

BOOK REVIEWS

British Columbia Almanac

Mark Forsythe

Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000.
213 pp. Illus., maps. \$23.95 paper.

BY ANNE MOON

Victoria

BRITISH COLUMBIA ALMANAC is a paperback potpourri of fact, fables, and feelings that owe their genesis to a weekday CBC Radio One show called *Almanac*, which serves most of British Columbia. Mark Forsythe, the amiable host of *Almanac*, CBC's lunchtime show, has put together the "best of show" in a delightful, quotable book. For twenty years *Almanac* has entertained, informed, aggravated, amused, and enlightened British Columbia. Best of all, it has set up a sort of wireless party line so that its listeners can add their stories to the mix of words and music beamed from Vancouver.

Forsythe has picked the best of those stories, stirred them with items from regular contributors, and added an eclectic mixture of such tidbits as jam recipes, bear beware tips, and big tree sightings, all of which are organized seasonally. So we meet the birds of spring, explore summertime trails, savour fall fair goodies, and share hints for cutting Christmas trees. It's rich with BC flavour – and not just in the salmon recipes. Herman Bosman tells how he went hang gliding with an eagle; Clarence Hall calmly discusses the cougar attack he survived in Bella Coola; and Nancy Yamamura recalls

the "degrading, traumatic" time in the Second World War when her Japanese family was interned. Forsythe describes his own adventure. Stuck in the studio with a door that wouldn't open he had to go on air with a bursting bladder. This situation was made worse by the fact that he could not avoid looking at the yellow ribbons with which his heartless colleagues had thoughtfully adorned the studio window.

The beauty of a book such as this is that you can dip into it anywhere and find a treat, rather like bobbing for apples. Writing for radio brings out the poet in us. You can hear the ecstasy in Victoria's Jacob Malthouse as he describes surfing off Sombrio Beach: "I paddle out towards the reef ... ready to dance in paradise." There are lists galore: best BC books; best BC movies; best web sites; the top ten scientific achievements in British Columbia.

Because the stories are written for radio they have an informal, conversational tone, which fits with their often intimate style. Who could fail to be moved by Pamela Kent's story of reluctantly immigrating to Canada with her husband Gordon? "As if this country hasn't given us enough, Gord

has a Canadian heart beating in his chest," she reveals after fifty happy years here. Her husband had a heart transplant in 1996. Judy Doyle offers a wide-eyed account of how she immigrated to Canada on the same plane as Prince Charles and got the twenty-one-gun salute and RCMP welcome as she sauntered down the same red carpet. There's a long-ago tale of Mah Bon Quan, who left his

gruelling mining job in 1909 to set up the first Chinese-owned business in Prince Rupert and who fathered some of the first Chinese children born in Canada. We also meet Peter Wing, who became North America's first Chinese mayor when he was elected in Kamloops in 1966.

As a bonus, proceeds from *British Columbia Almanac* go to the BC Children's Hospital Foundation.

*The Way We Were:
B.C.'s Amazing Journey to the Millennium*

Staff of the *Province*

Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2000. 148 pp. Illus. \$21.95 paper.

BY MARK FORSYTHE
CBC Almanac

Trying to determine what is going on in the world by reading newspapers is like trying to tell the time by watching the second hand of a clock.

Ben Hecht, American screenwriter, director, and novelist

WHAT IF YOU GLEANED a century's worth of memorable moments from those newspapers? Vancouver's *Province* newspaper staff did just that – minus the screaming headlines – for *The Way We Were: BC's Amazing Journey to the Millennium*. From first contact through the gold rush, boom and bust economic cycles, politics, cultural diversification: what a ride it's been.

The pictures here tell a powerful story. The Wah Chong family poses in front of its Chinese laundry; daughter Jennie becomes the first Asian to attend school in Vancouver

in 1884. Two years later grim-faced city fathers conduct municipal business from a tent with a city hall sign nailed to its peak after fire devoured 1,000 buildings in forty-five minutes, leaving twenty dead. A 1912 women's tug-of-war team on Vancouver Island, decked out in long skirts, hats, and broad grins, almost pulls an unseen opponent into the picture frame. Amused young men observing from the sidelines will soon travel to Europe for the "war that would end all wars." *The Way We Were* feels like a family photo album, the personal is never far removed from the larger events (in Canada and the world)