

the development of the province. Unfortunately, the account tells us little about his own role as resident engineer for Alcan. Considering the project's accomplishments I believe he has been excessively modest, and this also tells us something about the engineers who have built this province.

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*Hastings and Main: Stories from an Inner City Neighbourhood*, edited by Jo-Ann Canning-Dew with interviews by Laurel Kimbly. A project of the Carnegie Community Centre Association. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1987. Pp. 158, paper \$9.95.

*Hastings and Main* comprises twenty oral histories of life in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The area, nestled between the city's business district and Chinatown or Strathcona and overlapping with the western half of what is known as the East End, has historically been distinguished by the diversity, transiency, and poverty of its residents. This volume explores the way in which these demographic abstractions have played themselves out in the lives of individual men and women.

The project on which the book was based originated, not surprisingly, in the Carnegie Community Centre located at the junction of Hastings and Main Streets and, since its opening in the old Carnegie Library building in 1980, the physical and emotional centre of the Downtown Eastside. Fifty-four residents contributed their life stories to an Oral History Project, from which twenty were selected to "reflect the profile of the neighbourhood" (p. 15). While it is left unclear what role the interviewer played in suggesting topic areas (apparently a favourite question was "What gives you the incentive to get up and keep going?" [p. 18]) or whether any editing of individual stories occurred prior to publication, the explicit point is made that "opinions are stated as such" and social activities "are mentioned within the context of their importance for each speaker" (p. 15). As to precise methodology, the interviewer notes that "first I spoke to a person, got his or her story, and then went back and did the interview on tape" (p. 17), as an end in itself without any knowledge at the time that a book might result.

On the assumption that the twenty recollections do represent individuals' own perspectives on their experiences, they take on some importance as social documents, comparable to the oral histories making up the earlier *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End* (edited Daphne Marlatt and

Carole Itter; vol. 8, nos. 1-2, of *Sound Heritage* [Victoria, 1979]). Common themes resonate in *Hastings and Main* and *Opening Doors*. Most important, perhaps, is survival, very often on the economic margin. The transition from school to work occurs young, for a twelve-year-old of the early century "passing rivets" in a shipyard (pp. 29-30), in the case of an interwar counterpart "riding the rails" to work the prairie "harvest circuit" (pp. 37-38), for a thirteen-year-old in the depression "at the George Hotel as a bus girl" (p. 52). Adulthood represents an ongoing struggle to maintain employment and, via that employment, dignity and respect: thus, the pride with which one man states, "I never got a welfare cheque" (p. 33). Within this context, the depression of the 1930s takes on special significance. Despite strenuous efforts not to accept handouts, many individuals were forced on relief or on the road. Some of the most compelling recollections relate not so much to poverty itself as to the extent to which helplessness was compounded by the demeaning attitude taken by police and other authorities with power over the destitute (for example, pp. 47, 51 and 57-58).

The men and women who tell their stories in *Hastings and Main* do not ask to be liked and, indeed, some of them are not, on first acquaintance, very likeable. One of the principal reasons may be the absence of touchstones which we like to associate with the life course. Marriage and the family take on their own forms: thus comments, almost by the way, such as "I was married then," "my wife, I'm not married to her no more" and "the sixties was a married life" (pp. 115, 130 and 140). The inevitability of seasonal transiency in order to secure employment is one factor, alcoholism clearly another. In the case of a mother of ten, I "stayed married for twenty-three years, but it was off and on. . . . I raised my kids myself . . . by weeding farms in Cloverdale" (p. 54). The reverse situation also occurred: my wife "just left me and the kids and that was it." While this father "looked after the three oldest ones," already in school, "till they were living on their own," the three-year-old ended up in a foster home. "The last time I saw her she was about eight years old" (p. 77). Young children could become the protectors of their parent: "my mother was my mother and when she would go out I would go with her. Or when she would go in the bar, I would sit down outside and wait for her" (p. 137).

"Women, booze or whatnot" (p. 38) are accepted elements of everyday life. A child of the early century recalls previewing the "chairs each lady would occupy" in a "parlour house" being opened nearby (pp. 22 and 25-26). To quote a patron of the interwar years: "You could trip through the third floor of the Windsor and select any woman you wanted for a two-

dollar bill. Now the price is at least thirty-five dollars and it's going up. . . . A lay is still a lay, isn't it? It can't be *that* much better now than it was in my day" (pp. 39-40). A logger depicts Vancouver winters as "the beer parlour, or a wild woman once in a while" (p. 114). To a teenager of the 1960s escaping a fundamentalist childhood in the Fraser Valley, the Downtown Eastside represented buying and later dealing heroin, the opportunity to "turn a lot of gay tricks" and interacting with "a lot of working women, a *lot* of women" (pp. 152-58). The realization that human beings are susceptible but at the same time resilient underlies several of these accounts, as with the latter individual, who is now a social worker "with kids on the street."

The stories in *Hastings and Main* reveal the world of little people, so to speak, from the inside out. The importance of maintaining dignity and pride under difficult conditions is emphasized time and again. The recollections demonstrate in graphic form the interplay which exists in all of our lives between what we hope to accomplish and larger forces, such as depression and war, which may in the final analysis be dominant. We are reminded of the limited control individuals may in fact possess, what a victim of the depression terms "the denial of the right of young people to the development of their lives" (p. 71). As another has summed up, "the peculiar thing about poor people is they live helplessly" (p. 102).

*Hastings and Main* has justifiably become a popular best seller, as well as being shortlisted by the BC Book Prizes. It should also be mandatory reading for all British Columbia scholars and academics who pretend to understand the province in which they live and work.

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*Never Say Die! The Life and Times of A Pioneer Labour Lawyer*, by John Stanton. Ottawa: Steel Rail Publishing, 1987.

This book is based on the author's experiences as a labour lawyer in British Columbia from the late 1930s to the early 1970s. During his career John Stanton represented miners, longshoremen, fishermen and forestry-workers, acting on their behalf in a number of key legal disputes. As he argues in the Introduction, the province's system of industrial relations changed profoundly in the years he was active as a lawyer. Few people are better placed to provide an insider's account of that transformation and its impact on organized labour.