"The Singing was the Important Thing"

an interview with Phil Thomas

I had been wanting to get a profile of Phil into the Bulletin for quite some time, but it was a fairly academic proposition until one night at the 1996 AGM in Toronto. We were camped out in Judy Cohen's living room, and I was feeling guilty about grabbing the couch (though I grabbed it despite my guilt). I watched Phil lay out one of those thin foamies that backpackers use, under which he carefully laid his trousers. "Keeps the crease," he said, "old army trick." Once we were both settled, he regaled me with some of the stories here, and I was kicking myself that I didn't have a tape recorder with me. Fortunately, Phil was as good a storyteller in the heat of an afternoon in Vancouver the following summer as he'd been at midnight in Toronto.

Phil Thomas has been a significant figure in the cultural life of this nation; had he done nothing else but collect and publish Songs of the Pacific Northwest (Saanichton, BC: Hancock House, 1979), this would be true. But as a teacher, as an active member of this Society (of which he is an honorary life member), as a performer, and as a occasional songwriter—who knows what ripples he has cast? Whatever he's done, he's lived an active and interested (and therefore interesting) life. An alternate title for this interview was "Oh, my—all the funny things you see in life!" This is not a sentence that you'd hear from the fashionably jaded or the self-centred.

We wish Phil a long life and lots more songs, and we thank him for all that he's done for the Society and for Canadian arts. [GWL]
Dame, what makes your maidens lie, maidens lie, maidens lie?
On Christmas day in the morning?
And
Dame, what makes your ducks to die...
Their wings are clipped, they cannot fly.

All these little edges, you see, were there, and I loved that kind of thing. It's not smarmied up like Disney stuff. This is real stuff.

My mother used to play the piano for me, and she also had the A.A. Milne songs. I really didn't like those songs, but I loved this other, folklore stuff. So, as time went by, when I heard anything that was an echo of that, I responded to it immediately.

I took piano lessons, but I didn't get very far. These were a trade, I think. The piano teacher gave us lessons as an alternative to paying for my father's medical services. Both my brother and I took piano lessons, but it didn't go very far. I played in a couple of recitals, but I didn't pursue it. I went over to the drums later.

We got a radio about 1927 or so, and that became a part of our world. I used to listen to—what was this fellow's name? Seth Parker! It supposedly came out of a Maine fishing port; people would come together, supposedly a Sunday or Saturday night gathering, and they would do hymns. "The old captain" was there, you see, and there were all these characters with their characteristic voices. I used to listen to this—I don't think anyone else in the family used to listen to it. Eventually we got so that we could hear WLS in Chicago, and we would listen to the Barn Dance.

So that was always happening. I remember going down to the local radio station, CFT, this would be around 1931. There was a whole family of people, all dressed up in cowboy outfits, to sing on the radio! The thing that interested me was that they would sing songs like "Get Along, Little Dogies," and that was the stuff I liked. I never liked Gene Autry or any of those people. They didn't have the ring, the smell of people, you know? It was always the hype of the artificial, commercial stuff.

Something else we got as kids, we didn't know we were getting anything special—whose was this?
The little white pill rolled down the hill,
It rolled into the bunkhouse....

G—Vernon Dalhart? Carson Robison?

P—No.... Frank Crumit, that's who it was. We got stuff from Carson Robison and those people, but not directly. We got it through the street singing. "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum," and
Eleven more months and ten more days
I'll be out of the calaboose.

You see, there were songs that the kids knew, but we didn't know where they came from. Some of them may have said, "Oh, we have an old record of that at home...." We did have windup gramophones, but we didn't have a big collection in our own family.

My brother had a voice and was singing in the choir at Christ Church Cathedral. The next door neighbour, Mr. Davies, was the organist and choir master, and he would take my brother to sing in the choir. My brother was four years older; he was born in 1917, when my father was overseas, so my father did not have a proper identification with my brother and treated him badly, I thought.

Perhaps to compensate for this, Glen identified with the popular culture figures such as Bing Crosby and Russ Columbo. Thus with his talent, good voice, the encouragement of my mother, and the Christ Church choir master who lived next door, he focussed his high school life on singing. He had his own program on Victoria's radio station CFT, and sang with the dance band at the Saturday night dances at the Crystal Gardens, the CPR glass-roofed swimming pool complex situated next to the Empress Hotel. He used to sing with the old megaphone in front of the orchestra. He continued his singing when we moved to Vancouver in 1936. Thus songs and singing were very much part of our home life and beyond.

You see, he compensated by singing. He never got to be a professional singer; he couldn't read music. He'd taken a bit of piano lessons, he had a good ear, and he could do all this kind of thing. He won numbers of singing contests when he was in the Air Force; he was in Toronto, and he was given a trip to Montreal, all kinds of things, gold watches. He did have a damn good voice. He was a crooner, and then he could also sing things, the John Charles Thomas "Green Eyed Dragon With The Thirteen Tails," and all this.¹

My father drowned on November 11, 1944, on the Cowichan River, where he was flyfishing. It was high water, and he was warned not to go down, but he went overboard from his boat. He may have been pulling up his anchor and had a heart attack—who knows what happened? They didn't get his body until the next spring.

G—I get the impression that the music was more associated with your mother than your father. Was he involved in music?

P—He would sing,
Oh, you beautiful doll,
You great big, beautiful doll....
and he would sing "Darktown Strutters' Ball," and
Boola boola,
Boola boola,
which went, obviously, back to his McGill college days. And
My mother was a lady,
Like yours, I will allow,
And, sir, you wouldn't dare insult me now
If Jack were only here.
Oh, I've come to this great city,
To find a brother dear.

I've got it backwards, but these are things my dad used to sing. He didn't have any particular voice; it just would come out, you know.

But my mother was a trained musician, and she wanted to sing. I was kicked out of Sunday school—well, I wasn't thrown out, but the guy threw a hymnbook at me, and I decided I wouldn't go back. I was about grade five. My mother said, "Well, you either have to go to Sunday school, or you have to go to church." So I used to go to church and listen to the hymns and listen to the choir and listen to the soloists. My mother had a beautiful voice, and I'd listen to my mother.

I remember getting her to laugh. This was United Church, which has very little high-tone, you know, and they would pass the communion along, with the Welsh's grape juice, and a little piece of white bread cut into a star. You either
take it or not. I remember saying to her one time, I was eating the bread, "It's Shelley's," referring to the bakery in town. Absolutely no idea of transubstantiation or anything! [Laughter] This is not flesh and blood; this is Shelley's bread, very tasty! And I made her laugh. She was pretty good. She didn’t really believe in an afterlife, though she would say, when she got old, "How do you know?" Well, you can't know, really, but it’s not reasonable. It’s all made up.²

My brother was getting all this attention for his singing. In grade four, we had a Christmas concert, and I sang "Dinah."

_Dinah, is there anyone finah?_ and the teacher looked up, quite surprised, at this kid doing this thing.

Another thing. On Saturday morning, CFCT had a request program. Well, one time I heard them playing Cab Calloway, "I've Got a Right to Sing the Blues," and that was a completely new experience.

_I've got a right to sing the blues, I've got a right to be low down._

So I used to phone up every Saturday morning and ask for this, until they wouldn’t play it any more for me. This was 1932.

G—So you reacted to African American music.

P—Oh, Cab Calloway was something. And there was

_No gal made has got a shade on Sweet Georgia Brown._ All this stuff, you see. And when Benny Goodman came on the scene, 1935, around there, this was really interesting stuff! I built a big collection of all this.

There’s another thing. You could go down and get on the Empress boats. We were just a lot of ragamuffins out of the Fairfield district, but they wouldn’t stop us. Only once did someone tell us not to go into the steerage where the Chinese were being transported. The ship would come in from the Orient, but they were not getting off in Victoria. Just these

masses of Chinese coming for employment somewhere. An officer said to us, "You boys shouldn’t go down there. You might not come out again!" Or something like that. After that we would walk down in the dead middle of everything and see all of it. They had these gigantic beds, sleeping area, and you could see all the gambling going on, it was marvellous. It had a nice smell.

In Victoria, we kids had songs we sang. I mentioned "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum," and Frank Crumit:

_I am a gay caballero, coming from Rio Janeiro_ All that stuff! And "Abdul the Bulbul Amir," and all these songs. We used to sing these. The grownups didn’t hear us singing; we used to sit up in trees. We had these wonderful boulevard trees. We’d be up there, or we’d be off some-

where, and we’d be singing these songs. Of course, we had a wonderful beach, Dallas Road beach, wonderful pebbles and logs, so we’d go there. We used to sing. It was a working class district, by the way. It was a very odd kind of district. You see, Howe Street had a low part, which was all peat bog, and that’s where we lived. Our house was built about 1920. It had a room in the basement for the Chinese servant. [Laughter] We didn’t have any servants! It was a very small house.

At school, we had these musical festivals, you know, put on by the Knights of Pythias, and all the schools would enter. There’d be a choice of folk song, and we sang,

_And the landlubbers lying down below, below, below._

"The Mermaid," you know? Mr. Chatfield, our classroom teacher, was getting us all ready to take part in the music festival; I was in grade five, around 11, so that’d be 1932. But we didn’t have very much music in school. It was always incidental. In fact, I think that was the only year I remember us singing anything in school. I never thought about that before, but it’s quite true.

There was Bing Crosby, and some of the stuff he sang, "Look Down That Lonesome Road," and there was Paul Robeson. And there was some fun stuff, you know:

_When the sun goes down, and the tide goes out_ People used to sing, you know, "the darkies"—

_Darkies gather round, and they all begin to shout._

_Way, hey, Uncle Bud,_

_It's a treat to beat your feet in the Mississippi mud._

All that kind of thing. Crosby sang that with Whiteman, the Rhythm Boys, scat singing, and there’d be some Louis Armstrong in there somewhere, you know. Not the early stuff; I didn’t really meet that until I went to England, through Parlophone and HMV records, which took all that American jazz stuff
and did it before the Americans did it themselves. Jazz was big in England. This was wartime. You could go to a store and get them to put a 78 on and listen to them. So I bought a number of records over there and left them behind when I went to India.

There was a fellow in Vancouver, Kenneth Spencer. He turned up at a Baptist church, downtown, to sing in the summer when they dispensed with the choir. He was an understudy for Paul Robeson; he has records, Kenneth Spencer. He sang the solo during the regular service, and on occasion he had a concert afterwards. I had a friend, Irving Koenigsberg, and we used to go this Baptist church, and here this minister would be sailing off and do all this stuff, and his hands in the air, very emotive. Not Pentecostal, but moving into the more— I mean, you wouldn't see this kind of evangelical quality in the United Church!

Anyway, Irving and I would go down, go to the church service, put a little something into the pot, and then we would stay for the concert. This was one of the great experiences, to hear this man sing this Robesonish material, spirituals and this type of thing. It was really great.

G—Was he black?

P—Oh, yes. So that was another musical experience we had. I guess I’d have been about 17.

Saturday morning was always the opera, and my mother did the washing on Saturday morning, with an old washing machine. But right from the early 30s, even today, if I’m around here on Saturday afternoon, I put the opera on, on CBC. I mean, the opera has always been there, and I learned to enjoy music partly through listening to the operas.

One of the real exciting things, when I was about 11, I built a radio, a little one-tube radio. My dad supported me in this. He had these two guys come over and put up this big aerial for me. He had a friend, a medical doctor in charge of x-ray at the hospital, an Englishman who was into electronics, and I got some equipment from him. In fact, one of the radios I got from him, a De Forest, the city museum has it now.

I’d miss school to do my radio, and my mother would say that she wouldn’t write me a note, so my four-year older brother would write it for me. One time I got to school and unfolded the note, and it said, “Please excuse Phil from school yesterday. He had a slight case of cancer.” He always played practical jokes on me. He was watching me to see if I’d look at it. I don’t think he was going to stop me.

I became a radio amateur in grade eight, 1935. I had my own ham station with numbers and everything. It was very simple, with only a couple of tubes. We used to build all our own stuff. Later on it was more expensive, when you wanted to go real high power. You could spend 35 bucks for a tube. I used to work in factories here in Vancouver to pay for my amateur radio.

G—What does a ham operator do?

P—You talk to people. You’d pass messages. One time I got a piece of wedding cake from a couple who got married. He was an RCMP person up in Fort Norman or some place, and she was living in Victoria. I used to pass messages back and forth, you see. This was all Morse code. After the war I went on with a microphone.

G—Before the war, it was all Morse code?

P—Well, you could have that other facility, but I never had it. No, it was all Morse code. I could work 35 words a minute. I really could do code. I have a fellow, an old retired merchant seaman who comes on and tells stories— really, a kind of code practice. He varies from five words a minute up to about 50 words a minute—he loses me in there. He tells these wonderful yarns about different experiences at sea. It’s all code coming, but I can read it, just like words. I have a license now; I go on regularly. I have an antenna up there. I talk to people in Europe. Very seldom do you have a real conversation. In those days, it was simply the delight of a two-way interchange, trading a little bit about the weather or what your equipment is, and passing on your good wishes. Every once in a while you’d get into a real conversation, which is good. I used to play checkers with a guy in Australia.

I got to Pitcairn Island and spoke to one of the descendants of the Bounty crowd! I talked to the Archduke of the Hapsburgs. That was in the late 30s. There were all these characters. Then you would exchange these cards to confirm the communication.

Amateur radio was an exciting thing to do in those days. It’s far less now. The equipment is wonderful. It was really a different world. You could kill yourself very quickly with the power we were using. That was part of the game.

I’m not really a part of it all now, but they made a law in 1958 that anybody who’d had privileges before 1958 would continue. When I decided to become a ham again in 1980, when I was coming up to retirement, I simply went down, and they put a little notice on my old certificate from 1935, and I was given full privileges. I can go on any band, any power, whatever.

I joined the Air Force in October 1940. That was the year after radio amateurs were put out of business. I used to look back and say, “That’s what I did all those years,” looking at my radio amateur logbooks. I didn’t do much school, and I didn’t read much. I didn’t read much until I went to university, and then when I joined the Air Force I used to read. My parents were members of the Book of the Month club, so there was always books, but I didn’t really read them. I was busy with my radio, and I had a set of drums and used to play along with Gene Krupa, all this stuff.

G—How old were you when you got drums?

P—I guess I was about 16 or so.

G—Did someone show you what to do with them?

P—No, I got a book, so I could do my paradiddles and all this stuff.

G—Did you play the drums in bands?
P—No, no. I did play drums for a dance band over in Northern Ireland for a bit. I sat there, and I thought, "This is a pretty boring thing to do all night." But I could support the rhythm and give a little zip to things.

G—At the start of the war they shut ham operators down. For security reasons.

P—Oh, yes. We were told to make our equipment inoperable.

I went to first year university. I was not a particular scholar or anything, but I got my entrance to the university, and I was fortunate enough to get into Dr. Garnett Sedgewick's English class. He was what I considered my first teacher. That was exciting. He had his PhD from Harvard and was associated with Zeta Psi fraternity because he'd come from Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, and the fraternity he'd belonged to had been taken over by Zeta Psi. He was gay, and he liked young men. He got me in a corner one time, and he was up against me going— [Gestures, laughs]. Very strange. I said, "Oh, Dr. Sedgewick!" He desisted, and that was fine. I was quite pretty in those days. I had beautiful auburn hair. He didn't have any women in his first year class, only boys. Sedgewick lived with his mother. He had continuing relationships, serious, good relationships.

Sedgewick had all these mannerisms. If you said something particularly naive, he would come down and rap you on the you see. But we beat them with our zest. If you said something particularly naive, and had real choir arrangements of stuff, I was in the goddam fraternity with these people I didn't respect, you see. People that I had contempt for, actually, some of them. Not hatred, but I was not really brothers with these guys; there were a couple of them, Chargo and these guys, but, you know, it was a strange thing.

Why I wanted to talk about the fraternity is that we sang. We had lots of songs.

Martin Luther said this world is women, wine and song.
Surely he was a godly man.
And I am inclined to think him rather right than wrong.
When he said, Fill 'er up to the brim fill 'er up.
Fill 'er up again.
Oh, pledge we all, a jolly life to lead
For laddies drink and lassies wink to catch the heart of a true Zet.
Long drink, strong drink, quaff the foaming mead,
Fill 'er up, boys, fill 'er up again.

[Laughs] In fact we took part in an interfraternity choir contest, and we won first prize. And all we'd done was sing drinking songs!

Oh, Zeta Psi, we pledge tonight, ever more.

You know, this stuff.... [Laughs]

There were fraternities who took their participation in these really seriously and had real choir arrangements of stuff, you see. But we beat them with our zest.

When I came back after the war, I went to the rushing parties, but I went around telling the young people, "Are you sure this is what you want to do? I mean, there are some many more things to do in the universe." Judge Smith's son came up to me several months after he joined, and he said to me, "You were right."

But the singing was the important thing.

G—Every time you've turned around in your Christmas exams, you could join a fraternity. The Zeta Psi fraternity was running into trouble. They had 13 members, and they were, some of them, graduating, and they had this gigantic house that they were trying to maintain. So they hatched a plot to initiate kids from Prince of Wales High School and the private school, St. George's, and these people then worked amongst us. Chargo [Charles Gordon] Campbell, the father of Vancouver's former mayor who is now Leader of the Opposition in the BC Legislature—he was one of these charismatic guys, he played lead in the play—and there was another guy, Joe Miller, who was the quarterback on the football team. They were friends of mine. I wasn't interested in rushing, but I could see, Chargo and these guys, they're going Zet, so "I'll go Zet."

So we went to be initiated. You can see my brand here. [Shows faint, but distinguishable scar on forearm]. We were put down six feet deep and all this. All the guys who joined were in Sedgewick's class, you see.

Anyway, we all were up all night, getting these brands. All these black-cowled people—you didn't know what was happening. You were put in a coffin. The lid was put on, and then you were lowered, and then some dirt was thrown in on top of the coffin. Then you were brought up and reborn. This goes back to the middle 19th century when these fraternity were quite important and secret.

So we'd all come in to class, and we'd have our fraternity pins on our vests; we used to wear ties and vests and everything. And Sedgewick looks out, and he says, "Sssssshooooo. Fraternities! Rash friendships!" God, I loved it! I was in this goddam fraternity with these people I didn't respect, you see. People that I had contempt for, actually, some of them. Not hatred, but I was not really brothers with these guys; there were a couple of them, Chargo and these guys, but, you know, it was a strange thing.

Which brings us back to the middle 19th century when these fraternities were quite important and secret.
your life, you've had another reason to sing!

P—That's right.

I joined up in 1940. They came on the CBC news every night, an appeal for people to join the Air Force. "A thousand people proficient in radio are needed for overseas service immediately." Well, by this time, we were all inducted into the OTCC, all the males. We had route marches going every Saturday morning. We were brought down from the University to the Spanish Banks. It was a pain in the ass, going on this crazy route march. But you'd be kicked out of the University if you didn't.

I'd finished my first year university in arts, but I was wanting to become a radio engineer. It was in my blood, going back to when I was 12-13 years of age. I was in applied science. To become a radio engineer, you had to become an electrical engineer. We had to take civil engineering and heat and all these things, and I was in these courses, and I guess I thought, "This is what you have to do. I'll take four years of this stuff, and then I'll try to do well enough on the exams to get a position with Marconi, Westinghouse, General Electric or some place where they were doing electrical work." That was the route.

Well, it was pretty boring. It was a lot of hard work. And they wanted us overseas immediately. Here we were on the route marches. I'd been concerned about what was going on in Europe since '37. You know, I'd worked in factories, and I'd talked to immigrants from over there. We used to see the newsreels, and I'd talked to immigrants from over there. We used to see the newsreels, and we knew that this guy Hitler had to be stopped.

We were also made to be frightened of communism through the newsreels.

G—What were your politics then?

P—I would say that I had no particular politics. I had become a kind of a humanist, under the influence of Bertrand Russell. I wasn't so sophisticated enough to say that I was agnostic, to say that human beings can't know, I was essentially an atheist. Which I am now, though I'm enough of an agnostic to say that you can't really know any of this stuff. Furthermore, I'll say that nothing that anyone's invented so far has the slightest possibility of truth. In fact, I don't understand the Big Bang—I think it's a mathematical illusion, but that's all right. I have to go along with them that there's something in it. Whatever.

So I joined up. I went to see Sedgewick; he thought this was fine. I didn't see my parents, just saw Sedgewick. I joined up early enough to get my deposit back for my fees for that year. That was the end of October 1940. We were going over on a Belgian ship called the Leopoldville, and there were a bunch of New Zealand air gunners—I guess those guys probably all got killed, you know, I mean, air gunning was not a good profession, and then you get washed out afterwards—

G—Like the Robinson Jeffers poem, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner"—

P—I don't know that one. Jeffers was a great poet.

In January we were 13 days on the sea, way up, north of Iceland, so we didn't get torpedoed. These guys from New Zealand all sang. They were teaching us songs.

There was an old monk whose name was Brown,
There was an old monk whose name was Brown,
There was an old monk whose name was Brown,
Fucked a girl from our town, fucked a girl from our town.
Oh, the old sod, the filthy old bastard!
Why, the bugger deserves to die!

And it went on with this, you know. Six maids locked in the lavatory,
They were there from Monday to Saturday,
Nobody knew...

Do you remember that one?
They went there together for tea with the vicar,
They went there together, they thought it was quick,
But they didn't know that the lock was thick,
So the vicar had tea all alone.
Oh, dear, what can the matter be...

Right from the old nursery rhyme. They sang all these things. You see, they were in charge of the gun watch. The guys used to man machine guns on the deck in case some air craft came over.

We arrived in England. We used to line up alphabetically, so Thomas and Tronsgard were always together. Bob Tronsgard had been in a band in Moose Jaw, a dance band, and he could sing. I didn't have a really good voice. We used to sing "Sweet Georgia Brown" and all this kind of stuff. You're going places, you're always in lineups, you're waiting, waiting, waiting. We would entertain the other guys a little bit, but overall it was just singing for fun.

They had a big reunion last summer in Calgary of all these radar people in the RCAF, and I would have gone, but Bob Tronsgard died just a few weeks ahead of time, and the real reason I wanted to go was to see my old pal Bob that I was with different times—we met up again way out in India, you see. So I didn't go.

Then when I was in the units in Northern Ireland, there were three of us used to go around together. We would have a few drinks, and then we would start singing

For tonight we'll merry, merry be....
This kind of thing.

Good night, ladies...

Numbers of songs. In fact, they were arrested. The night I left, they were arrested. We had a big thing, we agreed that the fellows going away would be given a dinner and a nice thing by the others, so I was the first to go, and they did this, and then I heard later that we were singing in the square in Coleraine, and they got arrested for public disturbance or some damn thing by the service police after we'd left. Oh, God, it was too bad!

We had fun. There was always singing in the Air Force. When I went to India, you see, you had the Liberty Run, a big three-ton truck with a whole bunch of guys in the back, and they used to sing all bawdy songs, you know. When I was in Northern Ireland, we used to sing

Oh, it's old, but it is beautiful,
Its colors, they are rare,
and on the 12th I love to wear
The sash me father wore.

and this is of course an Orangeman's song. Well, we were at Kilkeel on the east coast of Ulster below Belfast, and the guys used to sing this going on duty because it's a great song to sing. And the
rocks would come out of the bloody night! Thrown at the lorry that was taking the guys on duty. So it came out on daily routine orders, "The airmen going on duty will forthwith stop singing 'The Sash Me Father Wore.'" It was so funny—the rocks coming out of the night! Oh, God, what a world it was!

When I was in Northern Ireland, I heard a guy sing a song about "the still on the hill." Now, this guy was in a South Irish pub in Coleraine. In other words, these were mostly Catholics. He was there because he had gone out and protested against the Orangemen on the 12th of July, and he was in Dutch with the family. The family was really down on him; he wasn't supposed to do that. So he was in there drinking; he was in his cups. He was supposed to come back the next week. I went again and again, never saw him again. But I wanted to get this song. It was about this still up on a hill; that was all I had.

I was in civvies, visiting Coleraine in 1942. I was staying with a road inspector who had a nice gas allowance, so we'd go off to do a nice road inspection, I'd go with him, and then we'd go off into the Free State for a little run around. His wife's sister would come for dinner, and she sat at the end of the table. She reminded me of one of the people Dylan Thomas evokes in his Child's Christmas in Wales. She said, "Let's sing a Come-All-Ye," and she started to sing, and I could hardly contain myself because it was not musical. It was interesting from an ethnic point of view, but she croaked away with this Come-All-Ye, and I'd never heard anything like it, but it went on and finished. That was a chance, if I'd had better ears, to know what I was listening to. But those two times I came up against folk music there.

Northern Ireland is a funny country, you know, with all that Scots overlay and all those damn people, you know.... Oh, my—all the funny things you see in life.

I was in Northern Ireland for a year, and I became a corporal, and then I became a sergeant posted overseas and was put in charge of a unit going we-didn't-know where. But we went on the Duchess of Edinburgh to Sierra Leone, and then around South Africa to Durban, and we saw ships go down on either side of us—the Japanese were working out of Madagascar, you see. That's a weird feeling; you're looking and seeing a ship out there, a cruiser, going round and about, not wanting to get zapped itself. You always wonder what happened.

I was in the air force for 5 years. and you know, after a few years, you get pretty, well, you lose your ... I was never interested in carrying a gun. I mean, I carried a sten gun a little bit, and one thing and another. I rose to the exalted rank of Warrant Officer First Class, which, you wear officer's clothing, but you have this insignia down here, with the coat of arms and stuff. I was moved out of ordinary radar stations to headquarters, doing maintenance supervision and this kind of stuff, and then we were sent off to one of these islands away on the Bay of Bengal, Char Chapli, an island in the Sunderbans, the many forested islands in the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers. Char Chapli was one of the islands in the far southeast of the Sunderbans, giving the radar a clear view towards Burma, as it was then known. Char Chapli is now of course not in India, but in Bangladesh. When there is a typhoon in that region, the island is almost inundated with many deaths among the population.

We had to put on our own entertainment, so, about every month we would put a concert on, you see, and everybody'd get up and do something. and we had a padre had come down, a minister, I think he was squadron leader or something. He brought a gun, and he went out shooting birds. This was a wonderful place, lots of birds. He actually did shoot towards the camp one time, and you heard all this shot, tch tch tch, hitting against the bamboo sides of things. The cook that day had been decoring the fridge and had been using the ice pick and had speared the ammonium, so the fridge had been put out of function by the coolant leaking. So, I did a parody of this. We had heard the song, "Pistol Packin' Mama," so I wrote

\[\text{Shotgun Packin' Padre, lay that shotgun down}\
\[\ldots \text{and volleys of pellets came through the billets}\
\[\text{And the fridge was done in besides...}\

And he came up, quite concerned after I had sung the song; I was the senior NCO.

G—Why did you pass from radar to.

P—Well, I had begun to read. Before I left, I said, "I'm not going to work in the factories during the summer. I'm going to summer school and do more English." You see, I may have been in Applied Science, but I was going to see if I couldn't earn money to go to summer school and do arts, philosophy, English.

G—What drew you? Was it Sedgewick?

P—Yeah, it was Sedgewick. I carried his picture in my wallet throughout the war, just a little newspaper picture.

G—All that you've said about that, a group of young heterosexual men, more than accepting a homosexual man ... at that time, that's pretty remarkable, isn't it?

P—Well, I don't know It was Sedgewick, that's all.

G—You accepted Sedgewick as a master teacher.

P—Yes, that's right. He was a guy who opened windows and didn't entice me to be curious about homosexuality.

When we first came back from the war, I first heard about Leadbelly from my old friend Jack Paisley, whose mother had been down to Seattle and had brought some 78s. And then I'd hear Roy Acuff, "I Didn't Hear Nobody Pray," that sound. Then I heard Woody Guthrie. And at university we heard Billie Holiday. 'Strange Fruit.' You see? There was all this stuff coming in. This was the real stuff. And Pete Seeger's old 78s. And I was in the peace movement.

And then there was that wonderful little book, songbook, by the Kolbs, John and Sylvia Kolb. It was a book of folk songs around 1947 or something, '48, somewhere in there. And Ian Hay was sitting beside me in English—

G—Would Sedgewick have incorporated
I went to teach in Delta Junior-Senior High in Ladner. At the end of the first year, the inspector came to me and—we had trouble with the principal that year, he was bit of a donkey, anyway, and the inspector was called in to handle it because the staff was in revolt against this principal. They thought that I was one of the instigators; I guess in a way I was. At the end of the year the inspector came to me, Colonel Johnnie Burnett, and he'd observed me teaching, and we had a pretty good relationship because I'd clued him in on some of the problems regarding what was going on in the school, and he said, "They're not going to renew your contract." When you're on temporary, the first year they don't have to give any reason, so he could have left it at that. "They say you're a Communist." I said, "I'm not a Communist; I'm a socialist." He said, "Hell, everybody's a socialist!" He gave me the principalship of Pender Harbor!

So I became principal of the Pender Harbor Superior School. That's where Hilda and I moved; we had one little girl. We got married in '47. When Hilda and I were getting married, we went to see Sedgwick. We told him we were getting married, and he looked directly at me and he told me, "Well, I can tell you that your taste is better than hers."

G—You met her at the university?

P—Oh yes, oh yes. You see, I was writing poetry, and she was poetry editor of the undergraduate magazine. We were both in the Letters Club, and we did this and that. I had my motorcycle, and she used to ride on the back. I had a Harley Twin, an army bike. Lots of fun. Hilda did her MA, writing on Malcolm Lowry. We'd met Malcolm Lowry. We were in Earle Birney's writers' group. Birney put me in the Canadian Poetry Magazine and in the Poetry Commonwealth, I have a poem in there. He gave me a very nice compliment about my stuff, saying that I was distinct from the other poets.

When I was in the Air Force, I met Tambimuttu, who was the editor of Poetry London, I went to see TS Eliot, and I saw Walter de la Mare's son. I didn't see Eliot, but I did get to see Cyril Connolly, and I showed him my poems; he was very kind. He had laryngitis, so he wrote me a note, which I have somewhere, "I like your poems; we are not publishing poetry at this time." What was his magazine, Criterion? Horizons? I forget.

I mean, it was really ridiculous. But I said, "I don't have anyone else to talk to, I'll go talk to the gods," you know? Then when I came back to London after the war, I went to see Tambimuttu, and I got in the social crowd. I'd be introduced as a poet. I published a little book of poems, which I called First Poems, in Pondicherry. It was just a little thing, not important, just this verse I was writing. Not very good, I would think. But, anyway, I did that. That whole thing, the result of Sedgwick, his influence.

G—It's hard not to associate you with Birney. You associate you both with Vancouver, and you're both a couple of long, tall beanpoles!

P—We were friends with him. We were in his writers' group, and saw him socially. Esther was a friend of Hilda, and Esther would come and pick Hilda up to take her to the Unitarian Church, and eventually we took our kids to the Unitarian Church because the Fogarties next door were all Catholics. We thought our kids should have some sort of exposure. I would read the Bible to them, all kinds of stuff—scare the hell out of them! [Laughter] Anyway, so we went to the Unitarian Church.

We had prescribed Bible readings at school. "Say The Lord's Prayer." When I was at the high school, I wouldn't lead The Lord's Prayer; I got girls to do it. I didn't explain this. But when I was moved to Vancouver eventually and got into the elementary school, I said, "I want you to stand respectfully while the prayer is said. You may join in or not. You must understand that there may be people here who believe this." [Laughter] Just get the little crack in—"Come on, let's not take this too seriously!"

But I would get into Ruth. I would read it. You're supposed to read an excerpt. I would read it until recess! It's such a beautiful thing. And even discuss it—what was happening to this family, and the elders come along and decide
what they should do. I wouldn’t go into too much about Ruth, what was, “go and get under Boaz’s blanket,” there was some of that going on, “so he will leave you the grain on the field.” If you climb under his blanket, that’ll fix it! I didn’t explain that to them, but it’s a great story.

I taught Delta Junior-Senior High, as I explained, grade nine to senior matric, but the grade nines, they were homogenous groupings, so you had the bright kids and the slow kids. With the slow kids, I used to do art. I’d read “The Ancient Mariner” and have them draw pictures of parts of the story. I was into child-art because I’d seen stuff when I was overseas at A.S. Neill’s school. I was also very impressed by Herbert Read, the essayist and philosopher who did education through art. I was interested in images as a poet, you see. Art would knock me out.

When I was a kid, I used to go down Granville, right across the bridge, and these were the hams that I knew. This was a completely different world. Here I was at the high school, and I would go out and play badminton at the Vancouver Lawn Tennis and Badminton Club and all this kind of stuff, which is all with the children of the rich. Then I would caddy, you see, and I caddied with these kids who all came from the other side of Main Street. In fact, I invited one of these boys I caddied with to come to dinner. He was nice, but he was completely nonplussed; he’d never seen anybody sit down at a proper dining room table.

Anyway, on one of those trips up from town—it was a bit of a hill, so I used to push my bicycle up, and I went by this framing store, with reproductions—we won’t call them prints; they were reproductions—and there was a Van Gogh! It was The Zouave Soldier! I looked at this, and I was absolutely aghast! I’d never seen anything like it in my life. So I went in, and I asked him what this was, and he told me. I guess I was 17, somewhere around there. We had some paintings in our house, but they were sort of atmospheric things. This was something else. So I was knocked dead with that.

I went overseas and became aware of Graham Sutherland and all these people. I don’t know if you know his stuff, but, Jesus, oh, man, it’s wonderful stuff. I was really turned on by art, and I found out that children could do all these wonderful things.

So I chose to go into the arts, then teaching, then getting up to Pender Harbor in 1950. And that’s where I started to collect some songs. I had these records by Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger by this time. I won a contest. They had a talent contest, and I got to top prize for singing, with “Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill.” Hilda played the piano accompanying me. So you see, we were under the influence of all this stuff. Then Edith Fowke’s program began to come on, this hour long program called Folk Song Time. I wrote to Edith and made inquiries, and eventually...

I was calling square dances up there for the Christmas Concert; I had all the kids going around, and old people coming up and saying they hadn’t heard anything like this in years. This was a group of girls; the boys wouldn’t dance. They were doing really great; I was doing.

Four hands up and a-right around doing stars and all kinds of things. That would be ‘50-'51-'52, the Christmas Concert, and, boy, they came from miles around. It was a big thing, standing room only.

I won this prize for “Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill,” and I was teaching ballads, but not singing ballads because I hadn’t heard Rawhide yet, I hadn’t heard that MacColl stuff yet.

We were in Pender Harbor for two years; then I decided to come to Vancouver. We had two little girls, and we were going to have to move out of the teacherage. I arrived at my first school in Vancouver, and the principal, a guy I’d been to university went, said, “Hello, Phil, will you teach music?” [Laughter] I said, “Sure, I’ll teach music.” I knew a guy, Ralph James, auto wreckers, and I knew that he could get me a tape recorder wholesale, so I got me this 60 pound Webcor, and I used to record the singing program out of Winnipeg on the CBC, with a guy called Duncan, who taught songs, he had a choir there, and then I’d get Hilda to put accompaniments on, and so I could do all this stuff, because I didn’t play any instrument.

We had a lot of fun. We did all folk songs. “Casey Jones,” all that stuff. The kids loved it. So, I was teaching music there, and I was interested in children’s art, which I’d already been using, both there and up at Pender Harbor. I did a mural of my own about fishing, and I came down to UBC in the summer to take an extension course in painting.

Then they got Miss Waller in to teach music, and I was asked if I would teach all the art for grade five. The principal said, “You have one period of art in your timetable, and you’re to use that as you see fit, in correlation with social studies, English, or whatever you do.” So, I was doing all this stuff, and then the art supervisor came and saw what I was doing, and he took photographs of the stuff and used ‘em as slides in the course he was giving. Then he came to me and said, “Would you like an art room? There’s a new one opening down at Livingstone. You’ll have to go into a regular classroom until Christmas.” I said, “Sure.” So I had the art room. This got me into teaching in the summertime, painting in the park for the Confederation of Canadian Artists and eventually teaching Saturday morning art classes at the art school, and then Bob Davidson asked me if I would teach at UBC. That lasted for years and years.

And then eventually, Sam Black was retiring. He’s very well known here for prints and other things, he had been running classes at the Vancouver Art Gal-
So I worked with children, enjoying what they do—don’t dote on it, but enjoy. I don’t believe in taking children’s work and saying, “This is the best picture.” Or implying this. If any pictures are going up, the whole class’s go up. This is difficult, but nevertheless.... You see, you’re not trying to make artists, and you’re not trying to discourage people. You’re trying to encourage a very strong internalized image-making which tells stories, and everybody’s honest work deserves the same respect. So I would say to a teacher, “Yes, I have some pictures from your children, but they all have to go up. Tastefully displayed, but all up.” Someone says, “I’m going to frame them, and put them up, and I’ll take five.” But what about all the other people? We are doing things together here.

G—Can you relate that philosophy to your interest in folk music?

P—Well, I guess so. Now that you raise the question, I’d say yes. We don’t have to apologize for our version of a song, and I guess I’m nearer to a folk singer than I am to any other kind of singer, yet again, not a very talented folk singer in the sense that—well, I can change tunes, I can shift out of a mode into something else and not even know I’ve done it. I can even shift time. I’m really a musical illiterate. It’s Hilda who does something for me. She’s very musical and knows everything, you see. I couldn’t do what I’ve done with out her.

G—An interest in folk music, I think, demonstrates some sort of respect for what people do.

P—Yes, but, mind you, we suppress all the negative stuff. I mean, you get into folk music, and you get racist stuff and all kinds of stuff, you see, so we select. There’s all kinds of sexist stuff and all these things. People change the words, or they can’t sing that any more. But there was one song I change because it’s just not appropriate to sing it although I think I printed it with the original words, and

P—I don’t know. Just sounded good, I guess. That was the beginning. Then I’d heard another one up there, which is “The Pender Harbour Fisherman,” a song made up by loggers, to make fun of fishermen. On the 24th of May, Sports Day, the loggers and the fishermen had a tug of war. So you had this song with a local kind of a edge to it, made up by someone in the Klein Family, at a place up there called Kleindale. I’d heard it, so when I came to Vancouver, I wanted to get it. I had a tape recorder by this time, and I phoned the guy up and he sang it to me over the phone. I got two songs that way, over the phone. I got the “Moose Hunter’s Blues” over the phone from Bobby Ball.7 I met his sister, and she was the one who told me about it, that he’d got this song he’d made up. Georgiana Ball, she was a teacher in Victoria, and I met her in the archives over there. It was one of those crazy things; I usually tried to follow up every lead I got.

Edith Fowke’s Folk Song Time brought a whole awareness of song in Canada. Newfoundland had joined Canada. After the war, I went to the Palomar Ballroom, and there was Ed McCurdy singing during the break between the band. I think that maybe his wife came from around here; I forget. There’s some connection. Here he was, this tall guy, and the CBC was being very friendly to him, so he had a radio program every once in a while. Also Daryl Duke, who became quite a big film producer, was organizing a folk song program. The folk song revival had come up sufficiently that they wanted to do a program; they had a couple doing a folk song program, and Daryl Duke phoned me up and asked what would be a good theme song. Well, by this time we all knew Burl Ives, so I said, “Lolly Too Dum.” They called the program Lolly Too Dum, and Ernie Prentice and Natalie Minuzie used to come on singing that. The two of them did this program, and he came on himself on another program, and he called himself Ernie McCurdle. [Laughter] In other words, we had these guys singing these songs, and they came out of the Lomax collection; you didn’t know where they came from at the time, you know. The CBC, you had Edith with her
program. These programs were beautifully made. They had records, and she went off and got special copies of Helen Creighton's stuff out of the Library of Congress. So we heard ethnic stuff, and we heard the pop stuff, and, oh, we became aware of Richard Dyer-Bennett and all this kind of stuff, you see, and there was lots of fun in the songs.

I collected "The Pender Harbour Fisherman," and then I wanted more songs. We had all these singers, under the influence of Woody Guthrie and Burl Ives, and I said that we had to have more songs. I felt this in Pender Harbor. These people did not know—music was not "from here." This is not the way to bring people up! They have to have something here. So I wrote to the National Museum in Ottawa and asked did they have any songs based in the primary industries. They wrote back and said they didn't know what I meant. Seriously, it was ridiculous. "You mean logging and mining?" They sent me a copy of Come A Singing.

And I said, "That means we'll have to find some." You see, Edith had not done her Ontario work by that time. Barbara Cass-Beggs had not been in Saskatchewan. There wasn't anything of the west.

Jeanie Cox was Al Cox's wife. Her father was owner or manager of a logging company up the coast. His name was Allen. Jeanie had been raised in this logging camp country, Port McNeill, Vancouver Island, and she said, "When I was a girl, we used to go on the tugboat, down the Campbell River, and the fellow who had the tugboat sang songs." So I said, "Oh." We were having a holiday; my mother was paying for a holiday and renting a cabin for the kids and everything at Shawnigan Lake, and I said, "I'm going up to find Bill Hall." I'd ascertained he was in Campbell River. I went up, and I had my big tape recorder, but I didn’t have a portable. He sang me, “We'll take the real folk name, High Riggers. We'll gnaw your bones and drink your blood. Where the skies are always blue.

So we met Keith Crowe, and he had songs, and there was quite a singing life going on. Through Keith we'd met Rolf Ingelsrud, this wonderful guitar player, who actually sang Norwegian things. He'd studied the lute. So he was joining in with us, just as a social thing. He was musical, and Hilda was musical. Rolf was a very fine guitarist. "Phil, you must bring your banjo." So I'd watch his hands. We had this group of four, which we eventually called The High Riggers, and we got a couple of gigs...

G—The people up in the trees?

P—Yeah. It's a real Northwest Coast logging term, you see, for the spar tree.

There was another group starting. Paul Phillips, not the Winnipeg Paul Phillips, this was a Welshman, a Welsh-Englishman, who's now living in Victoria, who came out and was full of Ewan MacColl and Dominic Behan, and all of these people. He'd lived in London, and he knew all this. He started a ballad and blues club, following the English model. They had a group, called themselves Treetoppers. We said, "Well, that's no goddamn name for anything. Treetoppers. You'd think they were a lot of gardeners or something. In the yellow pages: Treetoppers." I said, "We'll take the real folk name, High Riggers." So it was really putting them down. They started the ballad and blues club the same month we started what became the Folk Song Society.

That was the beginning of the whole thing that happened here. It was a great revival. We'd have 200 people out there on certain nights. That was in the summertime, when you'd have to move outdoors. We were meeting at the Alma YMCA, and that'd be absolutely crowded, and we'd move outside on certain days.

Al Cox was involved in the Folk Song Society out at UBC; he became a focus for people, to know whom to make contact with if you came from out of town. Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger stayed at their place. Charles Seeger
I modified a few things. "We’re coming, Idaho," do you know that one? Our old mule team will soon be seen ‘Way out in Idaho.

Well, I came across some sheet music of that, so I said Our old mule team will soon be seen ‘Way up the Cariboo.

And so I had enough songs of some kind to get going, and a guy who was in my art class—now, let’s see, he would probably have been in grade 7 or something—Barry Hall, I gave him my banjo to play. Well, he could play better than I could! So he did, It’s four long years since I reached this land In search of gold among the rocks and sand.

Yet I’m poor when the truth is told, I’m a lousy miner, I’m a dirty miner In search of shining gold. In search of shining gold.

And he has this line, he’s fed on something, beans and pork, something, a reference to the pig, "till my bowels squeal," or something. Here’s ol’ Barry, in front of 1500 people—I mean it was in the high school, big sports gym, and all of the people had come to see their kids and take part in it. It was all the schools. And here’s Barry in the spotlight in the middle of this bloody thing. and he has a piece of old bear skin—a beard like yours, but black, a bear skin.11

So the Centennial thing opened things up, and people began to tell me about people who had songs. A woman who was at the library said that over on Mayne Island, one of the Gulf Islands, there was a guy, so Barry Hall and I went off looking for this guy, and we found him, Jimmy Neale. He came from Belfast, had been an upholsterer; he was told was the trip before she was sunk on a voyage of the Lusitania, which I think I wrote about in my book about the Great War. So I got songs. Every time I went somewhere, I got songs. This activity expanded my collecting in this indirect way. The people who came to my workshops wanted to be able to involve somebody, either boy scouts or their community groups or whatever, in singing. It was adventitious that someone had known me enough that they had asked me to go on this trip.

So, what have we done? We’ve covered the idea of my collecting songs all over the place and then building on this. Edith Fowke said, "Why don’t you do a record of British Columbia songs to go with Folkways?" So I was in communication with Moe Asch [founder of Folkways Records, which has been run by Smithsonian Institute since Asch’s death], and I produced a tape. Most of the stuff is on that record of mine. That was recorded in ’62, somewhere around in there. So that was all sent to Moe Asch.

The summer of ’65 I spent at MIT on a vocational training course—what to do with the grey area of people between the university-bound and the other people? We were involved in a whole review of the philosophy of education, and I was invited to participate in this because of my interest in creative work with children and music and things. I went to Moe Asch, and I said, "Look, I want it back because I’ve got more stuff. and I’ve..."
done some research into the tunes, and I want the tunes to be right." So he gave me the tapes, and when we left, he said it'd be two records, volume one and two.

G—You just gave up on Asch?

P—Well, life went by, you know. My book came out in 1979, and it seemed

P—Oh, yes. My record had a number, it was right down to that. I got along well with Asch when I was there, and I had been very close to Stan Triggs; Asch did his record.

G—I didn't know that Moe Asch had your record. But he didn't do it.

P—I got the things back. I wanted to change things. I wanted to call it Songs of Columbia North, and they would have to think about it, see, instead of the British Columbia thing. Columbia North. He thought that wasn't a good idea. I wanted the editorship of the notes. He did ball up some awful notes. Wrong photographs and all kinds of funny things. Those recordings went onto my record, along with other stuff I did in '68. And by this time I'd been out collecting more songs.

that here was an opportunity to sell some. We sold a thousand. I didn't go back to them Asch because I wasn't sure what the relationship was. I think there was a little bit of the old If-you-buy-enough-copies- we'll-do-your-record; he never said that to me, but there was an implication that things had to be paid. I think Triggs was paid in copies—I forget. I think you could grease the wheels a bit if you said, "Look, I'll take 500 copies."

There was also this other thing, these Communist people here—when my book came out, the Pacific Tribune people, the local Communist paper, did not review it, and a local Communist, whom I knew very well, apologized to me. He said it was a good book, and he apologized that they wouldn't review it. When Earl Robinson came, and I wanted to talk to him, Searle Friedman (Perry's older brother) and these guys tipped him off that I was not one of them. I was not one of the Communist Party people. There was a distinct change in his response. I was asking him about Elvis Presley's stuff, likening it to "Bottle Up and Go," "Borrow Love and Go," you know that song by Leadbelly?

I heard this all in Leadbelly, this black music. I was wanting to talk about this. And these guys, it was down at the Boilmakers' Hall, and I was trying to talk to Earl about this, and these guys gave him the tch tch, and he just shut off.

Notes

1 John Charles Thomas was a popular American baritone; he sang in musical theatre, recorded on Victor Red Label 78 rpm records, and was featured on American radio. He was the star imported singer at a Vancouver's 60th Anniversary Pageant in 1946. My opera buff friend tells me he was noted for his French repertoire both in France and in Belgium, and that he sang at the Met in NYC some 40 times before his concluding role in Faust about 1942. But such is the fate of the sometime famous; I have not found him in my reference books (Britannica, or Encarta's 1994 CD on Hilda's computer). (Perhaps we should rather say, "Such are the high tech ref. sources!") No wonder you don't know who he is. [PJ7]

2 I had the idea of transubstantiation but did not believe it happened. A Catholic family who lived at the other end of our block on Howe Street were rumored to celebrate communion daily. A gang of us stood on the sidewalk outside their house and chanted something ridiculing the practice; the father came out and told us we did not understand. We left it at that and didn't bother them again. We left it at that and didn't bother them again. This was when I'd be about 11 years old. My joke with my mother got a little smile from her. [PJ7]

3 Garnett Gladwyn Sedgewick. ...Of Irony, especially in Drama. The Alexander Lectures in English at the University of Toronto, 1934. Toronto: U Toronto P, 1948.

4 A.S. Neill's Summerhill School in England was renowned as a "free school." It was the precursor of many experimental, largely parent-run schools in Canada and elsewhere.
Hilda Thomas has been active musically from childhood, singing in festivals and playing the piano. She was a key voice with the folk group The High Riggers in the 1950s, and along with Phil she was a founding member of the Vancouver Folk Song Society. Today she continues to sing folk songs together with her own songs and political parodies.

Hilda grew up in Kimberley, British Columbia. At 16, she enrolled at UBC, and, on the side, was soon singing on a picket line in support of IWA woodworkers. At UBC she joined the Players Club and the Letters Club and became poetry editor of the undergrad literary magazine, The Thunderbird. She graduated in Honours English and Philosophy. Her MA thesis was the first academic study of Malcolm Lowry’s Under the Volcano.

She taught in UBC’s English Department for twenty-five years.

Hilda has been active in many causes, from leading an anti-Vietnam War committee to saving what became Pacific Spirit Park from developers. She was one of the founders of Vancouver’s Everywoman’s Health Centre, which provides counselling for women, in addition to safe abortions. She has been active in the NDP and chaired the federal NDP women’s committee in the early 80s.

In addition to all this, she continues to mother three children, enjoys gardening, and as spouse she ensures that Phil’s dietary needs (as a survivor of quadruple heart by-passes) are met.

Not just an ordinary life. And she keeps singing!

—PJT June 16, 1998

3 via the Internet: GWL—No, I don’t, and maybe our readers don’t. What do you want to say about him? PJT—He was one of the most important painters in England in the war and post-war period. He did great emotional landscapes and close-up nature themes. Designed tapestries for the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral, blasted by the Germans in the war—the city was a non-military target. Also very perceptive portraits. The great one he did of Churchill is only available from the photographs made of it, for the widowed Lady Churchill destroyed it when the old man died. An outrageous act and a great loss. Jesus, oh, man, it’s wonderful stuff. If you visit the Fine Arts Section of the Calgary Public Library or the Calgary University Library you will find him. It could be worth it!

6 Sam Black died; I went to his memorial service with a whole churchful. His choice of readings were good, but for the rest—to much salvation and afterlife for me! I would like to have known him more, to sort out that service properly. Ugh! Black was named a Master Teacher in an award before he retired. He was socially impeccable; as was said a number of times in the service, he was a "gentleman." Someone said a gentleman is a person who never unintentionally offends anyone. He may, indeed, have never ever offended anyone. [PJ7]

7 "Moose Hunter’s Blues" was printed in the Bulletin blues issue, 32.1.

8 Barbeau, Marius, Arthur Lismer, and Arthur Bourinot. Come A Singing! Canadian Folk Songs. National Museum of Canada Bulletin 107 (Anthropological Series 26). Ottawa: Department of Mines and Resources, 1947. This pamphlet presents 30 songs, which have been "revamped" by Barbeau and Bourinot, with the help of Douglas Leechman; some of the illustrations are charming, but not all of them can be counted among Lismer’s best work. [GWL]

9 A.L. Lloyd, an Australian folklorist and singer, was, like MacColl, a major influence in the British folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s.

10 The Howay-Reid Collection was named after Judge Howay, who became an authority on early trading ships to this coast, and Robey Reid, a lawyer who delved into our history. Their collection became the foundation for the Special Collection Division of the UBC Library. [PJ7]

11 Barry Hall was a Grade Six student in my home room class. That’s how we met. He was remarkably creative art student…. He always took whatever theme we were working on and truly was individual. I always encouraged each student to find his/her own way of doing anything. Barry went at times tangentially and was always deeply involved. The first 5-string banjo he handled was my old English zither-banjo. He made the Folkways record, The Virtuoso 5-String Banjo. He can play anything: 5-string, and tenor banjos; mandolin; harmonica, jew’s harp, guitar. He is a great blues player and has gigs to do festival workshops on blues guitar. He has written many songs, of a wide variety.

He is an artist in graphics and sculpture, was at one time a scholarship student at the San Francisco Art Institute, and was offered an extended scholarship which he declined (perhaps with some regret in retrospect). He was not to be put in a box by anybody. He was a singer in a fundamentalist group, doing gospel songs, when we met. (He’d make an interesting interview, but a full profile would be many-layered.) [PJ7]