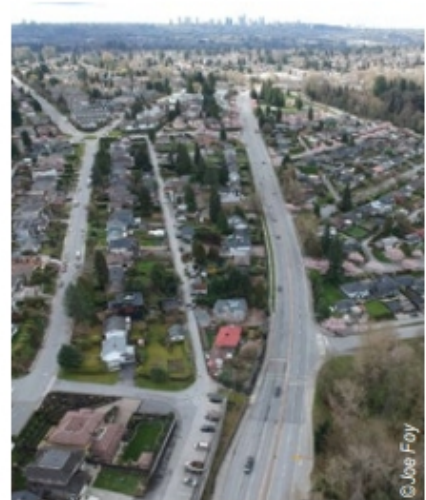
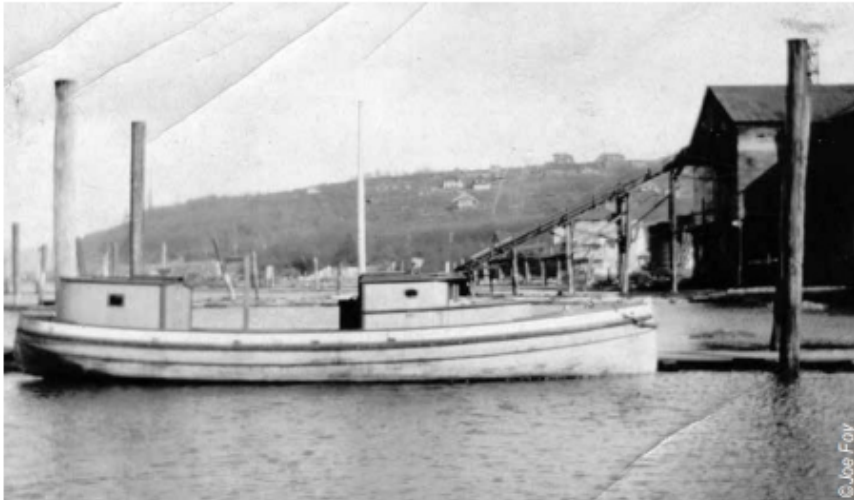


Wild Times

Good Bones



by Joe Foy

The house my great grandfather built in the 1920s still stands in East Van not far from the PNE grounds. Changing hands from owner to owner, the old house has been well looked after through the years and looks as solid today as it looks in photos taken a century ago. It's a house with good bones, as those renovation shows on TV like to say.

His wooden fishing boat, named the Ursula after his daughter born in Vancouver in 1903 – who would become my grandmother – was docked at Vancouver's old Hastings Mill in front of Gastown. Both mill and boat are long gone now. These days, great grandpa's boat lives on only in grainy family photos and snippets of memories passed down from my grandparents to my parents to me. His 1905 Salmon Fishery License hangs in a frame above the desk he built, which I sit at to write my Wild Times columns.

I have lived in the Lower Mainland for all of my 68 years.

My wife and I have now lived in New Westminster for the past 30 years. This former seat of the colonial government is an increasingly dense urban area, yet is only a stone's throw from the

black bears and salmon and herons and coyotes that live in and around the Brunette River. Our city lot is part of a block of land granted by the colonial government in 1860 to William Holmes, the first non-Indigenous resident of Burnaby. Our home sits on the unceded and unsundered land of the Halkomelem-speaking Indigenous Peoples in the Coast Salish territories who have lived in their lands since time out of mind and in no way consented to the land grant I now live on. This grave and ongoing injustice is the case throughout the Lower Mainland and most of BC.

Within the Lower Mainland are the territories of about 50 Indigenous communities representing several Salish languages including Halq'eméylem, N?e?kepmxcin, Səl'áλ'imx̱ac, SENĆOŦEN and Skwxwú7mesh.

On special occasions and holidays my wife and I are surrounded by a huge extended family who have expanded over a 12-decade-long passage of time thanks to babies and also immigration from many parts of the globe. Most of us still live near each other and we have spread out across various communities in the Lower Mainland.

I love this diverse, wild and complicated ever-changing place that helped to make me – this Lower Mainland that stretches from Lillooet to the US border and from Manning Park to the coast, encompassing a region as big as Vancouver Island. I love downtown crows and East Van salmon and Coal Harbour killer whales and Burnaby's designated Bear Area and the tall tall trees of the Coquitlam watershed. I love Squamish eagles and Chilliwack mountain goats and the wild ragged places where they live.

I am forever in awe of the region's big parks and protected areas including Garibaldi, Golden Ears, Pinecone Burke, Upper Elaho, Clendinning, Upper Lillooet, Manning, Stein Valley, Mehatl, and South Chilcotin Mountains. These rugged and mysterious lands of misty mountain ridges, ancient trees, thundering rivers and quiet glacier-fed streams have been experienced by generations on camping trips or day hikes or by just looking up to a distant line of peaks lit by the morning sun.

However, with a rising Lower Mainland population and stalled new park designations, getting a campsite or even entering popular parks is getting more difficult in the summer months. And if campers have it tough these days – wildlife has it tougher.

Back in 1900, about 26,000 people lived here. These lands once contributed much more to wild nature, before so much was drained and paved and filled in to make way for all three million of us that live here now – with more people arriving every day.

Sumas Lake in the Fraser Valley, once home to vast flocks of waterfowl that fed Stó:lō people since beyond memory, was drained to make way for farmland. The False Creek mudflats, once a provider of shellfish for the Squamish people, was filled in for industrial use. The city of Vancouver put many Musqueam and Squamish salmon streams in pipes deep underground to make way for homes and streets.

Industrial damage now extends far beyond our backyards and boulevards. A century and a half of clearcut logging operations have stripped the valley bottoms of old-growth forests with logging roads pushing into the remotest valleys. The result has been a growing list of wild species moving closer and closer to being wiped out. Case in point – the spotted owl, a famous Lower Mainland resident, lives in old-growth forests and once numbered a thousand pairs. At last count one wild born and raised spotted

owl still lives in a region of old-growth forest in the Fraser Canyon area. The province is hatching spotted owls in captivity for release into the wild – but still has not banned the logging of their old-growth forest habitat. (<https://www.wildernesscommittee.org/news/environmental-groups-petition-feds-protect-critical-habitat-last-spotted-owls>)

All of this land stealing and nature destruction has had terrible consequences. The legacy we live with includes ongoing damage to people, ongoing damage to the landscape, and ongoing damage to the wild things that live here.

People of like mind and common purpose are working together across the region to get back Indigenous land rights, end old-growth logging, and secure laws that expand protected areas and strong protection for all wild species – especially endangered species. Sadly our provincial and federal governments have been laggards – not the leaders we need them to be. (www.wildernesscommittee.org/news/independent-audit-finds-legal-gaps-drive-species-bc-toward-extinction)

No one of us gets to live forever. But this land we now call the Lower Mainland has sustained Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years. Ancient village sites exist the length and breadth of the region and attest to the abundance of clean water, air, and wild plants and animals that have sustained people through a vast arc of time.

Seeing clusters of centuries-old Nlaka'pamux circular winter home sites in the Fraser Canyon or some of the rectangular depressions left by Stó:lō big-houses, or panels of Katzie cliff paintings or hearing Squamish Nation creation stories brings home the reality that we all live together in a very old and wondrous place.

People here have a sense that time is running out and want to pass on what is left in the hope that these precious spaces and species can be preserved and restored to something like our shared home's former glory, diversity, and abundance. There is hope – this place still has good bones.

Joe Foy is the protected areas campaigner for the Wilderness Committee.