and who are still in business today would be logical candidates. They include Kodak (don't forget Agfa and Fuji), Navitar, Dataton among others. If I lived closer to Steve, I'd love to get involved. But here I am in western Canada with Steve on the east coast of America and a border closed to people who remain unvaccinated for Covid. I will likely never travel any distance ever again; I'm not vaccinated for Covid; me and my ilk are the latter-day Jews in a Neo-Nazi, communistic world being depopulated by criminal Fascists and Oligarchs.



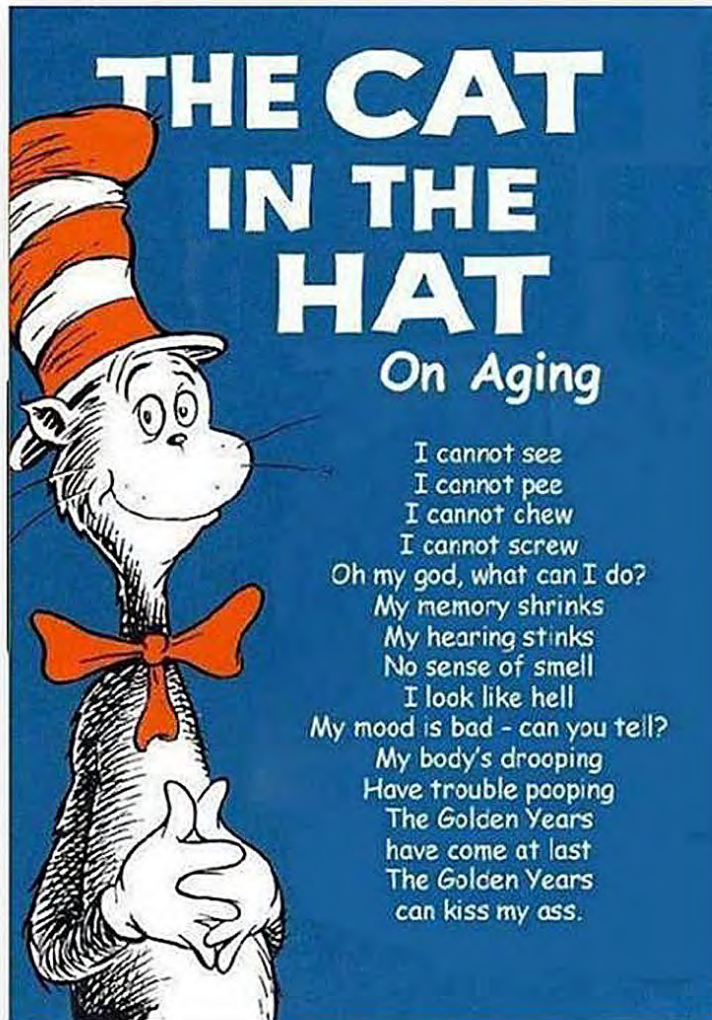
Pam is an optimist. I love her for that. Left to my own devices, I'd likely fall into a great depression, a state of ennui, for the seeming futility of carrying on with this project, given the distinct possibility that it will have no future, nor will many (most?) of us, if the Fascist, technocratic eugenicists succeed in their efforts to reduce the world population by 90%, to just 500 million. Despite the intensification of the Covid hoax and the increasing threat to our well being, as resistors, Pam remains confident that the Truth will prevail. Blessings on her for that perspective. It keeps me going. This third edition will go to press within the month. There will only be one hard copy, unless someone orders another, the chances of which are nil. I can't help but wonder, where will it end up when I pass on, and then Pam. Perhaps Steve Michelsen and his cohorts will succeed in creating a multi-image museum.

Pamela Swanson in 2020 wearing anniversary pendant with a 9-9-9 (wedding) motif.

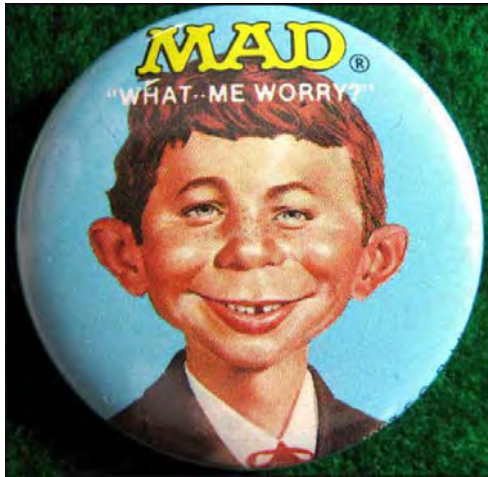
For now, dear reader, and until a ninth volume is (possibly) produced, I'll close with a well-worn quote: "That's all she wrote."

POSTSCRIPT N°2

Presented without comment.



Source unknown.



THE END?

Thanks for reading

An Incredible Epic

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