

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A tribute to Rob Bell-Irving

The recent CBC production, *Voices of the Forest*, was magnificent. We saw and heard the countless users of the forest, from industry to the salamander and tiny microbial life forms.

There are voices in the community that we listen and respond to when they write or speak publicly. There are other voices that do not speak to us. Unfortunately, some of these voices are professional writers and newspaper staffers.

Voices that I have personally listened to and responded to are such writers as Ron Nelson, Chris Pielou, Van Eagen, and Rob Bell-Irving. Rob Bell-Irving is leaving Campbell River to take up a permanent fisheries position with the Robertson Creek Hatchery in Port Alberni. Port Alberni will have a new and important voice.

My first images of Rob are those of a fly fisherman, fishing the main Islands Pool on the Campbell, or the run just above the highway bridge on the Oyster River. He would be accompanied by his dog. He was and is a successful fisherman, beaching and releasing steelhead.

I began reading his column in the *Upper-Islander* or *Courier* years ago. His voice spoke to me because he wrote out of solid experience and conviction, almost always factually, and always with a keen and contagious enthusiasm. But more than that, the earth and her life systems was not simply a material mechanism, but had a physical and spiritual level as well. This might be expressed by a quotation from Yeats, or by certain poetical and philosophical quotations as when he did a report for VIRS which served as an introduction to our invertebrate study. But mostly, I think, by a certain reverence for all living and non-living beings which found its expression through his writing.

I believe that Rob understands and intuitively that the earth, with its countless life forms, its myriad and profusion of flowers and radiant rivers, are forms created primarily to be communed with, not to be exploited. The West has lost this wonder and ability to commune. With the exception of our native peoples, perhaps the most spiritually sensitive people to ever inhabit the earth, we have lost the perennial philosophy, lost it since the end of the renaissance at the beginning of the 17th Century. We have lost the sense that the universe and the earth has an inner spiritual core.

We have need of a voice such as Rob's. We stand at the end of the Cenozoic period in man's and the earth's evolution, we live in the terminal phase of the cenozoic. This has been a period of 65 million years during which time the flowers, the birds, the rainforests, all of the life support systems came into being. We enter now a period, a new era that Thomas Berry calls the Ecozoic era. During the Cenozoic for the most part man had nothing to do with the magnificent lifeforms that came into being, except at the very end when he begins to destroy them. But in this

new era, man will have everything to do with it. Man cannot create a blade of grass, but there may not be a blade of grass unless man protects it, cares for it, and nourishes it. To use a symbol from the Old Testament, the Exodus Symbol: The Human Community and the Natural World will go into the future as a single sacred community or we won't go into it at all, we will perish in the desert. We have to come to see that not only is the human community a sacred community but the earth community is sacred as well. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. Thanks, Rob, for helping us see that a little more clearly and to act upon it.

Father Charles A.E. Brandt
Oyster River

EDITOR'S NOTE: We, too, find Rob's work something worth maintaining and we are happy to say we have reached an agreement with Rob to continue his "Rivers Never Sleep" weekly column. His "Ardent Angler" column will be written by another local authority who Rob guarantees has the right stuff to continue the tradition of the column. More on that in the future.

Writer criticizes PM

Thank you for showing courage and community leadership in dedicating an entire editorial to the exposure of the most shameful piece of legislation produced to date by the Mulroney Government. Everyone knows by now that this is the worst Government in Canadian history, but the Tories have shown with this infamous document that there is no limit to the depths they will sink.

How many Canadians, I wonder, remember Brian Mulroney responding to a question on social programs during the 1988 Federal election campaign, quote: "The universality of health care and social programs is a scared trust."

There can be no doubt that we are now seeing Mr. Mulroney complying with demands from business leaders to cut social programs in order to make the Free Trade Agreement acceptable to our U.S. partners. We were warned by opponents of Free Trade that this would be one consequence of the deal, but still we chose to ignore the advice on voting day.

Maybe, if your newspaper continues to focus on such important issues, readers will respond differently next time around.

Yours truly
Ken Stone
Campbell River