



JULY # 5—Victoria Weekend

Visuals: photographs of ferries, Butchart Garden, Legislative Building, provincial museum

Well, this was our weekend to go to Victoria and it has been an adventure complete with one rather awful scare but it also established an understanding (finally!) between Sandy and me. I'll start with the first day.

We went on the bus that goes on the ferry and drives into downtown Victoria after first stopping at Butchart Gardens. Sumi, Marina, Nicole, Song, Noboru, Bae, Fernando and I participated. Much to Song's disappointment, Daniel couldn't come, as he needed to entertain a manager from his bank, who is in Vancouver for the weekend. Although Noboru had been on a trip to Victoria once before, he decided to come again.

Noboru told us that as soon as the bus unloaded on the ferry we should all make a dash for the cafeteria to have breakfast. That was good advice. We got there, took over the tables we needed, and received our orders of eggs, pancakes, juice, tea and coffee, etc., before the hordes of other passengers arrived in the cafeteria to line up. It felt good sitting there as a group, eating as the ferry pulled out from the terminal headed for open sea. Seagulls screamed as they left their perches on top of pilings to stay with the ship. Morning light rippled on the surface of the water.

When we finally got up from our tables, we found a set of seats in the lounge and decided we would all gather there toward the end of the crossing. Some of us went off to look around the ship. Sumi and Bae planned to stay inside and read so we left our backpacks with them as we came and went from the lounge during the two-hour voyage. When it was time for passengers to return to the buses, we all gathered back at the seats in the lounge. That is, all but Song. No one had seen her

for the entire voyage! We panicked as all the other passengers left the lounge to return to the car deck. Buses are the first vehicles to get off the ship. The driver wouldn't be able to wait for any of us or even pull over on the road once outside.

Noboru said, "Does anyone have paper and pens to write some messages?" Marina pulled out a coil notepad and a pencil case with pens and tape. Noboru tore out several pages and handed a sheet to each of us.

"All of you write this," he said.

Song,

Go immediately to our bus—#114. It is at the front of the ship on the main car deck. If you don't get there in time and the bus has already left, meet Noboru in the same area (front of ship on car deck). The two of you can walk off the ferry together. See you soon.

The group.

Handing bits of tape to everyone and taping one of the notes to the seat we'd been sitting in, Noboru said, "Okay girls, each of you post a sign on a washroom door—Nicole on this floor and Sumi on the one below—and then get to the bus as soon as you can. Fernando you post one at the top of each set of stairs. Erika, you post one outside the elevator, just down there. Bae you go directly to the bus now."

"But I want to stay and find her with you."

"Bae, we need you at the bus now, please. If she's there, both of you stay put and we will join you as soon as we can."

"I am going to go and get the steward to make an announcement," Noboru said quickly.

"You all carry on with the bus when it leaves. If I walk off the ship with Song, we will get a public bus and meet you at the entrance to Butchart Gardens at 1:30. If we can't get there by then, we'll go touring by ourselves and meet you before supper at the hotel. Don't worry about us. Go now, quickly. See you later."

We all dispersed.

Well, it seems that Song (she later explained the whole story) had spent the entire crossing in the washroom trying to avoid throwing up. She has not been on a large, closed-in ship for many years and had forgotten that she always got seasick as a kid.

Apparently she had not heard the announcements to return to the car deck. When she realized she was alone in the washroom, she panicked and started trying to find her way back, unsuccessfully, to where we had been sitting. When she

couldn't find us, she tried to go to where she thought the bus was parked. But having been with the group when we arrived, she hadn't taken much notice.

When she got to the car deck, the bus was gone. Big trucks proceeded noisily in low gear toward the now diminished-looking, poorly lit entranceway at the front of the ship, their bulk almost filling the space. More trucks—bulky transport trucks, campers, vans, SUVs, and behind them rows and rows of cars—but no buses.

Song burst into tears because she didn't know what to do. How could she ever find us again? She didn't know how to get to Butchart Gardens or even know what hotel we were planning to stay in. She despaired that she hadn't stayed in Vancouver with Daniel.

Through the gaps in the trucks, Noboru saw Song but, with all the noise, he couldn't get her attention. They were on the opposite sides of the deck. He waved his arms but it wasn't until the last of the large vehicles had left the ferry that Song finally saw him. Apparently her face lit up, but then she cried some more—this time, in relief.

She would have given Noboru a big hug right then, but they were still separated by the stream of cars.

When the last one pulled up the ramp, she ran over to him. "I got lost," she sobbed.

"It's okay."

With his arm around her shoulder they hurried up the metal ramp to get out of the way of the deckhands who were ready to load the oncoming cars. They dodged some cars to get over to the other sidewalk and headed toward where the public bus was parked for loading. As they got within sight of the bus, it pulled away.

"Oh, no, how could it leave without us?" she said feeling so desperate.

As buses are scheduled to meet the ferries, it would be a while before another one was ready to leave.

"Don't worry, we'll go back into the terminal and get you some tea to help you recover."

"How could I do this?"

"It's okay," he said, squeezing her shoulder.

"But are we going to be able to find the group?"

"Sure, we just won't have much time for the garden. I've seen it anyway."

Well, they finally did get two connecting public buses that took them to the entrance of the garden. But with so little time left, they decided just to look around the gift shop and see what they could see from there without going in. They knew that the rest of us would be coming out in a few minutes.



When Bae, Sumi, Fernando, Nicole, and I walked across the gravel a few minutes before 1:30, we ran to Song and gave her a long, group hug.

Bae said, "I wanted to stay and find you, Song, but Noboru said the rest of us had to go with the bus. I wanted to find you," he said almost pleading her to believe him.

"Thank you, Bae," she said and gave him his own separate hug.

As the rest of the group emerged from the garden there were more hugs.

"We were so worried about you."

We all headed for the security of the parked bus that was waiting to take us to downtown Victoria.

Leaning against the bus with the group, Bae seemed to get over his fear and regain his sense of humour. He said to Song, "We were all sure you had been kidnapped. Locked in one of those big trucks. Taken off to be a sex slave."

"Oh, Bae," laughed Sumi. "You weren't thinking that, and the rest of us certainly weren't. I was quite sure you would be all right, Song. You had to be."

Noboru and Song provided all the details of the misadventure over late lunch in a peaceful restaurant in downtown Victoria. Song was sitting next to Noboru and called him her rescuer. In fact she continued to stick close to him for the rest of the afternoon while we were in the provincial museum. But on the way there, Bae stayed close to her too. In fact in walking to the museum, Bae had linked arms with both Song and Sumi and referred to them as his two favourite women.

The museum (a wonderfully stimulating place) showed much history of the province of BC including a marvellous exhibition of First Nations art. I had brought a sketchbook, so I drew one mask that I found appealing. Did I do this in thinking that I could show it to Sandy? I was sorry we didn't have more time to spend there.

When we were about to leave, Song wanted to go into a washroom, but she hesitated, fearing that she would lose us again. I went in with her and Noboru promised not to move an inch from the door until we came out again.

From there the group took two cabs to Craigdarroch Castle and met in front of the beautiful arched entranceway of this magnificent house. Falling slightly behind the pace of the others, Noboru and I were alone for a few moments in one of the main floor rooms. After my previous open criticism of him, I knew I had to give him credit for taking responsibility for the group on the ferry. I was also thinking of what Claudia had said to me—that maybe Noboru feels about me the way I feel about Sandy, although I still don't believe this could be possible. Anyway, I forced myself to speak up.

"Noboru, I just want to tell you how much I admire the way you handled the situation when Song was lost."

His understated response was, "That was easy, since I've been on the ferries before."

"There was more to it than just that. I was very impressed by your leadership and I am grateful that you took charge so effectively."

He looked at me without seeming to respond, or did he soften a little? I hope he was pleased that I'd at least acknowledged that he had done something admirable.

After we toured the remainder of the rooms of the castle, we all returned to our hotel, not far from the harbour.

"We'll give you 45 minutes to revive," the guys told us. "Then we'll be banging on your door to come to supper. It's already getting late."

It was good to get into our room, to feel we had a place to "live," as overcrowded as that was. The five of us girls were sharing the room (two double beds and a cot). Fernando, Bae, and Noboru were in a room down the hall.

I flopped down on a bed. At that moment I felt I had gotten up much too early and our concern about Song had taken a toll in nervous energy. All that walking too contributed to making me feel very tired. I was asleep immediately.

Luckily Nicole soon woke me up.

"Come on, Erika," she urged me shaking my shoulder. "You are going to want to get dressed properly, since you will be seeing Sandy after dinner."

Trust Nicole to consider that.

"Oh, thanks. How long have I been asleep?"

"Nine minutes."

Actually I was amazed I had slept only that long, because I did feel so much better, but maybe just thinking about meeting Sandy gave me some extra energy.

As our guys had warned us, they came pounding on our door in 45 minutes and, yes, some of us weren't quite ready.

Bae sat down on the bed next to Song who was waiting for the rest of us. He put his arm around Song's waist. Sumi had her back to us while she sat at the mirror on a bureau combing her long black hair and putting on earrings. But she maintained eye contact with Bae through the mirror until he said to Song, "Tonight I want to sleep here with you and Sumi so I don't have nightmares about losing you on the ship."

"Ah, good try, Bae," Nicole laughed, as she took off her running shoes and changed into some heels. "The bed is hardly big enough for two, let alone three. Noboru and Fernando will look after you. Won't you, guys?" she asked, looking at the two of them standing somewhat uncomfortably just inside the door.

"Of course, we will," Fernando responded.

Finally, we were ready. Nicole approved of how I was looking. And did I hear Noboru quietly confirm her compliment?

We went to a nearby restaurant for dinner. I sat through it with everyone but had only green salad and tea. I was waiting to eat with Sandy. They teased me about having a rendezvous with my "lover," a long way from true, but still I was a little self-conscious about going off with Sandy. I even felt a bit like a traitor by going outside the group.

I wondered how Noboru felt about this, since I had told him about my interest in Sandy so long ago, on our kayaking expedition. At least this confirmed Sandy's existence. Noboru now knows that I hadn't been imagining Sandy when I had rejected his (Noboru's) advances on Raccoon Island.

After we left the restaurant, we all went for a walk around the Inner Harbour on the promenade. It was such a beautiful evening. It feels good to be able to walk around outside at night and feel totally safe.



While the others joked about my meeting with Sandy as a “clandestine” affair (later I confirmed the meaning I’d guessed for this word), I thought of Sabine acknowledging how her undisclosed relationship with Hans somehow fueled it. Despite my anticipated meeting with Sandy not being secret, I did feel excited about it although I tried not to show it.

Actually, Noboru did not add to the banter. In fact, during our stroll around the Inner Harbour, he seemed very quiet. When we were walking side by side, about four abreast on the seaside promenade, the back of Noboru’s hand brushed against mine. I wondered whether that was accidental, or was he giving me a (final?) chance to reach out to him before my leaving to meet Sandy?



Photograph of Butchart Garden courtesy of Sibeli Fatima de Assis, Brazil. Other images of Victoria are by the author.



JULY # 6—Meeting Sandy after the Performance

Visuals: photos of Empress Hotel, Inner Harbour, and model of Craigdarroch Castle

Yes, we're still in Victoria (here until tomorrow late afternoon), but this definitely deserves a separate journal entry.

After our walk on the promenade, I told the group I should be on my way. But Nicole convinced everyone that they should all walk me to the hotel to meet Sandy where the band was playing.

"We need to be sure you make it there safely," she said.

I was thinking, "Please, no." That was not how I was picturing this.

"Oh, Nicole, you just want to see if you can pick up one of Sandy's friends in the band," Marina teased.

I was afraid of a repeat of Nicole's inappropriate behaviour from when she visited the apartment. I didn't want her around Sandy in case she would embarrass me by saying something about my feelings for him which, coming from her mouth, could sound so crude. In the end, the group decided they would only walk me within sight of the main hotel door. As safe as the city seems, I accepted that plan. The hotel was close to the harbour, so we walked there easily.

As we said goodnight they told me, like caring parents, not to stay out too late. I left them and headed for the hotel entrance. At the door I turned back and waved at them. I was relieved to see that Nicole hadn't broken away from the group to catch up to me. I tried to think only kind thoughts about how

much we look after each other as a group. Then I realized that Fernando was holding Nicole's hand.

Once inside the lobby of the hotel, I could hear the band playing at the far end of the main floor. I headed in that direction. One of the staff of the hotel was propping open sets of double doors along the side of the large ballroom from where the sound was coming. Most definitely them.

Glancing toward the stage, I was surprised to see the guys looking striking and unusual. Of course Leah was as beautiful as ever (long, cream sleeveless dress with glitter on it). But the guys were actually wearing formal black evening jackets and white pleated shirts together with knee-length khaki shorts and black flip-flops (yes, flip-flop thongs). They looked so good! Sandy was especially cute with his nicely tanned calves and feet.

Seeing Sandy on stage, viewing his stage persona, I felt even more drawn to him and somewhat jealous of the audience for having been able to watch him for the past hour and a half. Standing staring at Sandy from the side made me feel like a voyeur, so I found a sofa in the hallway and sat down to one side of the open front doors. Despite not seeing Sandy from there, I concentrated on identifying the parts he was singing and playing.

When the performance was over, including a demanded encore, the audience finally stopped clapping and came flowing out the side doors. As soon as the hall emptied, the band immediately started disassembling the set.

Leah came to the door.

In a gravelly voice, she said, "So wonderful to see you, Erika."

"So it went well?"

"Yes, it was good," she answered. "It's okay to come in."

She indicated a place for me to sit in the front row. Seeing me waiting, the group told Sandy he could leave after they put the totes in his car. I heard someone mention that he had been the one taking things back to Leah and Larry's place the previous few times, so it was someone else's turn now to load the van.

I had never thought about that before. About the fact that Sandy had always been the one helping take the stuff back to the apartment. Could Sandy have been doing that, doing more than his share of the work, in order to drive me to the apartment or see me there?

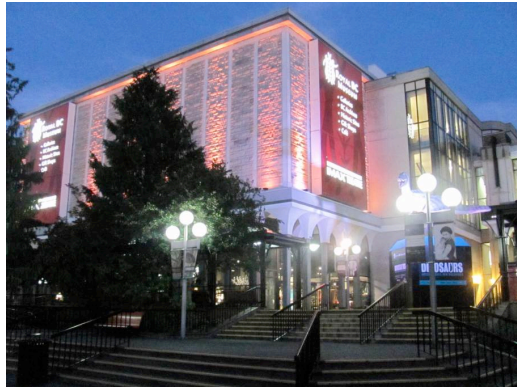
After making a couple of trips to his car, Sandy walked down the steps of the stage and, reaching me, smiled and squeezed my hand briefly.

“So glad you could make it. They’re letting me off early tonight.”

Still in his formal jacket and shirt, Sandy and I walked back to the harbour. I kept hoping I would not meet anyone in our group, specifically Nicole. Sandy suggested we eat at the restaurant built on a pier over the harbour. I knew about it because Daphne had told me she had worked there briefly when she had been a student at the University of Victoria.

Sandy and I arrived just in time to order. In fact we were the last ones served. The kitchen was about to close. This meant we ordered our dessert at the same time that we ordered our main course. We soon regretted this, as we became very full.

We needed to walk. We went out onto the seawall promenade and headed toward the Legislative Building, which was looking even more magical with its outline in white lights as it became increasingly dark. But everything that I was seeing again with Sandy somehow looked more intense (and romantic?). After walking around the museum, we headed back toward the docks again.



A cool breeze was blowing up off the ocean. We stood a few minutes at the railing overlooking the water. We talked about what we had been doing. Sandy commented on their performances and mentioned some humorous incidences that had happened in the past few days “up Island.” And I told him about temporarily losing Song on the ferry and how frightening that had been.

Sandy touched my arm and said, “Look, you’re shaking.”

He took off his black dress jacket.

“Here. Try this.”

Facing me, he put his jacket around my shoulders. As he continued to hold the lapels, I put my arms in. It felt intimate to feel his lingering warmth inside the jacket. For a second (did I lean forward or did he?), his mouth brushed lightly against my forehead.

“Now you’re the formal one,” he commented in a slightly strained voice.

Looking up at him, I commented, “Sounds like you might be getting a cold, so you probably shouldn’t be out in just a shirt with your feet exposed.”

We both looked down at his feet in the thongs. He smiled, saying, “Do you approve of our elegant footwear?”

“Yes, you all looked so good tonight.”

“Really? You liked our outfits?”

His laugh turned into a slight cough. “Not a look we’ve tried before. At the last moment, Leah demanded that we make some sort of an effort. So we decided we’d wear something we all have and something we could rent.”

“Turned out well. Luckily you all have decent legs.”
(Oops, should I have said that?)

“Oh, yeah?” he said, laughing.

“Are you getting a cold?”

“I could be. Others in the band are fighting colds.”

“I noticed Leah’s voice sounded raspy.”

“Yes, she has a cold for sure. Any worse and she wouldn’t be able to sing. We are all so overtired and we’ve been living in cramped quarters. If I am contagious, I wouldn’t want to infect you.”

Not wanting this to be a reason to keep my distance from Sandy, I said, “I generally don’t get colds.”

“I hope this is the case now. But I’m sharing a hotel room and I assume you are too, so we can’t go back there. And maybe that’s just as well.”

I liked that he said this, but perhaps I didn’t understand what he meant.



Then he said, "Look, could we go and sit in my car? We could keep the window open so you can breathe fresh air, but we could put the heater on. Besides, I'd like to show you my favorite spot on the water not far from here. A place I used to go to as a kid."

"I'd like to see that."

I was aware that I wasn't afraid to be alone with Sandy in his car.

"I'm parked just behind the hotel," he said, taking my elbow.

We walked back to the aboveground hotel parking lot and got into his car. We drove past an area that our group had seen after visiting Mile 0 earlier in the day. By the time we got to the spot overlooking a cove, the car was warm. Sandy reached across me and wound down the window on my side.

There was only a half moon, but it was enough to make a path of glittering light on the surface of the ocean and to outline the shore and hill up from the water. Sandy indicated a house on a point away from any others, and he told me that it had belonged to friends of his family. Apparently when he and his brothers were young they used to stay with the family, use the rowboats, and build forts out of driftwood on the beach.

"It was a wonderful place to have access to as a kid, despite my being the tag-along little brother," he said.

I tried to picture him there as the blond-haired eight year old I'd seen in the photo in his room. I imagined him sticking close to his teenage brothers, yet having the freedom of such a place. He continued to talk about his childhood adventures and how nostalgic he feels now that he acknowledges that part of his life is over.

I was glad when Sandy finally reached for my hand with a smile of acknowledgment. He stroked my palm, each fingernail, and between each finger, and he touched the pulse line in my wrist. This all felt so seductive, but he promised not to come any closer. I would have liked it if he had.

"I do want to talk to you though," he said, "because I have been struggling with the fact that I am so attracted to you."

(***** I was overwhelmed when he said this! Yoko, are you listening?)

Absolutely surprised, I impulsively said, "But you've never shown that."

I fear that I did not camouflage my voice. Did he hear my frustration of always wishing for more attention from him?

"I know. Being in the band, I've felt I have nothing to offer you. Being in a band destroys relationships, because we can never be counted on to be around at important times. Especially when touring, which you have to do to sell records,

to survive. And also for us, for you and me, we would only be setting ourselves up to get hurt, with your being here only temporarily."

I noticed that he had said, "You and me." I liked that.

I said, "I'm willing to risk that."

"Are you? Really?" he said brightening. "Knowing that we will part? Would it still be worth spending time together?"

"Yes, to me, it would be worth it."

He smiled. "Yet you'll be leaving in less than a year?"

"Yes, next April."

Thinking of what Song, in her 20-year-old wisdom, had told me about relating to Daniel, I added, "At least we might create some wonderful memories together."

"Maybe it's a good thing I have a cold then," he commented with a smile.

With this said, he told me how he had tried not to be attracted to me or to encourage me, because he worried about where that could lead. The difficulties.

"The difficulties...."

"Yes," he said, as if the phrase were self-explanatory.

"But when the interest, the attraction, doesn't go away, well, you can only suppress it for so long. Then you have to be willing to see where it takes you."

"Where it takes you?"

"Where it leads us. Still, the moment I dropped that postcard in the mailbox to you...well, I regretted it."

"Then why did you write it?"

"That was during a weak moment. When I was feeling alone, on the road, on my 25th birthday."

"That was your birthday!"

"Yeah. We were supposed to be performing that night in Penticton. But that concert had been cancelled. Leah and Larry went off to visit a relative; and I declined going to a pub with the others despite their encouragement."

He emphasized that, after posting that card, he felt it was unfair to suggest that he has feelings for me.

"And yet receiving that postcard made me feel so happy."

"But happy now may make for greater unhappiness later."

"I care about now."

"Well, today I seem to be caring mostly about now too."

It felt good to get all that out—both of us saying basically the same thing—admitting we had been feeling the same attraction all along. And that Canada Day had been a struggle, feeling he still shouldn't personally acknowledge me.

"But it was okay that I hugged you?"

"Yes. It was okay. Definitely okay," he smiled and added, "You know, Leah's been on our side all along, wanting to see us together. Telling me what an idiot I've been in suppressing my feelings and in saying she thinks you care about me."

"Couldn't you feel this yourself? My interest."

"I couldn't trust myself to know for sure. But Leah convinced me after she saw you hug me."

"So you talked about me on the way to Surrey?"

"Yeah." He smiled at me to see if it was all right to admit this. "So when I told her about your being in Victoria sometime soon, she urged me find out if we could meet here."

"She suggested that you phone that morning?"

"Yes, we had returned to their apartment too late after the performance for me to phone you that night, so she encouraged me to call you in the morning before we left for the ferry."

"Sounds like she is an intuitive and very helpful friend."

"Yes, she is. They both are."

"So I guessed right that you slept at the apartment."

"Yes, to save having to make a round trip to West Van for such a short night. But how did you know?"

"I saw your car there, alongside the van, at about three or four in the morning. When I wasn't sleeping well."

"I wasn't sleeping well either. It is not unusual for me to be energized after a performance, but there was even more to think about."

"Perhaps we were thinking about the same thing."

"Seems like we might have been."

So we agreed that despite knowing we will have to part within a year, we are willing to make some time for each other. Sandy did, however, ask me not to let our seeing each other get in the way of my life as an international student.

"Since I can't promise you anything for the future, I don't want to jeopardize your other important experiences. When you go back to Japan, I don't want you to feel you missed some of your international student experience by being pre-occupied by some guy."

I responded, "I already feel 'pre-occupied by some guy.'"

He laughed and said, "I understand that feeling. Being pre-occupied. But you must live your life as a language student fully. That's why you are here. Don't start re-arranging your schedule in order to see me. Do you agree to this?"

"I'll try."

I smiled, realizing how difficult that might be.

"There are things coming up for me that don't have anything to do with the band."

"Such as..."

"I need to do some work for my dad."

He quickly clarified, "I want to do some work with my dad—helping him with a major proposal his firm is making."

"What does that involve?"

"Constructing a model, preparing visual materials."

"Things you love doing."

"Yes, things I love doing."

"So when will you start on that project with your dad?"

"Next week."



"Oh, I took a photograph of a model for you today."

"You did? Of what?"

"Craigdarroch Castle."

"Really. Do you know, I have never actually been inside that building."

"Well, I'll show you. I took pictures of almost every room."

"Great."

Sandy drove me back to my hotel and parked within sight of the entrance. He held both my hands. It was obvious that we didn't want to part. And it was hard not to kiss, especially as Sandy helped me take my arms out of the sleeves of his jacket. Our faces were so close.

As if to stall, he asked me to ensure that I had my key. As I looked for it in my bag, he rested his hand on my shoulder and stroked my hair between his thumb and his fingers. That felt so soothing and not just to my head. My whole body seemed to relax into his touch.

When I located my key and showed it to him, he smiled a reluctant smile and squeezed my hand.

"Goodnight," we both said at the same time.

I got out of the car and he waited to see that I got safely inside the hotel entrance.

I went up the elevator and into the dark room lit only by a ray from a streetlight coming in between the drapes. I was

glad Nicole and Marina and Sumi and Song had taken the queen-size beds and were asleep. I was able to just slip in between the cool sheets on the cot without getting into any conversation. I didn't want to break the spell. I guess I was on a high.

I didn't sleep much. I was thinking about everything that Sandy had done and said. Our discussion had finally cleared away all my uncertainties.



Photograph of model of Craigdarroch Castle courtesy of Sibeli Fatima de Assis, Brazil; evening photographs of Victoria by the author



JULY # 7—Second Day in Victoria

Visuals: photos of art gallery, Willows Beach, Oak Bay, wax museum

When I awoke, I was still feeling a glow. Song and Nicole say I am in love. We spent the morning going through the lovely, just-big-enough Victoria Art Gallery and then bused to Willows Beach where we scrambled over some rocks. We had lunch in a sunny restaurant in Oak Bay, a quaint, quiet area. As we waited for our food, the group tried to get as much information out of me as possible about last night.

Noboru was sitting across from me with his back to the light so I couldn't see his face clearly. But obviously he was not welcoming my good news about Sandy. My saying that Sandy is suffering from a cold apparently stopped some of their assumptions. Besides I feel the others don't need to know every detail of our interaction. My first loyalty is to Sandy now.

After looking in some bookstores in Oak Bay, we headed back to downtown and visited the wax museum. The others laughed a lot, but I was in a fog. Being tired, I seemed to float through the day. It is a good thing I took some photos.



Back on the ferry, we had a quick supper of fish and chips—not nearly as good as the ferry breakfast. Heading back to the lounge, we were awed by the most wonderful sunset. We went out on the deck and leaned against the railing. I saw an affectionate couple—a guy leaning back against the sloped exterior wall of the ship with a girl resting against his chest, his arms around her. They looked so together, so sure of each other. I wished that could be Sandy and me. Right now.

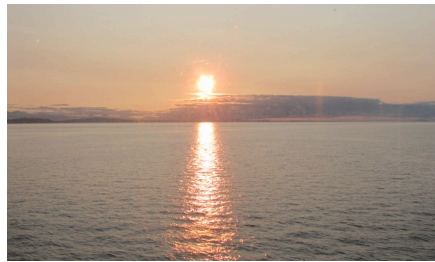
Realizing that Song might avoid getting nauseous if she stayed outside in the fresh air, she and Sumi and Bae found a bench outside on the deck and cuddled together in the cool air. With clear plans to meet back at the bus at the pre-arrival announcement, most of the others headed back to the lounge.

When I joined them a few minutes later, I smiled to see that Nicole was asleep with the side of her head against Fernando's shoulder. He smiled back at me in acknowledging the comfort of this. I followed Marina's example and got a book out, but I didn't actually do much reading.

When I got back to the apartment I found that Mary was away. She had left me a plate of dinner to microwave and a note explaining that she was going to an art gallery opening and then out for a late-night snack with friends. Perhaps I was just as glad to have the apartment to myself to think about what had happened between Sandy and me. As close as I feel to Mary, I am not quite ready to tell all.

I briefly thought I should be emailing Sabine. During the time she was in Vancouver, Sabine tried to promote a relationship between Nicole and Fernando. I know Sabine and Fernando are still writing to each other. So how will she feel now in hearing about Nicole and Fernando's increasing closeness? But at that moment I was beyond writing to anyone. I was feeling so preoccupied by Sandy.

Yes, "preoccupied."



Photograph of the Victoria Art Gallery courtesy of Sibeli Fatima de Assis, Brazil; other images by author



JULY # 8—Reconsidering Craigdarroch Castle

Visuals: photographs of Craigdarroch Castle

On Tuesday when I got back to the apartment after school, I put my Victoria weekend photos on Mary's computer so we could view at them at a larger size. When we looked at a picture of Craigdarroch Castle, I commented on how beautiful and amazing it is.

Mary responded, "Yes, but at what price?"

I didn't know what she meant, so she explained that Robert Dunsmuir, the man who had built the castle toward the end of the nineteenth century, was the owner of many coalmines around the Nanaimo area on Vancouver Island. According to Mary, this industrialist/coal baron, employed labour as cheaply as possible, disregarded the safety of the men working in his underground mines, and actively fought against the attempts of the miners to establish a union.

Mary added, "So, in part, the castle is a reminder of the labour of his employees undertaken in unsafe conditions for pay that could barely keep their families from starvation. It is also proof of the existence of a tax system that failed to distribute wealth justly—a system that allowed one man's business to lead to such an accumulation of wealth while the employees gave up their health and their life energy to do his work for him.

"You know a lot about this," I commented.

"Well, my grandfather worked as a miner in the coal operations and probably died as a result of attempting to

organize a miners' union and promote an extended miner's strike."

"Oh, no. How?"

"Details are not available, but he died during the strike, on the railway tracks, either as a result of falling on the tracks during a fight, or by being deliberately placed there when he was unconscious from a fight or from being drunk as a result of his despair."

"That's terrible."

"Yes. Try to imagine how my grandmother, as a 37-year-old mother of nine children, felt when a police officer arrived at her door telling her that her husband had just died. That a train ran over him."

"No!"

"It's true. He was killed, leaving behind nine children from ages one to about 14."

"Oh, no."

"But perhaps this was better than an alternative."

"How could this be better than something else?"

"Well, if my grandfather hadn't died then, he might have perished by drowning when a mine shaft in the area collapsed a few years later."

"Some miners drowned?"

"Yes. A mineshaft was being dug too close to a former shaft that had been flooded. The miners had smelled the foul, stagnant water of the adjacent mine seeping through the wall and had warned the bosses that the water could burst the wall between the two shafts."

"And is that what happened?"

"Yes. The owners ignored the miners' warnings. Those who complained were threatened with losing their jobs and this was a time when there was no other work in the area for those family men. As they predicted, the wall collapsed with water rushing in from the adjacent shaft. Fifteen men working there were trapped and drowned. When the bodies of these miners were retrieved from the water-filled tunnels, a father and his teenage son were found clinging to each other, dead in each other's arms."

"How awful. So this is what you think of when you see the castle?"

"Yes."

"Well, no wonder your first thought is not about its beauty."

"Exactly."

"How would I have viewed it if I had known this before I toured it?"

“Well, I do wonder about that. I wish there could be some sort of statement at the entrance to the castle acknowledging miners who suffered intolerable lives or who died in creating the kind of wealth that allowed for the elaborate, decorative construction of the castle.”

“Then the castle would become a memorial to the miners.”

“Yes, I’d love to see that. To finally give them their credit.”

The emotional tone of this conversation with Mary didn’t encourage me to tell her about my exciting news about meeting with Sandy in Victoria. I was just as glad, as this gave me yet another night to dream without considering anyone else’s version of reality, even though I knew Mary would be sympathetic—quite different than the reaction I’d get if my father knew!



Photographs of exterior and interior of Craigdarroch Castle courtesy of Sibeli Fatima de Assis, Brazil



JULY # 9—Whale Watching and Exploring Long Beach

Visuals: photographs of ferry, Cathedral Grove, Long Beach, Tofino, whale-watching excursion, beach fauna

Well, our whale-watching expedition on the wild (really!) and inspiring west coast of Vancouver Island was a lot of fun but again not without incident.

As ten of us decided to go, we took two cars—a rented one driven by Noboru and one driven by Daniel that belonged to his homestay brother. We had reserved three rooms in a bed-and-breakfast house in Tofino just beyond Long Beach, which is part of Pacific Rim National Park.

Song's scare of last weekend in getting lost on the ferry had her stating that she wouldn't participate unless she could ride with Daniel. As Song isn't one to be manipulative, this shows a real fear on her part. Bae was also not willing to be separated from Sumi. That meant Daniel transported Song, Sumi, Bae, and Marina, while Noboru drove Fernando, Nicole, Juliana and me.

This excursion required another early rising to get to the Horseshoe Bay ferry terminal by 8:00 am in order to get on the 9:00 ferry. Noboru was kind enough to come and pick me up. I made an extra effort to be ready, as we would be going back to the North Shore to pick up the others.

"Good morning," I said, having trouble suppressing a yawn.

Noboru replied cheerily, "Thanks for being on time," as he stowed my backpack in the trunk of the car.

"That's the least I could do."

I got in the front seat of the car with Noboru. As we drove away from the apartment, I asked, "What time did you have to get up?"

"Just after five. I wasn't sure how long it would take at the car rental office. I was there at six, as soon as it opened."

"Wow. I guess I'm the only one coming from downtown...."

"Yes, we couldn't get Se-Eun or Claudia to come."

"So thanks for coming all this way for me."

I forced myself to smile at him while feeling a little awkward in being alone with him. I was trying to remember what Claudia had said about being sensitive to his feelings.

"My pleasure," he said, returning my smile.

There was a pause and then Noboru said, "We'll pick up Fernando first because he knows where Nicole and Marina live. And we'll be picking up Juliana too. Actually she lives on the same street as I do, but I wanted to give her a little more time to sleep rather than have her come with me when I left."

"I'm sure she appreciates that."

"You can be the navigator. Here's the map."

Noboru had re-folded it to show the relevant areas of Vancouver Island where we would be travelling.

As we pulled up to Fernando's house, he said, "I'll go and knock. You can be studying the map."

"Good morning, Erika," Fernando said getting into the back seat. "Marina is at Nicole's new place. They decided to stay together overnight to make sure of getting up on time."

Fernando gave directions and in a couple of minutes we were in front of Nicole's homestay, and Nicole and Marina came down the steps. Noboru helped them put their belongings in the trunk.

"Hi, all!"

"Good morning."

"Good morning, Nico," Fernando said, as Nicole got in the backseat beside him. It's true that Fernando can call Nicole that form of her name with respect and caring without making the name sound diminutive.

"Good of the two of you to stay together," Noboru said.

"It was fun," Marina commented.

"I couldn't have offered to do this in my old homestay."

"So did you change your homestay, Nicole?"

"Yes, a couple of days ago. And what a difference from that other family who obviously just takes students for the money."

"Mary will be pleased to hear you were this decisive and let the school know. Hopefully other students won't have to suffer staying with an inferior homestay family."

"I hope so, because it took all my nerve to go to the homestay coordinator and tell her what had been going on."

"Well, Mary will be proud of you."

“You must thank her, since she was the one who encouraged me to complain.”

After a few minutes we picked up Juliana too. As she was the last to get in the car, she got in the front beside me, noticeably pushing me over toward Noboru.

“Hey, I don’t want to crowd our driver,” I said, trying to make a joke of the fact my shoulders were touching his.

“I’m okay,” Noboru said seriously.

“So which house is yours?” I asked Noboru.

He seemed pleased that I would ask.

“That one. With the yellow door.”

He pointed to a house just four or five from Juliana’s homestay.

As soon as we boarded the ferry, we dashed to the dining room and met the others. We were relieved to find we’d all managed to get on the ferry, but apparently there had been some stress when Daniel and the others arrived at Bae’s place to pick him up and found that he was still asleep. He had forgotten to set his alarm clock. As he jumped into clothes and gathered up his things, the others were stressed about making it to the ferry on time.

Nevertheless, they did make it and we all met in the ship’s dining room and enjoyed a tasty breakfast of eggs and pancakes—all of us except for Song who just had clear tea saying she again felt queasy.

As we finished eating, we shuffled seats so that drivers and navigators could get together to go over two identical maps. Marina was to change cars to serve as navigator for Daniel.

Noboru said, “After docking in Nanaimo, we have to get on the highway heading north. We continue north until we can go west on Highway 4, which is before Parksville. On #4 we’ll head west to Port Alberni. After that look for signs saying Ucluelet and Tofino. Those will be the big markers for us. Do you see them?” he asked.

Then he added, “Let’s not try to stick together on the road. Too much stress doing that. Let’s meet at Cathedral Grove, which is here,” he said pointing at my map. “We can eat our lunch there. But let’s only wait half an hour for each other. If we don’t connect there, proceed to Ucluelet. We can decide then if we are just having tea there or something more substantial. Failing all other contact, we will meet up at the bread-and-breakfast house in Tofino before supper. If we lose contact we can try to phone, but we can’t assume Daniel and I will have connections with our cell phones in this area.”

“All clear?” Noboru asked looking at Marina, Daniel, and me.

Not sounding totally convincing, Marina said, “Sort of,”

“Well, write these down in order then,” Noboru commented.

Marina brought out a steno pad and tore off a couple of pages and handed them to me as she proceeded to write also while Noboru stated the details again getting us to circle on our maps Coombs, Cameron Lake, Cathedral Grove, Port Alberni, Sproat Lake, Kennedy Lake, Ucluelet, Long Beach, Tofino.

He drew a yellow highlighter pen through the route on his map and offered the pen to Marina.

Sitting watching all this, Song said, somewhat admiringly, “Have you been here before too, Noboru?”

“No, I have just read a guidebook and looked at the map.”

After this we all went out onto the deck where we spent the rest of the trip looking at the sparkling, crinkled blue water. The seagulls screamed overhead gliding on the sea breezes and diving down to deck level squawking when someone offered them some food. As we got close to the Nanaimo ferry dock, we passed some islands. I wished we could explore some of them too.

Soon we were back in the cars, off the ferry, and on the highway, heading north. Our discussion about alternative plans, what to do if we did not meet at Cathedral Grove, made us worry somewhat about meeting up. So we were all delighted when, within minutes of each other, both cars pulled into the parking area for Cathedral Grove. After all, we had never seen nor passed each other on the road.

For a few minutes we walked around in the ancient rain forest among the huge evergreen trees feeling totally dwarfed by them. We hiked along a trail until we found a place where we could sit comfortably and eat our bag lunches on a bank of a creek.

We opened our lunches and started eating. With lunches packed by homestay parents, unwrapping the contents of our lunches was like being on a treasure hunt finding sandwiches, chips, cheese, muffins, nuts, cookies, yogurt, etc. Some of us swapped edibles.

As I munched I also drank my can of orange juice and set it down beside me. When I picked up the can without looking, I felt a sharp prick and I gave a little shriek and dropped the can. Apparently a wasp had been sipping a drop of juice on the lid of my can. Noboru was the only one who knew what I was reacting to. He grabbed my hand, saw the wasp clinging between my fingers, and flicked it away with his fingernail.

"You've been stung."
"Yeah. Ouch!" I said, as I flung my hand around at the wrist.
"Let's get your hand in cold water," he said.



In one swift movement he got me down the embankment to the creek while everyone else watched. We crouched at the edge of the water and he submerged my hand. The intensity of the cold water quickly numbed my arm to my elbow reducing the stinging.

"Helping?"

"Yes. Definitely."

"Have you ever had a bad reaction to a wasp bite?"

"I've never been stung before."

"We'll have to watch it then to see if it is going to swell up. Let's have a look"

As Noboru leaned closer toward me taking my hand, a stream of sunlight coming down between the branches of trees illuminated the top of his head. At that moment I was struck by how shiny and thick his hair is and I realized how much longer it is than when I first met him. Then I noticed how suitable his clothing was *finally*: khaki pants, light-weight hiking shoes, and a pullover sweater. This was unlike Daniel who still wore his banker's shoes and pants with pleat down the front despite their inappropriateness to the activity.

Turning my palm up on my right hand and checking the inside base of my index finger, Noboru said, "At least the stinger's out."

I let out another involuntary, "Ouch," and put my hand back in the water.

"Does anyone have any anti-histamine?" Noboru asked looking up at the group.

"What?"

"Allergy pills. For sinus congestion. That kind of thing."

"No."

"Not me."

"We'll get you some as soon as we get to a store. It will keep the swelling down and reduce the stinging. Now I'll get your lunch so you can keep your hand in the water until we are ready to go."

He brought my lunch to me, handing me the sandwich and then the sticks of carrot one at a time, so that I could take them with my left hand without having to remove my hurt hand from the water.

"Tell us when you want to go," he said, looking up at the others.

"Are you going to be okay?" they asked in their concern.

"Does it hurt a lot?" Song asked.

Noboru was concentrating on me again, "What about the yogurt?" he asked. "Are you ready for that?"

He took the lid off the container before I had time to decline.

No one seemed to be in a hurry on the creek bank above us, despite sprinkles of raindrops visible on the surface of the water. Noboru handed me the plastic spoon. He held the yogurt container for me as I awkwardly used the spoon with my left hand. I did the best I could because I feared Noboru might otherwise take the spoon and start feeding me. That would have been more intimate than I could have managed, crouched there at the creek's edge.

As the others started to put the remains of their lunches in their backpacks, Noboru said to me, "We should keep the air off it."

Looking up, he asked, "Does anyone have anything that we can use as a bandage?"

"A bandage?"

"Like a small scarf, washcloth, or even a clean sock?"

"Oh, I have an extra sock," Marina said.

"Do you want a safety pin to hold it in place?" Nicole asked.

"Yes, thanks."

Fernando took the pin and the sock from them and climbed down to the water's edge. He crouched there beside Noboru and me.

"How's it looking?"

"Not too bad. But it's too early to tell if it is going to swell a lot," Noboru said as he submerged the sock. Looking up at the others again, he asked, "Does anyone have a large drink container big enough for Erika to put her bandaged hand in with some water?"

"No, I don't think we do," Sumi answered after looking at the others.

Then he wrapped the sock around my palm and fingers and did up the pin. I was feeling pretty grateful to him as he finally took my left arm and helped me climb up the embankment of the creek.

Before we got back into the cars, we agreed that Noboru's group would stop at a drug store in Ucluelet and then join the rest at the restaurant someone had recommended to Marina.

By the time we got to Ucluelet my sting was feeling increasingly intense. We pulled into a gas station that had a convenience store attached to it. While the attendant was filling the car's tank with gas, Noboru went into the store.

He came out carrying what appeared to be a giant soft drink. This surprised me until he handed the large paper cup to me along with some allergy pills that he took out of a bag. I realized the drink was ice and water.

As he opened the box and punched a pill out of its foil packaging, he said, "Drink some of this with the pill. Then you can put your fingers in the ice."

He undid the pin and unwound the sock. I put my hand in the ice and felt immediate relief. And again I was moved by Noboru's decisiveness and caring.

As we headed off to find the restaurant, I realized I had not said anything to Noboru about paying for the pills. I decided it would be more generous on my part to accept Noboru's gesture at the moment and talk to him later about reimbursing him.

The restaurant was on the dock built on pilings over the ocean. The adjoining wharfs at the base of the ramp were lined with small fishing boats rocking and clanging in the slight breeze. We were pleased to see Daniel's car in the adjoining parking space. The others were inside and had already ordered a couple of plates of fish and chips to share and some soft drinks and tea. The waitress brought a side plate of shrimp and a small bowl of tomato seafood sauce. Apparently the boats we could see brought the shrimp in directly and unloaded it. Everything the others had ordered smelled so good our group decided to have the same.

Our tables had a view of activity on the wharves with the ever-present seagulls. Daniel asked the waitress about the whale watching charter boat that we had the reservations with.

"Yes, that's a good one," she reassured us. "When are you going?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"Supposed to be a nice day."



Because we were able to drive slower in the National Park, our two cars traveled within view of each other. When we saw miles of sandy shore and long strands of rolling waves, we signaled to each other and got out.

We walked a little way along the beach breathing in the fresh ocean air, which felt so light.

Marina and Nicole took off their shoes and walked on the shore. I got sand between my toes despite keeping my thongs on. I continued to carry the paper cup of melting ice with me, my hand submerged in it.

At one of these stops, Juliana and Noboru walked a little way down the beach and climbed a miniature craggy island together. They stood looking out at the ocean while talking quietly together.



By the time the ice melted and I had the bandage back on my hand, we arrived at Tofino. We found the bed-and-breakfast house and were pleased that it has a view of the ocean. We met Bob and Nancy, the owners. They seemed very friendly and helpful. They told us that we could use the barbecue pit in the backyard to make supper if we chose to.

Assessing our attitudes, Noboru said on our behalf, "We aren't really prepared to deal with groceries and cooking. We'd like to get cleaned up and go to a restaurant. Is there one you can recommend?"

"Yes, of course. We can give you a map when you are ready to head off."

We went downstairs to view our bedrooms—two for the guys and two for the girls. There were outside doors to the rooms that were glass and opened onto the lawn. Having decided to get “dressed up” (a little) for dinner, we showered the salt off of our skin and out of our hair and removed the sand from between our toes.



As each of us was ready, we gathered out on the deck. Nancy gave us a copy of a map of the area with amenities indicated. She circled the nearby restaurants and described several that sounded very good.

“And you know they’re just around the corner from the museum, which is here. You will have lots of time to see that tomorrow after whale watching if you are going on the 8:30 am trip.”

Bob laughed. “Nancy is on the board of directors of the museum.”

“That’s okay. We like museums,” Juliana commented.

“What kind of a museum is it?” Marina asked.

“It has objects of historical interest from the area.

Harpoons, parts of sunken ships, cannonballs, Native art and materials, maps, illustrations, that kind of thing.”

“Oh, neat. We’ll have to see it for sure,” Marina commented.

Noboru explained to Bob and Nancy about my wasp sting and asked if they had any suitable lotion to soothe it.

Nancy said, “Yes, I have something that should help.”

Bob commented, “That is quite an innovative bandage.”

“It’s been effective. That’s what’s mattered,” I said.

Nancy returned with a bottle of calamine lotion, some proper bandage, and adhesive tape. I sat down at a table while Noboru undid the sock, applied the lotion, and made me a proper bandage.

He looked so serious in doing this, I had to comment, “One would think you are the person intending to be a doctor.”

Fernando and Nicole joined us at the table and Fernando said, “Good job, Noboru. I don’t think my dad could do any better.”

Noboru smiled, somewhat pleased with himself.

I thought we were quite a presentable-looking troupe when we were ready to leave for the “town.” With the photocopied map in hand, we went out to discover Tofino’s main street and the area within sight of the docks.

We settled on a seafood restaurant with a view of ocean and the promise of a beautiful sunset. The food was delicious and the service was unhurried. After we savoured our dessert and tea, coffee, or wine, we went outside to enjoy the blazing sunset.



It was wonderful just walking around in the fresh air in the early evening, feeling perfectly free. Nicole was walking comfortably with her hand in Fernando’s back pocket. And Daniel looked surprisingly stress-free in his constant contact with Song. Sumi managed to keep some humour in the group through her light-hearted contact with Bae. And Juliana and Marina kept me from feeling that I was, by default, a couple with Noboru. After all that Claudia has said about Noboru’s feelings for me, I had been somewhat surprised at the restaurant when Noboru chose to sit between Juliana and Marina rather than next to me.

Walking on the pier, we headed toward a sign labelled “Whale watching.” We wanted to see where we would be leaving from in the morning.

We looked in the window of the shop on the wharf and saw rows of orangey-red suits hanging on a long rod. Pictures in the posted brochures, showed tourists wearing them on the whale-watching boats.

Bae said, “Sumi, tomorrow you are going to have to wear one of those orange outfits. There don’t seem to be any black ones. Maybe you’ll discover your true colour.”

“I don’t think so, Bae,” she laughed.

We strolled back up to the main street. Fernando had one hand on Nicole’s shoulder. She seems to be so much calmer with this apparently growing comfort between them.

We did briefly go into a pub (very active and noisy) but soon agreed we wanted something quieter.



Not being in a hurry, we wandered back toward our bed-and-breakfast in the fading light. Bob and Nancy were sitting quietly in the backyard by the fire pit. Its soft orange glow cast shadows of the table and the wooden lawn chairs, and the light of torches on bamboo stocks flickered at the edge of the flowerbeds.

“Pull up some chairs,” they said.

We dragged the heavy wooden lawn chairs into a circle around the fire. Like an affectionate kitten, Song sat down on the grass in front of Daniel leaning her back against his legs.

After a few minutes of discussion with Bob and Nancy about where we had eaten our dinner and what we had seen in the last couple of hours, Bob said, “We’re going in now.”

He indicated a watering can and said, “Could you put the fire out before you come in and flip the lids on the torches to put them out too?”

“Yes, sure.”

Alone as our group again, we finalized the choice of activities for the next day after whale watching. We agreed we would spend a few minutes in the museum and then shops (Sumi’s choice) or galleries (Marina, Juliana, and I). We decided we would then take both cars back to Pacific Sands Beach on Long Beach and walk as far as we felt like going along the 15-kilometre stretch of sand before driving back to Nanaimo to get the nine o’clock ferry.

We all basked in the glow of the embers in the warm night air. Some were too tired to make the effort to get up and go to bed. Nicole was dozing in the chair leaning against Fernando, who was sitting on the broad arm of her chair.

Finally as most of the others were heading inside, Daniel picked up the watering can to douse the fire.

Noboru said, “Daniel, I can do that in a few minutes. I’m not quite ready to go in yet.”

I didn’t feel ready to sleep, but I stood up with the others.

“Erika, will you stay a few minutes?”

Why did I feel some kind of a pang?

I simply said, "Sure. But aren't you tired from getting up so early and doing all that driving, Noboru?"

"Not so bad."

Moving to his chair closer to mine, he touched the tips of my bandaged fingers and said, "Your finger's okay?"

"It's a lot better than it would be if I hadn't had your help. I do appreciate that."

"I'm glad," he said, but he was thinking of something else.

"Erika, in our free time tomorrow, after whale watching, I'm wondering if you would.... Would you come with me to Hot Springs Cove? I'd like to take you there.... In a float plane."

"Oh, that's very kind of you, Noboru. I've read about the hot springs in a brochure, and they do look interesting, but no. I know some of the others couldn't afford to do that and I wouldn't want to create a division between us. Between those who could afford to go and those who can't or don't want to."

"You're very considerate."

"I just think there are lots of interesting things to see here that don't cost money and are more central to being here. I'd be happier exploring Long Beach than going up in a float plane to an isolated area."

I smiled at him recognizing that asking me to accompany him had probably taken some nerve on his part.

"I forgot you don't like small planes much," he said, recovering from his seriousness.

I started to jokingly protest, but then, smiling, he quietly added, "We wouldn't have to jump out of it, you know."

"It's not that," I laughed with him, "but thanks for asking me. You are very generous."

I was glad that he seemed to accept my refusal apparently without injured feelings. We were comfortable enough to sit there quietly for a while. Actually he began to talk about his younger sister and his concern over her pending involvement with her boyfriend. I served as a sympathetic ear as he sought advice about what he, as her older brother, should do about. It was obvious that this was a situation that he didn't approve of (she has just turned 20). My comments were cautious, as I could see the situation from both points of view—his, as an adult sibling wanting to protect his sister, and hers, as someone obviously in love.

We sat there quietly enjoying the glow of the embers for some time. Noboru finally suggested it was probably time to go in. He walked me to the curtained door of my room. Leaning against the doorframe, his face was close to mine. He looked at me in what I would say was a resigned way. But then he touched my elbow. For an instant I thought that he was going to

kiss me, but then he turned away. I was glad of this because after his being so caring and kind to me, I didn't want to seem ungrateful by rejecting him.

A moment later, Song came out the adjacent door from saying goodnight to Daniel, who was there in his Birkenstock sandals, looking relaxed.

The next morning we all got up early enough to have breakfast, although we did have to drag Nicole out of bed. We set off for the wharf to start on our whale-watching expedition.

In the process of getting the boat to the area where we were most likely to see the whales, we saw the area just off Tofino. It is called Clayoquot Sound where old-growth forest comes almost to the water's edge.

Three hours on the ocean seemed to go quickly and enjoyably for all of us except for Song. She was again feeling nauseous despite the open boat. So she was looking forward to getting back to the dock.



Several whales, some coming quite close to the boat, jumped in graceful, seemingly choreographed arcs spouting water and demonstrating the strength of their tails by lashing the water. We could feel their power and we marveled at their independent existence.

Our brief tour of the museum, galleries, and shops in town enabled Sumi to purchase many native-made articles. These are gifts to take back to family, friends, co-workers, and her boss. I am not willing to even think about having to do such shopping. I wish the Japanese could have the freedom Mary has in deciding whether or not to participate in gift-giving rituals.

Rather than going to a restaurant for lunch, our group bought picnic food to eat on the beach, dividing it up so each of us had a variety of deli items to carry with us while hiking. We returned to the cars and drove the few minutes to Mackenzie Beach. When we got out we all agreed that we would return to the cars at 5:00 pm.

We started to walk southeast along the long, flat beach. The tide was so low it was possible to climb on some of the small craggy rock formations that apparently are islands at higher tides. After ambling along looking at fascinating forms of sea life in the inter-tidal pools and climbing some of the “broken islands,” Song, Nicole, and I got ahead of Daniel, Fernando, and Noboru even though we were all continuing in the same direction.



When we could no longer hear them talking behind us on the beach, we turned and looked back. We were somewhat alarmed to realize that fog had rolled in and cut us off from sight of anyone.

We walked up to the top of the beach and we sat down on some rocks with long grass behind them. We were waiting for the guys to appear out of the mist. It was difficult to keep Song from becoming alarmed, as the memory of getting lost on the ferry was still so fresh in her mind.

Nicole and I tried to minimize Song’s worries by suggesting it was a good time to eat our lunch. Freshly made bread with deli meats, pickles, and a variety of cheeses, followed by baked goods—delicious. Nicole and I shared our apricot muffin and cinnamon bun, whereas Song decided to save hers in case we should be “lost for days on the seashore in the wilderness.”

When we finished, we started singing. We figured this would help the guys hear us if they were walking close to the water’s edge. Trying to be our noisiest, we tried some simple songs that we learned in our class.

“Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream.”

We sang this in rounds laughing but, still, the time did drag on.

“Let’s start back to try to find the guys or go back to the car.”

“If we keep within sight of the top of the shore, finding MacKenzie Beach won’t be a problem.”

"But what if the guys are looking for us now?" Song asked feeling some stress. "And what if they have already gone past us?"

"Good points...."

"What time is it?"

"Almost 4:30."

"Well, they did say they would meet us at the cars at 5:00, so let's start back."

"Yes, it's best to stick to the original plan."

I could feel that Song was again feeling that she wished she had never let go of Daniel's hand.

We walked back singing again so we would at least be heard if anyone from our group was close by. With the fog thickening, even I was beginning to get concerned about being out of touch with any of the others and not knowing exactly where we were. It was heartening when, at a pause in our noisemaking, we heard and then saw Juliana, Marina, Sumi, and Bae emerging from the mist down by the water's edge.

"Hey, group!" we called to them.

They strolled up the beach to meet us. Marina and Juliana, walking barefoot, had their sandals in hand, looking very casual and relaxed. Sumi looked as immaculately dressed as usual. (How does she do this?) Her black sandals looked as if they had never been off a carpet.

"So good to see you!"

"Have you seen the guys?"

"No, but we haven't been looking for them."

"That fog rolled in so fast. We don't know if they passed us or not, so we are heading back."

"Well, we could turn around too. It's probably almost time anyway."

"Have you seen anything interesting?"

"Yes, lots."

"Two sea lions. Lazy things. On a craggy rock island," Marina said.

"And blue and purple muscles and starfish and colourful sea anemones and shells and crabs and birds," Sumi added.



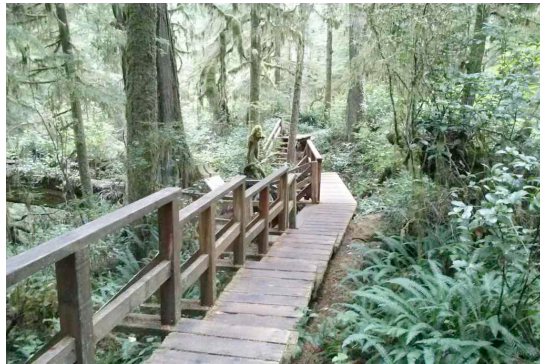
With their enthusiasm and total focus on the treasures of the beach, I was sorry that we had been so preoccupied by the fog and the whereabouts of the others. This was especially true when all ten of us reassembled at the cars. The guys hadn't been concerned about loosing touch either.

"Well, first we saw a baby sea lion that seemed to be in distress. We worried that his parents had abandoned it, so we watched from a distance until we saw an adult seal return to the area. It had apparently been waiting for us to clear out."

"Oh, and what about that blue heron...."

The guy's fascination with everything they had seen on the beach was such that they had forgotten to eat their lunch. Once we were back at the two cars, we divided up Noboru and Fernando's cheese and meat slices, buns, corn chips, fruit, etc., to share on our way to the forest stop.

We hadn't left nearly enough time for this destination, but nevertheless we got out had a chance to walk around. While the trees didn't seem as tall or dense as in Cathedral Grove, we still felt the age of the forest with its moss covered evergreens and wooden path over the swampy areas with fallen logs suggesting past winter wind storms.



Back on the road, we headed for Ucluelet. Both cars met up at the same restaurant where we had eaten lunch the day before, which at that point seemed so long ago. Despite having been snacking, we decided to eat something substantial there, as the food seemed more promising at this café than what we remembered about supper food on the ferry. Again we sat overlooking the boats that provide the seafood. It was delicious because it was so fresh.

We were very full when we went back in the cars. Feeling very mellow after that early dinner and the day's ocean air, we were tired on the return trip to Nanaimo. We did not stop at Cathedral Grove. I was just as glad to fly by it this time, as it reminded me of my wasp sting, which still hurt a little.

We did, however, stop to stretch our legs at a place within sight of a lake (Cameron Lake?) and walked around a few minutes. On our way back to the car, we were thrilled to see a fawn eating grass and bush, seemingly unafraid of us. Tokyo felt so far away.



We spent most of the return ferry trip out on the deck, as there was another very beautiful sunset. I wish the air at home could seem this clean! Again I envied a young couple sitting together. They were on a built-up box on the deck, comfortably leaning together, their faces directed toward the golden orange setting sun. Both had their eyes closed as if enjoying the warm light entirely through their skin. I wished I could share that comfortable, taking-for-granted feeling with Sandy; I was missing him so much.

I worried that Noboru, doing the trip in reverse on the way home, might drive me home after dropping all the others off on the way through North Van. I feared the potential intimacy of being alone with him, of what that might encourage. Again I respected Noboru more than ever when he invited Juliana to accompany us in driving me to the West End rather than having this time alone with me.

Parking in front of the door, Noboru helped me retrieve my backpack from the trunk.

"I hope your finger is going to be okay. If it is still stinging when you are ready for bed, take another anti-histamine."

"Sure. Oh, Noboru, I didn't pay you for those pills."

"Never mind about that. Perhaps another time. See you at school tomorrow."

"Thanks for driving me home."

"Glad to."

"Goodnight, Juliana."

"Yes, see you at school."

The minute I walked in through the door in arriving home, the telephone rang several times because Mary was not home. I answered it. It was Sandy. Strangely, his call jarred me somewhat as I was still in our weekend world.

"Hi. So now you know what a whale looks like up close?" he asked in his friendly voice. I do love his voice.
"Yes, several whales came close to our boat."
"Oh, good. I didn't want you to be disappointed."
"We certainly weren't."
"If you took any pictures, I'd be happy to see them."
"Sure. Anyway, we had a great time, even though I was stung by a wasp in Cathedral Grove on the trip there."
"You were?"
"Yes. On my finger, when we were eating lunch."
"Was it very bad, the sting?"
"Uncomfortable, but bearable."
"Which hand?"
"My right."
"Oh, no. Is it okay now?"
"Almost back to normal. I managed to keep my hand in ice water a lot of time on Saturday and that helped a lot. It started to swell, but we got some anti-histamine for me. That made it less painful and brought the swelling down."
"Good thinking."

Without knowing I was going to say this, I added, "We have a would-be doctor in our group."

As I said this I was picturing Fernando, so this was true, but I realized this comment was misleading because Fernando hadn't been the one taking care of me. I quickly changed the subject talking about all that we had seen and done.

I did wonder, however, why was I not willing to give Noboru full credit for being so caring and decisive in helping me.

Still alone in the house after talking with Sandy, I checked my email. I was pleased to see a message from Sabine. So to avoid confronting my confused emotions, I wrote her back immediately.

To: sabine.gerhardt@gmx.ch
From: Erico.yamashiro@mobiilityelite.co.jp
Date: July 24

Sabine,
We just returned from a wonderful group trip to Long Beach (West Coast of Vancouver Island) for whale watching. Inspiring nature there. Bonding within the group. My time was only somewhat spoiled by getting a wasp sting. I reluctantly confess that I accepted Noboru's effective help in minimizing the pain of the sting.
So glad you to hear that you have managed a full break with Hans. Hope that opens things up for you. Good thinking in telling

your family you'll not be participating in any group events with them that include Hans. Hopefully they'll choose you over him. Also I'd like to know more about your new job and how it is different from the last one.

Congratulations on being so decisive and for being willing to take risks and give up some security.

Are these qualities that you learned from being in Canada?

I wonder if I am learning any of these.

You may not want to hear, but I know you'll want to hear, that Sandy and I had a prearranged meeting, date actually, in Victoria (quite romantic) during our classmates' weekend when his band was playing at a nearby hotel. He and I admitted our mutual attraction. It's true we did! And we have agreed to try and make some time for each other, despite knowing that we will have to part next April. Not sure what this will look like in reality, as Sandy has so many things that may keep him just as busy (and unavailable) as ever.

Love,

Erika



Photographs of creek of Cathedral Grove (p. 194), Long Beach heron (p. 208) and star fish (p. 204), and Tofino pub (p. 200) courtesy of Mathieu Gemin, France; photographs of rolling waves and craggy islands (p. 197), Pacific Sands (p. 198), and whale watching (p. 202) courtesy of Christian Knaus, Austria; fog rolling in (p. 203) and wooden sidewalk through forest floor (p. 205), courtesy of Nadja Rathgeb, Germany; image of fawn by the author

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