

Simon Says

Fall 2010

Simon Fraser University
Retirees Association



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Leigh Palmer, Professor Emeritus, honoured at 2010 BCAPT AGM May 10, 2010



The 2010 Annual General Meeting of the British Columbia Association of Physics Teachers was held at Langara College on May 8th. Leigh Palmer was presented with a Lifetime Achievement award in recognition of his leadership and contributions to the teaching and learning of physics.

Leigh recently retired from a long career in SFU's Physics Department where he was well known for his prowess at lecture demonstrations and his interest in physics education research. He was one of the founders of the BC Chapter of the American Association of Physics Teachers in 1984, and

is still involved in their activities. Leigh had just ended his presentation on the physics behind the Real-D technology used in Avatar when the award was announced, along with a cake to celebrate his 75th birthday. Congratulations Leigh!

REFLECTIONS

Len Evenden, Past President

Some time ago I called on Harry Evans in his new "digs" in Coquitlam. I had a job to do, namely to deliver to Harry the SFURA Mug of Honour, awarded to him at the recent AGM. And so the two of us spent a couple of uninterrupted hours together over a cup of Harry's best blend. This put me in a reflective mood and I found myself casting my mind back over the last couple of years of involvement with SFURA.

As members know, the association started over a decade ago, gathering strength over a few short years. Along with a number of others, Harry was at the centre of the initiative. He told me how both Presidents Bill Saywell and Jack Blaney had, at the earliest stages of discussion, supported the idea of establishing an SFU retiree group. Later, President Michael Stevenson provided steady encouragement throughout his term of office and, among other actions, appointed Vice-President Warren Gill to act as the university's official connection to SFURA. There can be no doubt that the association owes its

existence to the imagination, dedication and effort of a number of people, but here I would like to acknowledge the encouragement of these University Presidents and to Vice-president Gill. In addition, SFURA has benefited from the advice and support of others, particularly the Human Resources office under Alan Black.

A couple of years ago, Marv Wideen called to ask if I would join the executive with a view to running for president. I had little idea of what would be involved but soon discovered there was plenty to learn! The pleasure of my involvement stemmed from having a capable, conscientious and congenial group of colleagues to work with. We learned from one another, particularly from the members of long standing. Along the way the association has tried to initiate activities that would provide social pleasure, endeavoured to contribute to the aims of the university and has tried also to pursue suggestions relating to benefits for members. In my own case, I joined SFURA simply to stay in touch and then discovered the many possibilities of *how* to stay in touch with university affairs and acquaintances *through* the association. Others may have joined for more specific reasons, such as receiving the newsletter or the privilege of occasional parking. A few have expressed interest in the fact that a national group of associations has been formed and is gradually gaining strength. (This is the College and University Retiree Associations of Canada – CURAC.) And it may also be of general interest to know that the executives of the associations at UVic, UBC and SFU have recently set up a regular system of contact and collaboration through semi-annual meetings. I would not be surprised if this (quite vigorous) discussion were to lead to beneficial results at some point. Overall, there are various avenues by which one can enjoy a fuller retirement through membership.

While “reflections” might be a good place to muse about the larger issues of why such groups as ours are being established in growing numbers, let me take the limited space available here to mention some recent and specific matters concerning our own group. No particular order of importance is intended, and most points refer to on-going matters that may have been initiated years ago and for which former members deserve credit.

Several years ago the short illustrated history of SFURA and three DVDs of reminiscences were completed.* These contributed to the establishment of the association’s identity and to documenting the university’s history. More comprehensively, the website, constructed by Norman Swartz and linked to the SFU website, provides information about the association, its activities and records. A newly designed website, with interactive features, will soon be up and running. A newsletter has always been produced but recently there has been a need to regularize it. Tom Poiker has done this, developing a new format and now distributing it largely via the internet (following a vote at the AGM to take this action). This too is a record of the association, its activities and contributions from members. In a further step, our new and elegant logo, designed by Chris Hildred, symbolizes our association as distinct from but related to the university. This logo may be seen on the coffee mugs that are available (for a modest price) and also on the Mugs of Honour that are awarded periodically.

Space has been made available on the Burnaby Mountain campus for a desk, places to hold executive and other small meetings and to store records. Setting up this “office” has involved a gradual transition and shift of orientation (and some physical work!) but the task is now largely complete. Marv Wideen was active in negotiating for this space, but we are all indebted to Marg Jones for taking care of most of the records and responding to most of the enquiries from her campus office in the Recreation Department -- for years! Now, given this new space, Evelyn Palmer is heading up an archives project. And while we are referring to premises and infrastructure we might note that, at the suggestion of President Stevenson, contact was made with Gordon Harris, President and CEO of SFU Community Trust, the developer of UniverCity. Our concern was to ensure that the design work of the new residential and institutional environments would take into account the needs of seniors at all stages, and we have been reassured on this general point.

Gradually we have come to appreciate that our activities should be organized on as regular a basis as possible. The aim is to make them a recognized and expected part of the university’s timetable. We might note that our activities fall into two broad groupings – those that are for the social pleasure of the membership and those that contribute to the life of the university. In the latter case, perhaps our best-known activity is the seminar series held at the Halpern Centre. We sponsor lectures and discussion, open to all, on a wide variety of topics. These are quite well attended by members of the university, including graduate students, and I would rate this as a major contribution. After some experimentation with schedules, these will now be held three times a semester, during the third, sixth and ninth weeks. Beyond this, we have tried, with limited success so far, to track the contributions by individual members to campus and intellectual life. But we do know that such contributions involve continued research and publication, the directing of graduate students, conducting examinations, attendance at disciplinary meetings, volunteering as subjects for research in Gerontology and related subjects, attendance at convocation, helping in fund raisers such as the garden and book sales -- and more.

The success of any organization such as ours, comprising a voluntary membership, depends upon the suggestions and actions of members. Not all suggestions find support and participation, but two in particular have been successful. One is the occasional series of finance interest seminars, organized by Marv Wideen. These have been remarkably well attended, often attracting an audience from outside our membership – another contribution to university life. The second is the walking group, initiated by Ted Cohn and now jointly organized by Ted, Dave Ryeburn and Bob Horsfall. This is a weekly activity that one can watch out for, and participate in -- to “stay in shape” as the years roll by! On one occasion, the walk took the form of a “field trip” to the North Shore, led by Mike Roberts, to examine the evidence of debris flows and their impacts on residential properties. In addition, social activities and outings form a regular part of SFURA’s life, and have included theatre visits, sporting events, garden party singing and tours of specific

places – Chinatown, the Ismaili Centre in Burnaby, the Port of Vancouver and more. Last but not least, and the most social of all occasions, are the fall dinner, the Ides of March reception and the spring AGM and dinner. Kudos here to several members over the years, perhaps most notably Marg Jones and now Kersti Jaager as well.

These musings are not intended to be a comprehensive reckoning of my time as SFURA president, and I have not mentioned every contribution by individual members. Many more folks have contributed significantly; they know who they are and I am sure they have the collective thanks of the membership. But I also want to make the point, clichéd and didactic though it may be, that one gets out of an activity what one puts into it. Some members have communicated with me and with others on the executive with notes of appreciation, complaint, criticism and a few suggestions. Collectively, such communications contribute to the general involvement that holds the organization together, and I hope such communications continue. In my conversation with Harry Evans, referred to above, we recalled a wise former faculty member, Jim Wilson, now deceased. Jim was the co-head of BC Hydro during the years of the Barrett government, charged with the responsibility of ensuring that a social dimension was incorporated into all the major projects undertaken by Hydro. On one occasion during that time, Jim concluded a lecture to a large audience of students and academics by averring that to get anything done right “you have to be there”.** In this vein one might urge: join, attend, make suggestions or develop an activity. “Be there”, stay with it, and others will come along too. As for me, “it’s been a slice” to serve on the executive of SFURA, and I hope members will give strong support to Marilyn Bowman during the time of her presidency.

* Copies of each are still available.

** Jim summarized the results of this work, including field work when he “was there”, in *People in the Way: the human aspects of the Columbia River Project*. University of Toronto Press, 1973. (SFU library HD 1694 A2)

A Fiery Experience

Ron Long

On June 16 I was on top of Pink Mountain which is in the far north of BC. I was there to photograph rare alpine plants but as I watched a single lightning strike ignited a forest fire in the valley below. When I came down from the mountain about four hours later I found the flames raging only about one K from the Alaska Highway. The highway shoulder gave me a great vantage point from which to photograph the fire. I stayed there for a couple of hours and photographed as tankers dropped a combination of retardant and mud on the fire. It was very impressive how quickly they knocked down those enormous flames. The next day a couple of helicopters were dropping buckets of water on hot spots and ground crews have worked for five days at mopping up. The small community of Pink Mountain was put on evacuation alert which caught media attention. I received e mails from several friends all saying approximately the same thing - "I heard that Pink Mountain is on fire - are you OK?" On June 20 a friendly helicopter pilot gave me

an opportunity to shoot the burn from the air and I was surprised at how small the burned area is - about 57 ha I'm told. That is further testimony to how effective those ariel tankers are. So now photographing wildflowers is going to seem a little tame but I have another month in the north and almost anything may happen.



Membership Statistics

New - Clyde Reed Joan Collinge Warren Burton Marge Kroeker
Judith MacKenzie Margaret Jackson Jean Trask
Susan Stevenson Marie Ann Elder Betty Chung Bruce Harwood

Renewed - Fred Murray, Paul Delaney Larry Albright

Deceased - Eric Bannister Ken Thornton Alan Aberbach

Membership: 351

Financial Planning Interest Group

Marvin Wideen, Tom O'Shea, Philip Mah

The F P Interest Group aims to organize events and seminars on financial planning that will engage retirees and others from the University community. We hope this will promote discussion of topic and issues to expand understanding and knowledge of financial matters effecting our retirement planning.

Our last two seminars have involved planners and money managers discussing topics such as exchange traded funds (ETFs), managed accounts, and a strategy for pension income preservation. A complete list of the seminars organized by the FP Interest group can be found on the SFURA website,

We have set out a partial program for next year. The topics include estate planning, travel insurance, reports from a panel of retirees about their financial planning, and a revisiting of the Sun Life funds.

Please pass on any ideas or questions you may have to us (widen@sfu.ca, oshea@sfu.ca, pmah@sfu.ca) and we will circulate them to members of our planning committee. We are looking forward to an interesting and provocative program for next year.

Did You Know?

We have a \$1000 limit in reimbursement per year in our pacific blue cross dental coverage. AND there is a limit on the number of xrays they will cover. Check out the terms of our PBC dental coverage. Turns out you can get up to date information on your limits and amount claimed to date for both medical and dental benefits by logging in to your PBC account.

Whispered in the ear of the Benefits Committee by Elizabeth Michno.

A Day at the Races: The Marg Jones Stakes

Tom O'Shea, Socialist

"I got a horse right here, his name is Paul Revere,
And here's a guy who says if the weather's clear
Can do, can do. This guy says the horse can do."

Mark your calendars and get out your tip sheets. SFURA's nth annual outing at the Hastings Racetrack will be held on Saturday, August 14th.

For more information, write to Tom O'Shea at oshea@sfu.ca

The Second Swinging Soirée

Tom O'Shea, Socialist

The 32 SFURA members who attended the SFURA Swinging Soirée on June 25th at the home of Evelyn and Leigh Palmer may still be humming the songs of the evening. Entertainment featured the Chemsemble Choir (Chemistry Department plus friends), conducted by Irene Percival with Nathan Mah (Philip's son) at the keyboard. The audience participated in a sing-along to begin and end the evening. In between the choir showed off their fine repertoire. The highlight was the performance, with audience participation, of Tom Lehrer's *The Elements* (a wonderfully appropriate piece for a chemistry-based choral group). Special thanks to the



choir (lots of practices), Irene (lots of advance preparation, including song sheets), and Nathan (for his skilled and instinctive accompaniment).

The party was held outside on the Palmers' deck, and a light breeze wafted up from Deer Lake. At times the temperature seemed to drop and your past, past president, Norman Swartz, showed his gallantry by putting his arm around Sylvia (his wife) and giving her his jacket. Members contributed pot-luck dishes for dinner and our organization through randomness once again resulted in a fine array of appetizers, hot and cold main dishes, and desserts.

We are all indebted to Leigh and Evelyn for their hospitality again this year...lots of house preparation, borrowing of chairs, organization of the kitchen, etc. Marg Jones and Polly Evenden saw to the laying out of food and organization of the clean-up, for which we all are very grateful. Others pitched in to

help where needed. Many thanks to all -- for coming and contributing to a great evening.

AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA AND ARMENIA

Malcolm Page

In the Spring I was asked if I would like to be the Canadian delegate to the International Association of Theatre Critics assembly. (I was the delegate two years ago, to a meeting in Bulgaria). This time, Yerevan, Armenia. Armenia was not on my radar, as they say. "Armenia?" I said to Christine, my partner. "Near Azerbaijan - I've friends there," she replied, "and near Georgia, and Turkey, and..." In a few seconds we had decided to go..

We flew into Baku, Azerbaijan. We stayed with the friends, New Zealanders who taught at the International School, so we were mostly among expatriates. Baku is prosperous with oil, hence much new building and the pollution of the Caspian Sea. The walled old city is an intriguing mix of cafes, souvenir shops, 'oil-boom mansions' of the 1880-1910 era, and mosques. These were little used; Azerbaijan must be the only Muslim country in the world where most are non-practising. We paid admission to the 15th century Palace of the Shirvanshahs at 5.45 and exactly six minutes later attendants began driving us out for closing time. We had an introduction to a theatre director; unfortunately, her English was limited and the translator we had tried to arrange did not arrive. We saw a comedy by the Neapolitan, Eduardo de Filippo. At intermission the director appeared and said "I will take you to the seaside," which meant sightseeing. She commandeered an actor as driver and took us to various viewpoints. Late in the evening, we stopped on a hilltop. We were hungry, but she ordered tea, served with two teaspoons of jam, tea being the national drink.

We flew out of Baku to Tbilisi, Georgia, at 9.30 p.m. Landing, the terminal looked like the one we had left but at first we attributed this to standardized Soviet architecture, before realising that we were back in Baku. Finding anyone to give information in English was hard, but we found that the weather was bad in Tbilisi and that the plane might leave again in half an hour or an hour. Later came news that the flight would be at 8.0 a.m., followed by uncertainty as to whether or not luggage would be unloaded. Finally, a brash but kindly American organized us to the airport hotel and beat down the price. (He was President and chief shareholder of the Georgian American University, which taught only Law and Business)

In Tbilisi, we had arranged 'home-stay.' The owner in fact did not have a spare room and had put up beds in the studio in which she taught piano. She was eager that we see Georgia and indeed came with us to bus stations to find the right bus for our outings. I was eager to see Tbilisi as my father was there with a British army unit for several months in 1919; somewhere I have his letters

home to his parents. (The army was there to defend independent Georgia, but withdrew before the Red Army marched in) Tbilisi was destroyed in a Persian attack in 1795, so the buildings even in the 'old city' are 19th century. Again we had an introduction to a theatre director, and saw a late 19th century farce. The title was translated for us as "First Dead, Then Married;" the play has not been translated. Some of its humour apparently turns on an Armenian trying to speak Georgian. Ketik, the director, gave us an introduction to the Mother Superior of Bodbe convent: one of my odder experiences has to be being shown round a convent - in Georgia. Many people were lined up to see the grave of St Nino, who converted Georgia to Christianity in 326; accompanied by the Mother Superior, we bypassed the line-up.

A taxi driver who not only spoke no English but had not been there before took us to Gori and its Stalin Museum. Georgia still reveres Stalin as 'local boy made good,' though the statue of Stalin was removed by night two weeks after our visit. On the same trip we saw the cave-city of Uplistsikhe, with a population of up to 20,000 from prehistoric times to about 1000, and the churches of Mtskheta, two small ones dated about 600, and thus older than any stone churches I have seen in Britain. A long bus ride to Kazbegi took us among snow-capped mountains of the Caucasus range; Prometheus was bound to the biggest. With two young Americans and a Georgian girl we went to the monastery at Davit Gareja. We scrambled up a vertical path for some 2,000 feet - the day was hot, too - and then found an amazing array of caves once occupied by monks, each with fading frescos - and in early evening the sun was illuminating each cave.

We flew on to Yerevan, a city of about a million with, we were told, twenty theatres and two movie-theatres. Yerevan has an art gallery bettered only by Moscow and St Petersburg, because paintings were sent there for safety during the war and never returned. The working language of the assembly was English, and - though very few had it as a first language - I was amazed at the fluency. I collected cards from such people as a Portuguese academic specializing in contemporary British theatre and the Director of the National Theatre of Macedonia. We saw nine plays, all in Armenian, chosen from 17 possibilities. Four were well-known texts, including Macbeth; two were puppets and marionettes; two provided hand-outs in English first, which left just one where plot and character were totally bewildering, forcing us to focus on sets, costumes, sound and lighting! Fortunately Christine shares my inexhaustible appetite for theatre, whatever the language. We had a last-night party in a theatre bar, sampling a lot of local cognac, then the next night going to a golf club in the outskirts (which taxi drivers typically had trouble finding), where the emphasis was on local champagne. (Though Armenia is poor, apparently conference organizers can find money). We had two outings, to the monastery at Khor Virap, close to Mount Ararat, which is across the closed border, in Turkey, and to the churches of Echmjadzin, where a reliquary has two fragments of wood from the cross and another from Noah's ark - am I gullible?

Two reflections. I had supposed that the collapse of the Soviet Union twenty years ago had led peacefully to the independence of these countries. Not so: Armenia and Azerbaijan fought in 1994 and the border is still closed; Russia invaded Georgia in August 2008; Georgia favours Europe while Armenia may lean more to Russia. Georgia and Armenia both have populations of about four million; both have great national pride and welcome attention. Nowhere are there tourists (Christine and I were of course travellers). The languages of the three countries are different, with different scripts. Few speak English. The younger generation learn it in school, but we found no teenagers who could go beyond "What your name?" and "Where you from?" Consequently ordering a meal and finding one's way about is always a challenge - perhaps the way travel was a hundred years ago.

Volunteering at CNIB

Bob Horsfall

I asked Ron at the SFU centre for disabilities about volunteering opportunities with the blind, and he immediately connected me with Jill Jukes @ CNIB. Her response was too long to fit in this Newsletter, so I summarize below. If you're interested, please contact me <horsfall@sfu.ca>, and I'll be happy to provide you with the full text. If you're still interested, a questionnaire is involved, followed by an interview with Jill at the CNIB office across the street from the Joyce Skytrain Station, followed later by an orientation and training session.

You would be matched with a visually impaired person (VIP) who lives close to your home, school or work. You would go over once a week for a couple of hours to provide sighted assistance with four kinds of activities: reading (usually the mail, bills, newspapers, etc), errands (groceries and other shopping), going for walks and social visiting. Vision mate volunteers do not drive VIPs in their cars: all outings are on foot, by transit (including Handy Dart) or by taxi (the VIP pays).

You will be matched with someone whose schedule is compatible with yours, and you set up mutually convenient times to meet. It can be the same day and time every week, or you can schedule visits week-to-week if that works better for you. It's ok to miss a week or two or to reschedule if something comes up - as long as you give your VIP as much notice as possible.

Vision mates must be reliable, patient, responsible and friendly. You either have strong English skills or are willing to volunteer in your native language. The waiting list is constantly changing as matches begin and end almost every day. So there is no way of knowing today who will be waiting for volunteer support in your area when you are ready for a placement. If at that time there are no suitable potential matches in your neighbourhood, we will either look at other areas of the lower mainland or wait for a new request close to home - it's your choice.

Retiring Slowly – Retiring Early

Tom Poiker

“Hello Tom:

I am writing to you as the Editor of the SFURA newsletter. I am an SFU employee who is contemplating taking early retirement. I have done the official thing - visited Alan Black in Human Resources, done the financial planning, etc. But I find that once SFU retirees leave to start their retirement lives, I don't see them on campus to chat about their new lives.

I have been reading your on-line newsletters, to see if anyone has any "words of wisdom" for those of us contemplating retirement. Concrete ideas, not vague suggestions about eg., getting a hobby. In fact, your article about travelling to Mexico and the spin-offs that trip has led to, was very interesting.

Is this something a future newsletter could address?”

I am not sure how “concrete” this is going to be but it might be a start. I will tell you my own “retirement process”. That might give you a few ideas. In the middle 1990s, some European colleagues tried to convince me that their consortium for an online program in our field (Geographic Information Systems) could use an expansion into North America. I found the idea interesting, especially because it would provide education for people that lived away from the centres of education, especially mature students in the North and the Interior. I got the agreement of the university fairly quickly, even though my department wasn't too enthusiastic – they didn't like distance learning much.

So I started writing. Much of the material had to be updated and/or translated from German. By 1997, I had completed about half of the 1500 pages that I eventually wrote and we accepted the first intake. So, now I had a full day-time program, lots of pages to write and some 27 students to supervise. I was desperate for help. But my Chairman said, cynically, “I'm not giving you a penny”. A week later, the Dean refused the buy-out of one day-time course by the program because my teaching was needed. That day, in the afternoon, we visited our financial advisor who said ‘you know, you were lucky, you could retire tomorrow.’” A couple of months later, I informed my chairman that I would retire from the department. Of course, I moved to another department, “Continuing Studies”, the day after I left Geography – for half pay - but I left behind all the committees, all the arguments over whether distance learning was “academic” and I left behind all the students that took courses for the credit they needed and not for content that interested them. I was 61 when that happened.

From then on, I worked at home, interacted only with two academic assistants and two very amiable administrators, still a full-time job but it felt very much like half-retired. My students were older but very interested in the topic, with good questions, good ideas and very friendly interaction. Even though we communicated by email (with the exception of a yearly seminar in Vancouver), we thought we knew each other better than regular students know each other and their professor. Also, I could circumvent the mandatory retirement at 65 that so many of my colleagues hated and basically worked until I was 69.

So, what is the lesson from this story. Simply, retirement is not work stoppage. Study what you don't like about your present work and try to eliminate those components. But keep those parts that you enjoy as long as possible. This is why so many retired people say that they work harder than ever before but now they enjoy every bit of it. This is the sign of well-planned retirement.

Can anybody add some advice for this lady?

Fall 2010 Seminars

Mike Roberts

September 21st (Tuesday)

Marilyn Bowman: *'Cities of the Silk Road: Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva'*

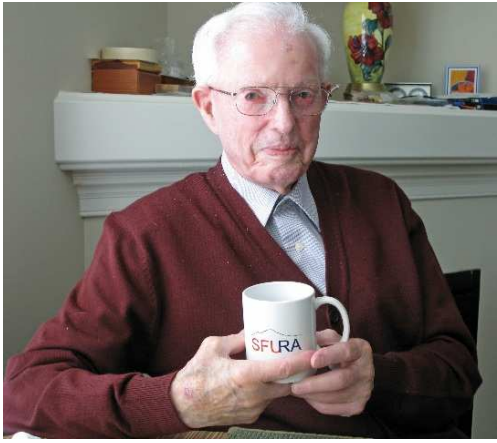
October 19th (Tuesday)

Herb Grubel & Don DeVoretz: *'The Fiscal Cost of Mass Immigration'*

November 16th (Tuesday)

Rolf Mathewes: *'Flower Power' helps catch criminals: experiences in forensic botany'*

All talks will be in the Halpern Centre (Rm 126) at Noon



Harry Evans receives the SFURA Mug of Honour in his new "digs". The Mug is not only a token of SFURA's appreciation, but it is also a house-warming gift! SFURA is nothing if not flexible!



Lionel Funt receives the SFURA Mug of Honour in a neighbourhood coffee shop, but drinks Orange Pekoe tea! He clutches the Mug in his left hand, but his right hand holds Donna! The camera sees all!

In Memoriam—Alan Aberbach



One of the most active SFU seniors and members of SFURA died on Sunday, August 1st. A charter member of the History Department, he was the American History specialist there for 32 years. He even founded an “American History Fellowship”. Many students remember him for his enthusiastic lectures, an enthusiasm that earned him a “teacher-of-excellence” award.

There were two other fields that gave Alan much joy and endeared him to many people outside the History Department, especially seniors.

The first was his love for Opera. As a student, he heard over 500 performances and, in later life, gave him the opportunity to give many courses in the field. He also was instrumental in the organization of opera, especially as the founder of the Vancouver Opera Club that grew to over 1000 members after 10 years, the largest Opera Club in North America.

The second activity that made Alan a hero outside of History was his Directorship of the Seniors Program at Simon Fraser University, Harbour Centre. He attributed his decision of taking over the management of the program to the memory of his mother who earned a university degree late in her life. He was always very happy, sometimes exuberant, in the way he ran the program. He personified it.

We will miss you, Alan.