

Vancouver Street Life

SUMMER 1965

When a boy is twelve years old, there is only one thought consuming his mind! My father had not given me the proverbial birds and bees lecture yet. Actually, he never did and hadn't needed to.

We were on summer vacation. My family stopped at a hotel in the heart of downtown Vancouver, Canada. My dad's parents traveled to the city from Northern British Columbia and anticipated our visit.

We were heading to Port Alberni in the center of Vancouver Island. Following our move to the San Diego, this is our first visit back.

Vancouver was a large old city. The streets were narrow and crowded. Parking is a nightmare. The city is the main Canadian West Coast seaport and overcrowded with a variety of people, from roughnecks to tourists. It was filled with immigrants from all over the world, most seemed to be standing on the streets, chatting in their native languages.

It was still a tough wild-west environment.

My grandparents stayed in an ancient grand hotel in the older downtown section. Arriving at their building, we took an elevator to the seventh floor and located their room at the end of the hall.

The old hotel appeared to have the original burgundy and gold flowered wall-to-wall carpeting. The center contained well-worn footpaths. In addition, the carpet contained numerous faded stains and musky smells that refused to mask by their attempt to perfume over them. The light green patterned wallpapered walls complimented the hallway's post-war decorum. Spaced dreary-yellow ceiling lamps dimly lit our way. Despite the hotel's appearance it was immaculately clean.

My parents and grandparents were having a nice visit chatting away like clucking chickens. Thom, my younger brother, almost six and I sat quietly under the only double-hung window overlooking the street far below. Our reverence was not by our choice.

Boredom set in almost immediately. After an hour watching the bustling street traffic heading to wherever they had to go; I could not take it any longer. I stood up and announced, "I going downstairs." I don't know if anyone heard me but no one objected and I slipped out the door.

Once free, I ventured onto Robinson Street. It packed with cars and foot traffic. Its wide sidewalks mostly lined with old stores and hotels. There were many modern skyscrapers visible from the neighboring blocks. Construct sites dotted here and there. It appeared this three-block section under modernized with new buildings and reconstruction updating.

I moseyed down the block and leaned against a brick wall. The street chaos and noises were exciting. Yellow taxis were honking. Every few minutes a street trolley clamored along with its dual pole electrical connector reaching high over its roof and intersecting twin wire feeds. At every junction, the overhead wires sparked wildly as the buses bounced along. All Vancouver's main city streets crisscross with a maze of feeder lines and plagued with traffic snarling buses.

I was a sponge, filling my mind with the hectic cityscape as fast as I could.

I hadn't been enjoying the surroundings for long when I noticed an overly intoxicated man staggering my way. Not wanting to stare, I continuously snuck intriguing glances at his progress.

He could barely walk as he banged on and off the chipped and cracked stucco storefronts. I was stunned when he stopped face-to-face in front of me.

The drunk announced, "I'm going to piss on you!"

I couldn't believe my ears. I stood as straight and tall as a small boy could, "The Hell you are!" My feeble larger-than-life intimidation failed.

He responded, "Yep I'm going to pee right here," reaching for his fly.

Flabbergasted and without options I could only say, "Go ahead." and hurried to the opposite end of the brick wall.

He was true to his word. The smashed man swayed in place wetting the wall with the splattering sound of streaming urine. The street's foot traffic continued along their way without notice. I could not imagine anyone being oblivious to this man's lewd outdoor bathroom scene. It certainly couldn't be commonplace!

I was thankful when the inebriated man finished. He fumbled with his zipper for a while. I don't know if he ever got it squared away or not before returning in the direction from whence he came.

It was an easy decision for me not to return to my now wet spot at the other end of the wall and remain dry where I was. Soon again, I was hypnotized in the activity surrounding me.

Only a few minutes later, three beautiful women walked up the sidewalk. Each of their different solid colored satin skirts blew freely in the gentle breeze coming off the bay. Their breasts bounced up and down under their sheer pastel blouses. I was mesmerized in fantasy.

They were less than ten feet away when they noticed me and stopped. Almost on cue, the three hiked their skirts to their waists. They were more beautiful by the minute.

The middle one asked, "Do you want to buy some?"

I was too embarrassed to sneak a peek. I slowly shook my head and declined. Sadly, I had not a dime to my name.

The women let their skirts slip slowly down over their firm slender legs and continued past me. They hailed a taxi. Before the last one slid into the back seat, she turned back to me, "Are you sure?"

The only thing I was sure of was the pitiful state of my wallet!

Soon after the incident my parents emerged from the hotel and found me, "What are you doing here?"

"Just hanging around. I asked if I could come downstairs." It hadn't mattered if I asked or stated it; no one listened to the wants of a now fasting maturing young man.

My dad announced it was time to leave.

There was no doubt in my mind the small island town could compete with Vancouver. I suggested I meet them at our car and begged for a couple more minutes on the street.

I thought better of asking for a loan.