

EDITORIAL

A phone call from Yale to Arthur Urquhart in Spuzzum reaches Kathleen York, Arthur's cousin, who tells me how sorry she is to report that Arthur died last July. Our paths had crossed intermittently for a number of years, and latterly his health was failing. Still, the news is a shock. We talk for a while, Kathleen and I. She sounds like her sister Annie with whom Arthur lived for years — English with a Nhl̓a7káp̓mx inflection. She says I can come up if I want and talk some more, and I say that perhaps I will. Next day the others at the conference in Yale go rafting. I am feeling pensive and go to talk with Kathleen.

The little white house with blue trim close by the CPR tracks looks much as always, but the garden is less tended, the wood pile depleted, and the antique car, Arthur's pride, is missing from the garage. The interior, with its wood stove, worn linoleum, and coziness, is almost as ordered and shining as when Arthur and his cousin Annie lived there. Kathleen and I talk about Arthur. I say that he was one of the real gentlemen I have known, quiet, unassertive, and somehow elegant. I tell her of the time he took me into the garden, picked a large bouquet from a snowball bush, and gave it to me — a simple, dignified act of friendship. Kathleen says that the family was like that.

Arthur lived in Spuzzum almost all his life. His father, William Urquhart, was a Scot from near Edinburgh. His mother, Rhoda York, was the granddaughter on her father's side of Cataline Caux, a Basque who was one of the most colourful gold rush packers, and C'eyxkn (Amelia) from Spuzzum. On her mother's side, she was the granddaughter of John Palmer, one of the Royal Engineers, and of Amy Antoine, a Métis woman from Shackan in the Nicola Valley. The first language Arthur spoke, he told me once, was the trading pidgin Chinook, and the second, he said, was Mandarin. He learned the latter from Ah Ching, a Chinese resident of Spuzzum married to a Nhl̓a7káp̓mx woman, a couple with whom Arthur was left for a time when his parents moved to Siska (near Lytton) where William worked for the CPR. Ah Ching's remedy for many ailments was cooked Blue Jay, the toughest thing, Arthur used to say, he ever ate.

Arthur went as far as grade eight in school at Yale. When he was eighteen he acquired an Nlha7kápmx name, but did not speak Nlha7kápmxcin nearly as well as Annie. He worked on the trains and the highways almost all his working life, and loved the trains. When they could, CPR trainmen stopped at his house to get some apples and water and pass the time of day. Arthur did not know southern Nlha7kápmx culture as Annie did, and the many scholars who came to their little house focussed on her. After Annie's death a few years ago, I intended to have some long conversations with Arthur about his own life but, regreably, never really did.

After a couple of hours I thank Kathleen and leave, feeling more pensive than ever. What sort of place, this British Columbia, that creates someone like Arthur Urquhart? A gold rush, a Royal Engineer, a Basque, a Scot, several Nlha7kápmx, a Chinese, cooked Blue Jays, the trains, a snowball bush. How to make sense of that? Yet Arthur did, living a modest and attractive life beside the CPR mainline in the age-old Native settlement of Spuzzum.

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