

Salon March 26, 2016

State of the Art

## It turned out to be a week full of fond memories

When he was four, Andrew Spencer, the grandson of our beloved neighbour Dot Matthews, was told that my husband was a poet. Andrew decided he too wanted to be a poet. He would sit at his grandfather Murray's desk, scribble notes, and shyly put them in our mailbox. For a reason my kids and I can't remember, Bill called him Googoo.

I wish Bill was here the afternoon Googoo, with his own two beautiful googoes and his mother Nancy, came to deliver Andrew's first book of poetry, *?*, published by Broken Jaw Press. If I had to say the title out loud, I don't know what I would say; "Question Mark", I suppose.

I don't often get a chance to print a whole poem here, but several of Spencer's poems are short enough. "Woke up in moss/cold, moist, and alive/Becoming the intangible/Wondrous sleep/Morning/The stars shine brightest/before the dawn". The cover was designed by the little googoes' mother, Krizy Shepherd; the cover illustration is also the title. These are the poems of a young man having found some of the answers to his searching.

On March 17 I went to a St. Patrick's Day party given by an authentic Irishman, Gerry Beirne. The occasion was also the launch of Beirne's first collection of short stories, *In a Time of Drought and Hunger*, published by Oberon Press. The stories are set in northern Manitoba in a Cree community where Gerry and his family settled when they first came to Canada.

This Oberon launch brought back memories of the Oberon launches we had at our house years ago. David Adams Richards told me that Oberon would like to launch *The Coming of Winter*, his first novel, at someone's house. We just had an addition put on that made our house feel gigantic, so I offered ours. It was a gala affair. A nice coincidence was that the League of Canadian Poets was holding its annual meeting in Fredericton, and we invited them as well as the Fredericton writers. Dorothy Livesay was here, Alden Nowlan, Robert Gibbs, Kent Thompson—I think about 150 people. The publishers, Ann and Michael Macklem, were delighted that we sold so many books. We held other Oberon launches—for Joseph Sherman's first book of poetry, Ann Copeland's first book of short stories, Richards' *The Road to the Stilt House*. I wrote about the New Brunswick/Oberon connection in *Arts Atlantic*.

The launch at the Beirne house was also full of interesting people, with food, music, a reading.

It turned out to be a week full of memories. The University of New Brunswick Art Centre held the launching of Roslyn Rosenfeld's biography of Lucy Jarvis, *Even Stones Have Life* and the opening of two exhibits. I never met Jarvis, the founder of the Art Centre, but I heard a lot

about her. The large crowd that gathered was full of people my age, even older, people who had known her.

One of the exhibits was of Peggy Nichol MacLeod's puppet show, Peter and the Wolf, now owned by Dick and Brigid Toole Grant. Grant conducted the puppet show at the 1965 annual University of New Brunswick family Christmas party, our family's first attendance. These puppets are marionettes, and Terry Graff, one of the speakers at the opening, remarked at how amazing the machinery was. Be sure to notice this intricate collection of strings if you go.

In 1965 Jarvis was gone, but the Art Centre was still a hub for cultural activities, under Marjory Donaldson and Bruno Bobak. When a group of us decided to publish a chapbook series, I went there to get their expert opinion. The two of them offered to design the cover. I was inordinately proud of the fact that two such fine artists had created the design. Donaldson even silk-screened the coloured band with the series number. Remembering Donaldson, I once again thought that it's about time a retrospective exhibit be mounted of her outstanding paintings.

Now I have two books to read. The *question mark* I will re-read. I still have four Beirne stories to enjoy. Those I have read are exceptionally vivid, full of fascinating details of life in the north.

I'm only 30 pages into the Jarvis biography. It's a handsome book, full of her paintings and other illustrations, designed by the incomparable Julie Scriver. I keep stopping to write down sentences: Jarvis "turned her back on the commercial art world. 'I don't sell paintings; people buy them.'" She's a kindred spirit, I think. Stuart Smith wrote about her last exhibit: "a lightened palette and agitation of surface."

An artist friend said he wished he had been in her art centre circle, that it seemed like such a lively and free community. A young Brigid Toole Grant was in the group, obviously excited and inspired to perpetuate Jarvis' work by painting and teaching herself.