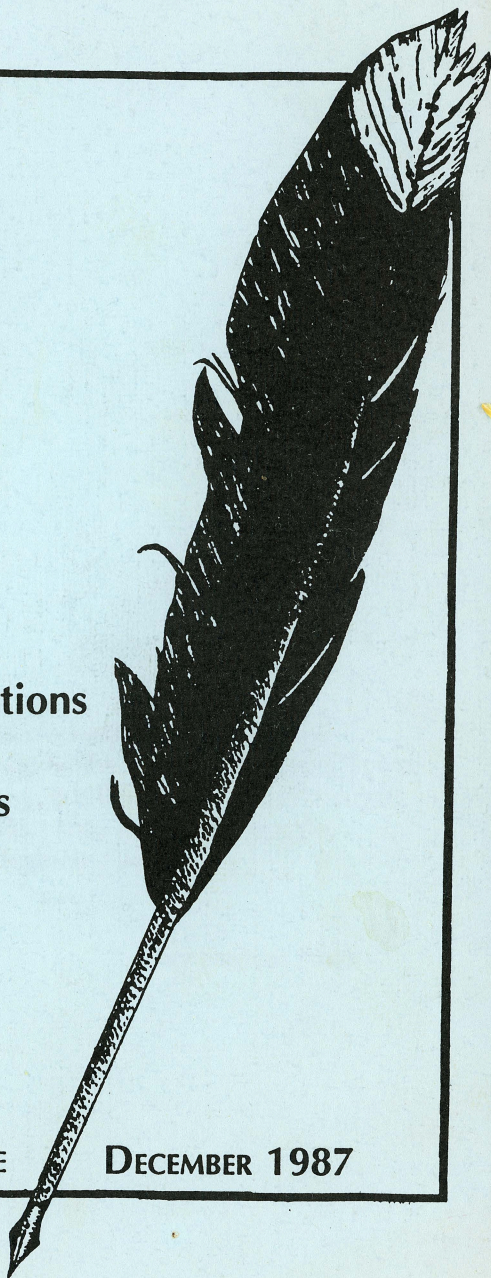


The Feathered Pen

A Collection of Compositions
from the
English Writing Class

CARNEGIE CENTRE

DECEMBER 1987



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The Feathered Pen is a collection of students' writings from the Writing Course offered at Carnegie Centre by the Vancouver School Board. Writing is more than communicating. It is thinking. A lot of thoughts were generated in producing these works. They reflect the struggle, perseverance, and hard work of these beginning writers.

Mary Frances Smith

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MY TRIP TO THE PLANETARIUM

by

VELMA PAQUETTE

One Saturday my friend Denise and I took a trip to the Planetarium. One of the employees gave us a very informative talk about mirrors and the self image.

Also we had a demonstration on how to make puppets out of socks. They provided the supplies such as socks, buttons, glue, and old clothes.

Next we sat in a chair and the light went out.

The stars came out and we saw Vancouver on the film screen. The narrator was describing all the planets.

A funny part of this was when a friend's little girl screamed because a big snow flake came down in the middle of the dome. She thought it was real.

I really enjoyed the trip and when I returned home, I could look back on this as an enjoyable experience.

FOR YOU GRANDFATHER WITH LOVE

by

MARY A. CAPPELL

Dear Heavenly Father,

I would like to talk to my granddaddy. Thank you.

Dear Grandad,

I really wish that God didn't have to take you when he did. My life was hell for sixteen years after your death. My mother has never been one, with all her dishonesty and hatred. Father never seems to be around for any of us in the family. He hardly sees his own mother. She is so lonely these days, I really wish someone would be around for her. It's not easy for me since I'm 3,000 miles away from her.

These days you would be so proud of me if you were here. I gave birth on August 18th, 1985 to your first great-grandchild. He's so sweet. I do my best to love and care for him. I named him Adam Lee Cappell. He will carry on the family name, when he gets older.

Eric, your second grandchild that you've never met, is not doing too great. One time the family promises him something, then they break their promise. For example, Grandad, Eric was going to come visit me last summer then Dad told him to wait until Christmas. Now he is telling my brother to wait for the summer holidays in 1988. Eric is so mixed up and confused these days. He doesn't know what to do.

I have been doing a lot better since I've been in Vancouver, with my son.

Grandad I wish my questions would be answered one of these days. It's pretty upsetting when you don't have the answers for anything.

Why couldn't God let you stay alive for a few more years? I've never blamed you for leaving me. I've blamed God. At one time I did blame you until I realized God takes those who are ready to go.

Even though, you've been gone for eighteen years, I still love you and miss you.

Love,

Mary

THE WINDOW TABLE

by

BONNIE CHARETTE

Charlie Taylor sat at the dark corner table of the Hollow Hill Tavern. Sipping on a pint of beer and eating a sandwich had been a daily routine for Charlie for almost five months. He sat watching the sun penetrating through the window at the front of the tavern. It was almost over, and he started thinking that his plan was not a very good plan, after all.

Earlier that year, Charlie had lost his job. He had been an inventory clerk for the town's only department store. Last year the store had installed a computer system. Most of the employees had no problems adjusting to the system. They had anticipated the computer era. Charlie, on the other hand, was terrified of the glowing green screens. Although the keyboard on the terminal resembled that of a typewriter, Charlie still thought the contraption appeared to be quite alien.

He explained his feelings to his supervisor. Considering that he had worked for the company for quite some time, he was permitted to perform other jobs until the end of the fiscal year. Charlie knew that they were menial tasks and that he would eventually be asked to leave.

Then it happened. He was called into the office. "Charlie," Mr. Jackson said, "I'm sure you knew this would happen sooner or later. We feel that it is no longer feasible to employ you. The company just doesn't have the budget for it. If only you'd—"

Charlie cut him short, mumbling "No, no, no..."

Mr. Jackson had a sincere look of sympathy on his face, however, he continued informing Charlie of his termination. "I'll have my secretary write you up an excellent reference. I don't think you'll have any problems finding another position with another firm." He went on to thank Charlie for the years that he had put into the company.

What Mr. Jackson did not know was that Charlie didn't have enough confidence to go out and find another job. Although he knew it would happen, Charlie had not prepared himself for this, mentally or financially. Charlie's pay had been little and his bank account looked more like a child's piggy bank. Charlie didn't own a house. He never married, and he had no children. Charlie was what other people called a loser. Charlie knew this but he was damned if he allowed other people to think so. Anytime that he got into a situation that required a companion, or a fancy dinner, Charlie would put everything on his credit cards, including a rented sportscar and a female escort. Charlie was just as plastic as his money.

He decided that since there was nothing he could do about his debts, he would just forget about them for a while. He sold his old car, his television set, and the few pieces of furniture that he had. He took his

savings out of the bank and returned home to do some calculations. He figured that he had just enough money to pull through the next six months. He booked a room at an inexpensive motel, and decided that he would have his daily lunch at a little tavern just down the street. He paid for the room for six months, in advance. Unpacking his clothes, Charlie began to plan his reason for his daily luncheon visit.

The next day, he went to the Hollow Hill. He told the bartender that he was writing a book about people who frequent local taverns. He said that he had chosen the Hollow Hill for a six month study and that he would be in every day at 2 p.m. for a pint and a sandwich. He paid the bartender in advance.

Not wanting to take up a whole table for himself, Charlie sat on a bar stool. While he ate his lunch, he decided that he would enjoy coming here each day. It was such an interesting place. There were such a variety of patrons; young couples, the neighbourhood regulars, veterans of the war, and even a few tourists now and then. As he gazed about the room, Charlie saw a familiar face. It was one of the clerks from a credit company where Charlie made monthly payments on a loan. Realizing this, he quickly turned his head, hoping the woman would not see him. The blood rushed to his head as he started to think that perhaps this was a bad omen, and that his six month 'vacation from life' as Charlie called it, would be doomed. The clerk finally left without noticing Charlie. The relief that he felt enabled him to think clearly for a moment. He did not want to take another chance of his creditors seeing him. He took his mug, and moved over to the corner table of the tavern. It was dark and inconspicuous and he figured that nobody would see him there. Besides, he had a nice view of the front tables near the window, and the sunshine that blessed them. Yes, thought Charlie, I will enjoy this vacation from life, not having to worry about a damned thing.

Charlie's life went on pretty much the same, day after day. After a few weeks, the bartender would automatically take a pint of beer and a sandwich over to the corner table for Charlie. Charlie was thankful of this, as he knew the less time he spent in plain view, the less chance of someone spotting him.

Sipping on his beer, Charlie always caught himself staring at the window table. He envied the people who got to sit there. How their lives must be so nice, how their conscience must be so clear, how free they were. How alive. Charlie started to daydream about his life after the vacation would be over. He would picture himself in a luxurious apartment giving a wine and cheese party for all of his friends from City Hall. He even conjured up a beautiful woman to inhabit his dreams with him. When all of this became a little monotonous, Charlie thought of Hawaii. He thought of hula girls, the beaches, and even surfing. How beautiful the Hawaiian sun would be — the light, the warmth. Charlie began to miss the sun. He sat there at the corner table imprisoned in darkness, his eyes

transfixed on the window table. He sat and observed the young couple occupying it. The woman had beautiful blonde hair. The sun made it look various shades of gold and yellow. The man wore an expensive suit and a gold watch. Charlie wished that he had a gold watch so he could sit there, too. Charlie began to hate the couple sitting there, enjoying the sunshine, enjoying life.

As the days and weeks went by, Charlie couldn't think of anything but the window table. It had become an obsession. He knew the only way that he could sit there was if he was debt-free. This meant getting a job and working. It was just another two weeks until the end of his vacation, and all he could envision was death. If only he could sit at that table, the table of sunshine, the table of life, then everything would be okay. He wouldn't have a worry in the world. He would be free from everything, just like the people who sat there. Trying to get the table off his mind, Charlie began to think of Hawaii, but even that didn't work anymore. Yes, his plan had not been a good one after all. The days went by and Charlie became more depressed.

Walking down the street, Charlie kept his head down. He wasn't quite sure why he was still paranoid and avoiding his creditors. What could they do to him now? It would all be over tomorrow. Watching the sidewalk, Charlie spotted a single dollar bill near the edge of the road. He bent down and picked it up. It felt strange to be holding money in his hand, it had been so long. He took the dollar bill directly to the store on the corner where they sold lottery tickets. Purchasing a ticket, his hopes and feelings did not change. He had accepted the fact that he was an unlucky man. He went to his room, lay down on the bed and dozed off into a deep sleep.

Morning arrived. It was the last day of his vacation from life, and Charlie didn't care too much about anything. He opened his blinds and the sun into his room. He didn't know if he would return to his room after leaving the tavern. He hadn't really thought about how his life would end, he just knew that this was the day.

On his way to the Hollow Hill, curiosity led him to the store where he had bought the ticket. He gave it to the clerk to check over. His heart almost stopped dead as he heard the clerk congratulating him on his winnings. Charlie had the clerk assure him that he was not dreaming, and that he was in fact, \$168,000 richer. He took his ticket a few blocks over to the lottery office. They took his picture for the newspaper, and gave him a cashier's cheque.

Charlie took a taxi back to the motel, asking the driver to wait for him. He quickly ran inside, gathered up all of his statements and bills and returned to the taxi. He went to the bank, opened an account, and had certified cheques made out to each and every creditor for the full amounts owed. He went from office to office, store to store, paying off all of his debts. When all business was taken care of, he instructed the driver to take

him to the Hollow Hill.

Entering the tavern, the bartender spotted him. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Taylor. I left you lunch on the table as usual, but you're a little late today. Have a seat and I'll bring you a fresh sandwich and a cold ale."

Charlie started to chuckle. He started feeling something he hadn't thought about in months — pride. "Actually, sir, today is a special day. I have completed my research and will not be patronizing your establishment after today. Seeing as it is my last day, I'd like to sit here." Charlie pointed to the window table. "I also feel that a beer and sandwich won't do, either. I understand that you serve a fine steak from the dinner menu." The bartender agreed, but explained that it wasn't quite the dinner hour yet. Charlie smiled, passing him a crisp one hundred dollar bill, "Well, sir, I would appreciate it more than just about anything." He stood staring at the window table.

The bartender smiled back, "I'll have your steak brought to you in a short while. Medium-rare?"

"Yes, and a bottle of your finest champagne, if you will."

Charlie sat down on the chair. It felt the same, only it had been heated by the sun. He looked over at the dark corner table, and silently thanked the Lord. The lottery ticket was not just a ticket to wealth, or steak and champagne. Today his vacation from life was over. That ticket was his path to the window table. The table of life.

As he sat waiting for his drink, he gazed out the window. A young couple had just left the tavern and were driving out of the parking lot. Across the street walked a well-dressed man with a leather briefcase. Charlie no longer hated or envied these people. The bartender brought him a bottle of champagne and poured him a glass. Charlie thanked him and stared out the window again. Turning back to the table, he raised his glass to toast the day. As he brought the glass to his mouth, out of the corner of his eye he saw a car come screeching into the parking lot of the tavern. It crashed right through the window table.

A simple piece of furniture, a table near the window of a tavern, an inanimate object had become the focus of one man's dream. What he had thought to be table of life was in fact, for Charlie Taylor, the table of death.

RECREATION ON MAIN AND HASTINGS

by

FRED ARRANCE

Main and Hastings is one of the hardest hit areas for poverty, crime, prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse. Anyone having knowledge of the history of the neighbourhood knows that these things are major concerns for groups and organizations in the immediate area.

How do we, as members of the community, try to change the bad reputation the area has, as being Skid Row?

Maybe recreation in a small way can help people to get involved with other things besides what the streets have to offer. We already know the population is mostly male and a large number are seniors, but the other part of the population is Native or French Canadian under the age of 40. They need some kind of recreation to keep themselves out of trouble and to occupy the spare time they have on their hands. Recreation really does offer a person a lot. It offers people a chance to belong to a team, a chance to develop skills, and a chance to learn a bit of discipline.

This area has never had a lot of recreation to offer people on the street level. This is not saying that recreation on the street level cannot happen. It's about time that some of the organizations who like to think they are the leaders in the community get their heads together and focus some energy on this subject.

Some people may wonder how can recreation be offered to these people if there are no gyms available to accommodate them. This assumption is totally incorrect because there are five gyms in the area: Ray Cam, Carnegie Centre, the First Church, the Police Department, and the Vancouver Indian Centre.

With this many gyms in the area, there are really not many programs set up to meet the needs of these people. Programs like floor hockey, volleyball, basketball, all cost really nothing to operate except that they do need gym space. It wouldn't be difficult to find enough people to participate in these programs. These gyms in the neighbourhood must become more accessible to street people.

If recreation does not appeal to everyone, there could be alternate programs set up, for example, a bi-weekly gathering, or pow-wow could happen for native people. The purpose of these programs would be to make available to the people, information on education programs offered by different sources in the community including drug and alcohol counselling.

This program would get native organizations more familiar with each other, and a chance to let the people know what they are about. Plus, it would give the Native population what they are starving for; some of their culture and heritage back. This is something that Native people have to

get. Drummers and singers from different tribes could come every second week and take turns to dance and explain the meaning of each dance.

Because Main and Hastings is one of the hardest areas to develop recreational programs for, maybe the methods I have mentioned will help meet some of the needs of these people from the street.

CHRISTMAS OF 1987

by

MARY A. CAPPELL

Christmas is just around the corner; so is New Year's. This will be my fourth Christmas away from home. The last two I've had my child to share Christmas with me.

The first Christmas he really didn't understand. He was only four months old. Last year, 1986, he was only a year old.

My son really enjoyed seeing Santa this year. Santa received a big hug and kiss from him. When Santa asked him what he would like for Christmas this year, my son replied "a drum." I'm glad he is only two right now, for I can't afford a little drum set for him this year. I hope to explain why he couldn't get a drum set this year for Christmas. Hopefully next year Santa will be nice to Adam's mommy.

THE WAKE OF THE THERON

by

JAMES ROADKNIGHT

In the spring of 1953 I was on the beach in Halifax, out of a job, looking for a ship. I'd heard Carl Carlson Company were looking for sealers. My buddy and I had asked the first officer for a job. He signed us on the motor vessel Theron, the latest in ice breakers. She was a nice little ship, 150 feet long with a 30 foot beam. The bridge, engine room, cabins were aft. I preferred working on smaller ships anyway. I was just after tongue-fighting with the wife and would've been glad to take any ship. After putting fuel, water, and grub aboard, we sailed March 2nd for the ice. As we were leaving the harbour I had feelings of misgiving, but it was too late then.

The weather was good all the way north, cold but nice. There was quite a mixture of crew, Newfies, Cape Bretoners, Norwegians, and Nova Scotians. Except for the officers, we were all broke. The first night out we were issued with clothing, knives, a stone for sharpening and a butcher's steel, plus a ration of cigarettes. Smoky Joe said with a cigarette in hand, "We'll stop beefing now for a few days." Three meals a day along with the fags does wonders for about ten days.

I was one of the first ones aboard, for if you are last you get the worst bunk with pipes running through the deckhead right over your head. I threw my seabag on a top bunk as my new shipmate took the bottom one. It was the only two-man cabin forward. The rest of the crew had to settle for ten and twelve men cabins. Still, that's better than the Newfoundland sealers who sleep two in a bunk with a cast iron coal stove in the center. My roommate and I got along from the start, but I could get along with an ape in the jungle as long as he was half-civilized.

Smiley kept me entertained with outrageous lies. Seamen are great story tellers. The bigger the lie, the better the tale. The seamen, oilers, and the steward's department got the best rooms down aft close to the galley and mess rooms. As we were forward, a mess boy brought our meals in dixie cans to a small galley. Smiley and I ate in our room. The meals were terrible. Of all the cooks in the Maritimes, we were unlucky enough to get a guy who was a cook in name only. Later, we put the small galley to good use.

We arrived on the ice field one dark evening as the Norwegian captain climbed down from the look-out barrel, high on the foremast. He steered and controlled the engines from there. He said, "Get a goodnight's sleep, boys. Tomorrow you skin the seal." Well, he was wrong. We were awoken early the following morning by a blowing snow gale. You could not see five feet in front of you. She blew all that day and far into the night, but by the following morning she had slacked off some. The captain

said, (which I can still hear to this day) "Ya, ya, on the ice, skin the seal." A few hardy fools stepped onto the ice slowly. I left the vessel, but not too far. Later, I wished I was someplace else. The pups cried just like babies, and some would crawl to you thinking that you were their mother or father. I love animals and to see them clubbed and skinned before my eyes sickened me. For the next two months I could not get away. There were some days when I thought I would walk ashore, but being the coward I am, I did not want to risk getting lost. Out there, everything is the same, all white and grey skies. If it wasn't for the sunglasses, we would have been snow blind. The following morning at 5:30 a.m., precisely, the watchman called us for breakfast.

Armed with a gaff, knife, and a steel, we climbed over the bulwarks and down a makeshift ladder of sorts. The crew of seal killers set off across the ice clubbing the pups and skinning them. It was not very pleasant. We wore cotton gloves. As you peel the skin of pelt off the still hot bloody carcass, your gloves get soakin' wet. As you tow the pelt to a pile, you place a stick in the ice with the ship's colours so the captain up in the barrel can spot the mound and come along side. The oilers and mess boys winch the lot aboard. Hard work for anyone not used to toiling.

Now to get back to you soakin' wet gloves — these start to freeze up a few steps away from your last kill. If you don't find another seal soon, you risk frost bite, as one poor chap found out. He had hid behind a small iceberg and suffered until we arrived back in port. He lost three fingers from each hand. I never met him again as he wasn't a fisherman nor a seaman (we thought he was lazy).

The first seven days we killed 10,000 pups. It took us seven more weeks to hunt and find 450 more, so we had lots of time to get to know one another. Some of us brought reading material with us. A lot of the time was taken up by eating, sleeping, and seeing who could tell the biggest lies. My shipmate, Smiley, was twice my age so I was able to get valuable information from him, like making homemade brew. After all, the officers had their rum of which they would not give us a drop. Our friendly mess boy got yeast, raisins, and some gallon juice jugs. Smiley showed me how to get it going, and we had eight jugs on the go. My partner said not to tell anyone and I didn't, but he would open the cabin door and invite in anyone that was passing by — so much for secrecy. I called our cabin, Smiley's Tavern, or Do Drop Inn. I must have been thirsty or something for I said, "I wonder if this is finished working yet." I cracked the cork and raisins flew out like buckshot over the deck bulkhead and also all over Smiley. I stopped the flow by jamming the neck in my mouth (after all, I had to do something). We sure had a sweet smelling room for the rest of the trip.

We would also get the key from the mess boy for the galley and fry seal steaks. We would broil or bake seal flippers and make seal flipper pie, all Newfie recipies. You have to soak the seal meat overnight in a pot of

vinegar and water to take away the fishy taste. The Newfoundland ship's crew bring the flippers to St. Johns and the first ones home would get the best price. You can buy canned seal meat if you can find a Newfie store. There are a few in Toronto, I do not know if Vancouver has one. I'll have to look, maybe this weekend.

Meanwhile, back on the ice, it's dangerous to travel alone because you might drop through the soft ice. After a fresh snow fall, you poke ahead with the gaffe. Even so, Smiley was reckless and in a hurry to skin seals. It is a way of life for Newfoundlanders and he fell in a hole the first day. He was wearing a pair of knee-high seaboots and they started to fill with sea water. He pulled them off and I gave him a spare pair of socks. He started for the ship, far in the distance.

The ship is the only mark to see out there. One day I was busy killing and skinning, I looked around and there was only two of us. I said to Gordon, "I think we better make our way back before we lose sight of the Theron." She was already on the horizon line. It was my fault for not keeping an eye out. It took us four hours to get aboard. We were served a hot meal. We took a short rest and then back on the ice.

As I said, we were up at five-thirty every morning. We had breakfast and we were on the ice at 6 a.m. We worked until 5 or 6 at night. You would eat your supper, crawl into the bunk, and just die. A hard cruel life for Northern people, but on the other hand, we did not know anything else in the good old days. In fact, I can honestly say, there were no good old days, just pure bull labour.

Near the end of April, after two months on the ice, spring was in the air. The ice was getting softer and we were all falling in. The Captain decided that we would sail for home. He gave us all 3 fingers of demon rum. You never saw a happier bunch of men. On the way home we were talking about the pay-off and how we would spend it. I didn't have to think about it at all. The money was to pay bills. My wife was expecting a baby. I was hoping for a boy but it was a girl. It didn't make any difference to me, a change of name, that's all.

On all ships, seamen homeward-bound think of their pay-off while doing a trick at the wheel or standing look-out. The closer to your homeport you get, the more excitement you feel. We call it 'channel fever.' After sixty days at sea and on the ice, the Port of Halifax looked green and beautiful. It was the second day of May. We tied up at the Irving Oil dock to take on water, fuel, and old wooden barrels.

Ten or twelve seamen were waiting for us to receive a piece-off (money, in other words). Someone came down from the office and gave us \$10 — not much for a home-coming. They also knew if they gave us any more money, there would be trouble. A few might not make it for the sailing to Chester, Nova Scotia, where the company had a factory to separate the pelts from the blubber.

After being ashore for two days, carousing, I slowly made my way

back to the Theron. You could smell the stink of seal two blocks away. You do not notice it while you are on board, you work in it, sleep and eat with it. Speaking of eating, they fired the cook and the Norski chief steward took over for the next two weeks. The one thing I never got used to eating while working Norwegian ships, was hot fruit soup. It makes a dandy brew, though.

We left Halifax one more time, bound for Chester, about three hours steaming up the south west coast of Nova Scotia. At Chester, the captain and mate broke us up in gangs. Some worked in the cargo hold, slinging pelts. Some worked in the loft where they were landed. The pelts were put through a cutter that separated the fat from the skin. The blubber was cut in chunks, dropped in a boiler, and rendered down to liquid. It was made into margarine, perfume, and other products. The hides of the young are made into coats and muckluks. The old seal pelts are made into car seats or what have you. The skins were put through a cutter placed in revolving drums along with sawdust for a few hours, then pulled out and put in piles, fur-side down, and salted. I was one of the salters. I never found out the next process, for as soon as the last pelt was salted, we headed back to Halifax.

We brought the ship around to Halifax and were happy again. It was over. They called us in one man at a time for a very good reason. I was stunned at the pay-off slip. After deducting \$50 for clothing, so much for cigarettes, food, our weapons, I was given \$75, even the rum was charged to our bill. They had also sent my wife \$100 allotment, two weeks past. We, the crew, were all stunned at so low a share. Outside of grumbling, we all went out separate ways vowing never to go sealing again. I was in Halifax the following spring and was asked to go out on the ice again, but I'm a man of my word. I replied "No way!"

ONCE WE WERE

by

FRED ARRANCE

Once we were strong with pride
Like the winds and the mighty tide
A people free like the birds that fly
Freedom of open space and sky.
The bears that once roamed our lands
Were sacred to our tribal bands
The power and strength that this beast holds
Will someday help us when we're cold.
Nature and people together as one
This is the Indian, just like the sun.

TORN SPIRITS

by

FRED ARRANCE

Remember we our people of this land
Tradition and culture was part of our band
O Great Spirit guide us with pride
So our people will not have to hide
It is time for our elders to say
To our children the Indian way,
We come to cities of steel and cement
This is not where the Indian is meant
Here we are, on Hastings and Main
Trying to live without any pain
This is not where we want to stay
With spirits torn, that's not the way
Where is our leader when we are cold?
Fighting for power this we are told
More helping than fighting that's what we need.

THE FUTURE

1964

1964-1965

Remember, we are people of this land, we
Indian and citizen with heart and mind
O Great Spirit, guide us with power and grace
So our people may live in peace and love
It is our duty to stand for peace and love
To our children, to the world, to the future
We must stand for peace and love
The future is ours, the future is ours
Here we stand, we stand for peace and love
Trying to live in peace and love
This is not where we want to stay
With your love, that's our way
We are our people, when we are cold
Fighting for power, for the world
More helping, the fighting that's what we need



The UBC Library and UBC Learning Exchange would like to thank the following participants for their contributions to digitizing this community-generated document:

Brookes Bayfield; Graham Cunningham

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November 22, 2017