

Cache Creek, 1980.

Imagine that you are a twenty-something, living away from your home town for the first time, and your first new teaching assignment is not in a classroom in a campus building, but in a small hall, without technological communication, in a village an hour from the town to which you have just moved. Even in 1980, this was an eye-opening experience.

The upgrading course I taught in Cache Creek was my introduction to the geography and culture of the BC Interior. Each day, I would catch a Greyhound from downtown Kamloops (where, incidentally Hudson's Bay, Sears, and Woodwards were also located) that took me through terrain that fascinated me and landed me at the Cache Creek station, where I was met by one of the students, a former bus driver, who insisted on chauffeuring me the two blocks to the Elks' Hall. I spent many evenings photocopying at the Alan Mathews Centre – the downtown campus of Cariboo – to prepare materials for the group.

Reg McNamara, my department chair, was a great proponent of experiential learning; this, in addition to serving the students well, was a way for me to get to know the area. In addition to taking field trips to the Ashcroft newspaper and Western Canada Theatre, we saved the money from our coffee machine to subsidize occasional dinners at the Wander Inn, a Chinese restaurant in Cache Creek. The students also regaled me with stories (largely frightening) about oppressive heat, cacti, snakes, and bears. Our cultural experiences were varied.

I believe it was Reg's suggestion that the class organize a volleyball tournament between classes at all of the regional campuses of Cariboo College. The Cache Creek students had a real advantage here, as I knew little about the other centres or volleyball, so they had the opportunity to do virtually all of the planning. In preparation, we acquired dozens and dozens of hotdogs and buns (one of the students knew a guy who gave us a great deal), only to find that the participants (from Lytton, Lillooet, and Merritt, as I recall) made a mass exodus to Hungry Herbie's at lunchtime. We were left with dozens and dozens of hotdogs and buns to purchase for personal use.

You may be wondering where the academics were in all of these adventures. The truth is, I cannot recall what literature we studied. However, rest assured that we did attend to scholastic matters: in addition to studying literature and mathematics in more traditional ways, we created a small cook book (which I still use) and a brief history (complete with photographs) of the Cache Creek area.

That adventure was a profoundly significant immersion for me— into both the culture of the area and experiential learning. Perhaps it shaped my subsequent interest in local literature and Service Learning. I know it coloured my appreciation for this area and for the institution now known as Thompson Rivers University; my passion for both has only deepened in the intervening four decades – despite the fact that I haven't played volleyball since and rarely eat hot dogs.

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