

THE RANT AND RAVE GAZETTE

A Music Newsletter

Issue 9

Welcome to the ninth issue of the Rant. NOTE: the most recent issue comes up first with the past issues following. Cheers!

THE HOKEY POKEY

“YOU PUT YOUR RIGHT HAND IN



“So this is it then. A little predictable don't ya think?”

We just returned from a hair raising trip to visit friends on their land in the mountains north of Vancouver B.C. The Casper Creek Wildfire had just ripped through the area and the fight to save their property ended up being epic. It's a great story that ended up being of interest to a couple of local newspapers. An edited version of it follows:

ONE MAN'S FIRE

Risking It All To Fight The Blaze From Hell
by Paul Lucas

Mary Thor charged through the smoke down her treacherous driveway in the little Toyota. With one hand gripping the family dog and the fire literally exploding trees behind her, she headed for the strip of washboard road cut into the side of the mountain that she hoped would eventually lead her to safety. It was July 27th, and evacuation notices had been issued for all of the country affected by the raging Casper Creek Wildfire. It was a hair raising 30km drive, and she was flying solo. Her husband, Bernhard, had stayed behind to fight the blaze and she wasn't sure she would ever see him again.

In what was likely a very short discussion, he had made it clear that he wasn't about to give up a life's work because of some forest fire. Besides, he had been preparing for this day for years, every season clearing ground cover and cutting firebreaks to mitigate a possible spread. In the end, it was that, along with a ready water supply and an indefatigable constitution that made him think he might have a real chance of saving the land. When the fire finally approached the house, he was ready.

Bernhard and Mary Thor have lived on the mountain for over 50 years. Like myself, Bernhard staked property in the days when the province of B.C. saw fit to open up land to settlers. On that stake north of Whistler B.C., he built his home. But not just any home. A multi-faceted man of the arts, he used all of his skills as a sculptor, stone mason and painter to build a dwelling that was itself, a piece of art. That, along with some incomparable bush skills made him one of our few true modern day Renaissance men - a fact only outshaded by a remarkable early life.

His upbringing reads more like a piece of thriller fiction than a childhood. Born in East Germany, he escaped the political oppression of the Soviets by making a run for it through a no man's land of minefields, razor wire, electrified fences and booby traps - all overseen by guard towers and machine gun nests. The whole thing took some serious intestinal fortitude, and it's a miracle he is alive to tell the tale. What he didn't know was that one day he would need every bit of that snot and vinegar to face the raging wildfire that would threaten his house and land



It was late in July when the fire soared up the steep ridge towards the property, turning what had begun as a simple sighting of smoke into a mythical struggle for survival. Bernhard didn't waste time in responding. Alternately soaking land, buildings and slashing bush, he fought off the flames with everything at his disposal. Over the years he had developed a complex sprinkler system to water the extensive acreage that hosted, amongst other things, a huge vegetable garden, a workshop and several sheds. He expanded this to allow the continual watering of the roof of the house. That, he hoped, along with several strategically placed fire breaks and a cleared forest floor, would be enough to save the property.

When it became clear he wasn't going to abandon the land, the fire crews in the area took the opportunity to make it a base for operations. But not before the police were called in to try and persuade him to evacuate.

When they arrived, they asked him what he was still doing there.

The reply was pure Bernhard.

“I don't like to run away from trouble. I prefer to run towards it,”

There were some raised eyebrows from the fire crew, along with a little poking at the ground and staring into the distance as they slowly digested who they were dealing with. Then all of a sudden, one by one, they started to laugh. And that was that. They settled down at that big old kitchen table and put together a plan of action.

Fire fighting is a complicated and dangerous business. Above all, though, it is extremely hard work. In the days that followed, those crews laboured to save the properties on the side of that mountain with a dedication that can only be described as Herculean. Meanwhile, Bernhard continued to cut, clear and water day and night, taking only brief naps when he could no longer stand up.

In the end, it all paid off, because when a worried Mary Thor returned after 10 days of living out of her car, she found her house still standing and her husband alive and well ... more or less anyway. Bernhard was worn right down to the nub. He was, however, according to Mary, 'sporting a very large grin.'

That land now sits like an emerald on the face of the mountain - a tiny oasis that stands as a monument to the human spirit.

We visited Mary and Bernhard immediately after the fire. After talking our way through the road blocks, we wended our way up the damaged track towards the property. Even after disaster, this country remains spectacular, and the views from this wild and rugged road continue to take my breath away. The devastation we found, however, was chilling. In that peculiar way a forest fire burns, it had charred entire mountainsides while leaving certain areas untouched, so much of it dependent on the the prevailing wind and weather.

Relief flooded over us when we saw the house and land still intact. Bernhard and Mary are our friends, and the thought of them losing a life's work to fire had been haunting us for weeks. We had a fine old celebration that night. Lynn dragged out her accordion, I grabbed my guitar, Mary cooked a monster dinner and Bernhard went to raid the beer cooler. It was the best of all possible endings.

LITTLE GEMS

ADVICE THAT WAS WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD



““Playing fast is just playing slowly, FASTER.””

THATS ALL FOR NOW FOLKS! SEE YOU NEXT TIME