

## CONTENTS

*Introduction* / 1

### - Arriving -

BRIAN BRETT

The Beaches of Clayoquot / 11

ALEXANDRA MORTON

Beloved / 17

DARCY DOBELL

Ecosystem / 23

NADINE CROOKES (KLIIAHTAH)

Being Nuu-Chah-Nulth / 29

JOANNA STREETLY

Finding Home / 33

CHANDRA WONG

Uncharacteristically Simple / 41

HELEN CLAY

Called Home / 45

### - Yearning -

ANDREW STRUTHERS

Excerpts from *The Last Voyage of the Loch Ryan* / 53

CHRISTINE LOWTHER

Facing the Mountain / 60

MICHAEL SCOTT CURNES

All in a Day's Dream / 73

KEVEN DREWS

Never Say Never / 82

JOANNA STREETLY

Midnight at Catface / 89

SHERRY MERK

Love Song to Clayoquot Sound / 91

- Immersing -

SUSAN MUSGRAVE

An Excluded Sort of Place / 101

DAVID PITT-BROOKE

November Day of the Dead: Seeking Y'aq-wii-itq-quu?as  
(Those Who Were Here Before) / 107

ELI ENNS

From the Heart of Clayoquot Sound / 113

BETTY SHIVER KRAWCZYK

Excerpts from *Clayoquot: The Sound of My Heart* / 123

VALERIE LANGER

A Groundswell is a Wave / 132

DIANNE IGNACE

Thirty Years in Hesquiat / 142

ROB LIBOIRON

A Sound Existence / 150

- Lingerin' -

ADRIENNE MASON

Stone Heart / 159

KATE BRAID

A Series of Poems on the Paintings of Emily Carr / 168

KEITH HARRISON

Hornby Island: The Nature of Home / 174

GREG BLANCHETTE

Forty Kilometres from Home / 179

JANIS MCDOUGALL

So, When Are You Moving Back? / 189

ANITA SINNER

The Sensual Coast: Living in the Everyday / 195

- Encountering -

BRIONY PENN

Sex in the City: Love in the Forest / 205

CAROLYN REDL

On a Quest for the Western Screech Owl / 210

BONNY GLAMBECK

Commuting by Kayak / 220

FRANK HARPER

Bright Solstice Darkness / 227

JOANNA L. ROBINSON AND DAVID B. TINDALL

Defending the Forest: Chronicles of Protest at Clayoquot Sound / 232

HANNE LORE

Contact Luna / 248

CATHERINE LEBREDT

A Collection / 254

*Contributor Biographies / 265*

## INTRODUCTION

The great land mass of North America meets the northern Pacific Ocean in a jagged array of mountains, deep valleys, fiords and islands. Clayoquot Sound on the central west coast of Vancouver Island is home to the largest intact temperate rainforest remaining on the Island. Here, where great winds and ocean swells bring fog and rain that can last for weeks, ecosystems of unparalleled beauty and diversity have evolved.

*Writing the West Coast* explores living on this western edge and, by extension, represents paths to awareness, understanding and being in one's bioregion. Perhaps real love comes from the day when we glean our information from our surroundings rather than from computer screens, although we have both. Incoming weather systems, moon phases and tides, wildlife behaviour, even how high or low (fast or slow) a creek is running can inform our daily lives. This kind of connection, ingrained in first nations culture —

learning to read the natural signs around us, and realizing how to use that information — makes us feel at home in nature. It fosters appreciation of and gratitude toward the land. If our link to place goes back generations, we feel in our bones that we belong. Conversely, if we come here fleeing alienation and then find solace in beauty, our affection is quickly gained. Further, when we experience coastal storms and their shrinking of our own significance, our respect is increased, our “place” as mortal humans acknowledged and confirmed.

A common story among non-aboriginal inhabitants is that they came to visit, and decided to stay. They were captured by a beautiful area, by a magnetic, intriguing environment, by invigorating air stinging with salt — and were transformed. As visitors, they found it relaxing and rejuvenating. But as home the west coast is not an easy place. In defence of the ancient rainforest, so much of which has been destroyed by human rapacity, the inhabitants of Clayoquot have placed their own bodies between forest and chainsaw. In 1993, in the largest civil disobedience action seen in Canada, the inhabitants of the Sound were joined by thousands of protestors from other parts of the world.

Clayoquot is both Nuu-chah-nulth traditional territory and a UN-designated Biosphere Reserve, offering such beauties as Pretty Girl Cove, the Ursus Valley, the Megin River, the Moyeha watershed, Meares Island, the Clayoquot River Valley, the Sydney Estuary and Flores Island. Some of these areas are protected from industries such as logging, Atlantic salmon farming and mining. Some are partially safeguarded while some remain completely unprotected. Often the protected areas are fragmented and vulnerable to roads, which can be built through them to reach unprotected areas. Indeed, anyone flying over certain parts of the Sound today will hear chainsaws, roadbuilding blasts, and ancient trees falling. Granted, the volume of trees cut in 2007 was one third of 1993’s volume, but the forest industry’s appetite for “fibre” continually threatens the last remaining intact valleys of the region.

Although the tourist brochures like to speak of the area as “wilderness,” in fact the native villages have been here thousands of

years. Across the harbour from Tofino is Opitsat, Esowista is at Long Beach, Ahousat is on Flores, and Hot Springs Cove has its own village. There are many more traditional sites such as Echa-chist, Yarksis, Kakawis and Hesquiat. From ancient middens and culturally modified trees, to a two-hundred-year-old bead-encrusted anchor dredged from the deep, and on to our present-day villages and towns, humans have created links to the coast, altered the area substantially, and have themselves been changed.

For visitors, one of the more popular sites is the Meares Island Big Tree Trail. Here a red cedar, “the Hanging Garden Tree,” estimated to be a thousand years old, impresses visitors with its massive diameter of 5.9 metres. Before the “Earth Mother” cedar on Meares fell in the autumn storms of 2006, it was Canada’s largest tree by volume, at 293 cubic metres, and approximately 1,500 years old. But the popularity of large trees can cause people to overlook the fact that the rainforest comprises a wide range of vegetation. In addition to western red cedar, at the lower levels one finds western hemlock, sitka spruce, amabilis fir, shore pine and red alder. Douglas fir is much less common. An understorey of salal, huckleberry, salmonberry, fungi, nurse logs and hundreds of species of ferns nurture new tree seedlings. At the higher elevations one finds yellow cedar, mountain hemlock and balsam.

As a result of the media exposure given to the extraordinary beauty of the area in recent years, Tofino now receives upwards of a million tourists each year, concentrated in the summer months, when there is a chance that the area’s three and a half metres of annual rainfall might ease up. Travellers come to see the big trees, walk and surf the miles of beaches, watch whales, try kayaking and soak in the hot springs. Accommodating so many visitors is a constant challenge — so much so that even with the rainfall, water shortages have become an issue. Global warming was the buzz in Tofino when the town shut down on its busiest weekend of the year, Labour Day of 2006, for lack of water. In addition, the Esowista native village has periodically lacked clean water. Housing for locals is another heated issue. Visitors are the priority; they are our income. But residents serve them, and have a right to

secure and affordable housing. As Tofino lies at the end of the road on a narrow peninsula, however, room is running out.

Our initial idea for this collection was to compile a celebration of nature-writing focused on Clayoquot Sound. The submissions that came in were more complicated, however — with mosaics of memoir, humour, nature, research, life writing and activism — all inspired by Clayoquot and other regions of the west coast. Locales south of Clayoquot included here are East Sooke near Victoria and Hornby Island in the Strait of Georgia, where the climate is slightly drier and one finds arbutus trees and threatened Garry oak ecosystems, as well as plants like camas and cacti. To the north of Clayoquot, Nootka Sound is featured, where Captain Cook landed in 1778, at what he named Friendly Cove. Also to the north of Clayoquot is Haida Gwaii, or the Queen Charlotte Islands. The region here is similar to Clayoquot Sound in mild temperatures, heavy rainfall, rainforest, upland bog, salmon streams, estuaries and kelp beds. Finally, there is the Broughton Archipelago, which lies roughly between Port McNeil on the northeastern edge of Vancouver Island and the British Columbia mainland. The marine provincial park here contains one of the most under-represented terrestrial ecosystems in the province — the Outer Fiordland Ecoregion Coastal Western Hemlock very wet maritime submontane variant. Currently only 1.3 percent of this ecosystem is protected in B.C.

It is our love for these acutely western places in their changing moods that keeps us all here, and urges us to share our experiences in writing. This anthology quickly became an intimate collection about island life, a vantage point outside of both the metropolitan and the rural — offering a third viewpoint, the far west of the west coast. Here we find lives of contrast: people alone or in a small village within vast wild spaces. Such lives are often lived between the rainforest and rugged rocky headlands, between the peaceful sound of incoming waves and the sudden rogue wave, between deep silence and terrible storms. The breadth of writing in this collection, from renderings of beauty to profound insights into the

struggles that shape lives, demonstrates the many ways we come to be in love with place.

To be in love with place can also mean to be in tension with place. Some authors describe their bond with nature as unrequited love, paralleling the loss or absence of home due to lack of affordable housing or appropriate work, as if our cherished ideal location does not want us. This love can be sobered by grief as one watches a place change with development and tourism, or as one feels the date of departure loom closer. Love can be painful. For some authors, it can cause fear as the effects of environmental degradation call for an ever deeper commitment. Such relationships to home require more than a passive, complacent love. Our dedication can actually bring resentment when we come to a place for a deeper sense of community and end up lonely. This loneliness, nevertheless, can reshape identity.

From the lived experiences shared by the writers in this collection, five key approaches or themes emerged: arriving, yearning, immersing, lingering, encountering.

*Arriving* to find home includes writing that describes coming to a destination in life through place, attaining a state of peacefulness, or for some, a rebirth. Arriving is a pronouncement, an act of conveying happenings which interface between then and now, defined by social and cultural shifts in Canadian society. Narratives indicting the political miscues that reshape the west coast — in particular, the region of Tofino — come together with stories of personal and professional challenges, of science and artful living, and rich versus poor. Here we are reminded of the importance of attending to the constructs that shape our lives in times of increasing disconnect from one another, and from nature. Brian Brett reflects soberly on possible futures for Clayoquot, thinking back to the wild times he spent here in the sixties. Alexandra Morton explores her fierce love of and inability to abandon the Broughton Archipelago with its disappearing pink salmon. Darcy Dobell asserts that an awareness of natural forces stirs an internal compass that orients us to the world. Nadine Crookes describes growing up Nuu-chah-nulth and her gratitude toward her elders. Joanna



Streety remembers fleeing from home only to find it, unexpectedly, kayaking in her newly discovered Canada. Chandra Wong discusses creative alternatives to the housing shortage. Helen Clay recounts her signpost-filled journey from Exmoor to Clayoquot.

*Yearning* for the peace and beauty we call nature is written with longing, compassion and desire expressed as milestone experiences in special places. These stories are filled with tenderness, and tell of writers deeply moved. From anecdotes of eccentric dock-dwellers to questions of the cosmos, chronicles of illness and the role of nature in recovery, writers bring forward perspectives of caring and attend to our moral responsibility to nature. Andrew Struthers gives us memoirs of an unconventional life and his sense of humour. Christine Lowther shares wildlife encounters from her floathouse. Michael Curnes dreams of returning to his old haunts. Keven Drews bravely offers his account of healing-by-surfing. Joanna Streety encapsulates a transcendent moment atop Lone Cone in the moonlight. Sherry Merk reveals how, as a single mother, she worked so hard to stay in Tofino that, after ten years, her health broke down and she had to leave her beloved landscape and community.

*Immersing* oneself in natural and wild surroundings presents narratives of embedding the whole person in nature-scapes: a practice of meaning-making that requires merging self with nature. Richly textured accounts take readers on walks in Clayoquot or through the daily round on Haida Gwaii. We witness history from the point of view of a young first nations man, and share in the lives of feisty forest protectors and resilient modern-day pioneers. Susan Musgrave shows why she prefers “an excluded sort of place.” David Pitt-Brooke investigates and enjoys an ancient hidden midden site. Eli Enns announces the many ways his people, the Tla-o-qui-aht, are improving their lives. He also suggests highly localized, more traditional values in tree-harvesting. Grandmother-activist Betty Krawczyk describes living in a remote A-frame under mountains that have been clear-cut, and how this leads her to join the blockades. Valerie Langer compares Canadian rainforests to remnant European ecosystems — and faces a tsunami warning.

Dianne Ignace portrays a remote lifestyle completely alien to the dominant urban mindscape. Similarly, Rob Liboiron contemplates the advantages and dangers of dwelling off the beaten track.

*Lingering* in spaces of contemplation allows writers a meditative engagement as they describe in detail their experiences of abiding by the rhythms of the world around them. Stories of lingering involve passing, staying, hesitating, waiting, with a continued presence in nature-scapes. These are chronicles of living in union with the local geography, feeling the contours of the physical world and conveying the quality and grain of what it is to touch ephemeral experiences. Adrienne Mason enacts leaps of faith in juggling family life with career pastimes such as the catching, weighing and banding of murrelet chicks. Kate Braid responds to paintings by Emily Carr, the Victoria artist who first introduced many of us to the imagery of the west coast. Keith Harrison takes us along for a day's meander on Hornby Island. Greg Blanchette tells a story of loneliness. After thirty years in one place, Janis McDougall proves to her city friends that she is too deeply in love ever to go back. Anita Sinner acknowledges the privilege that solitude allows.

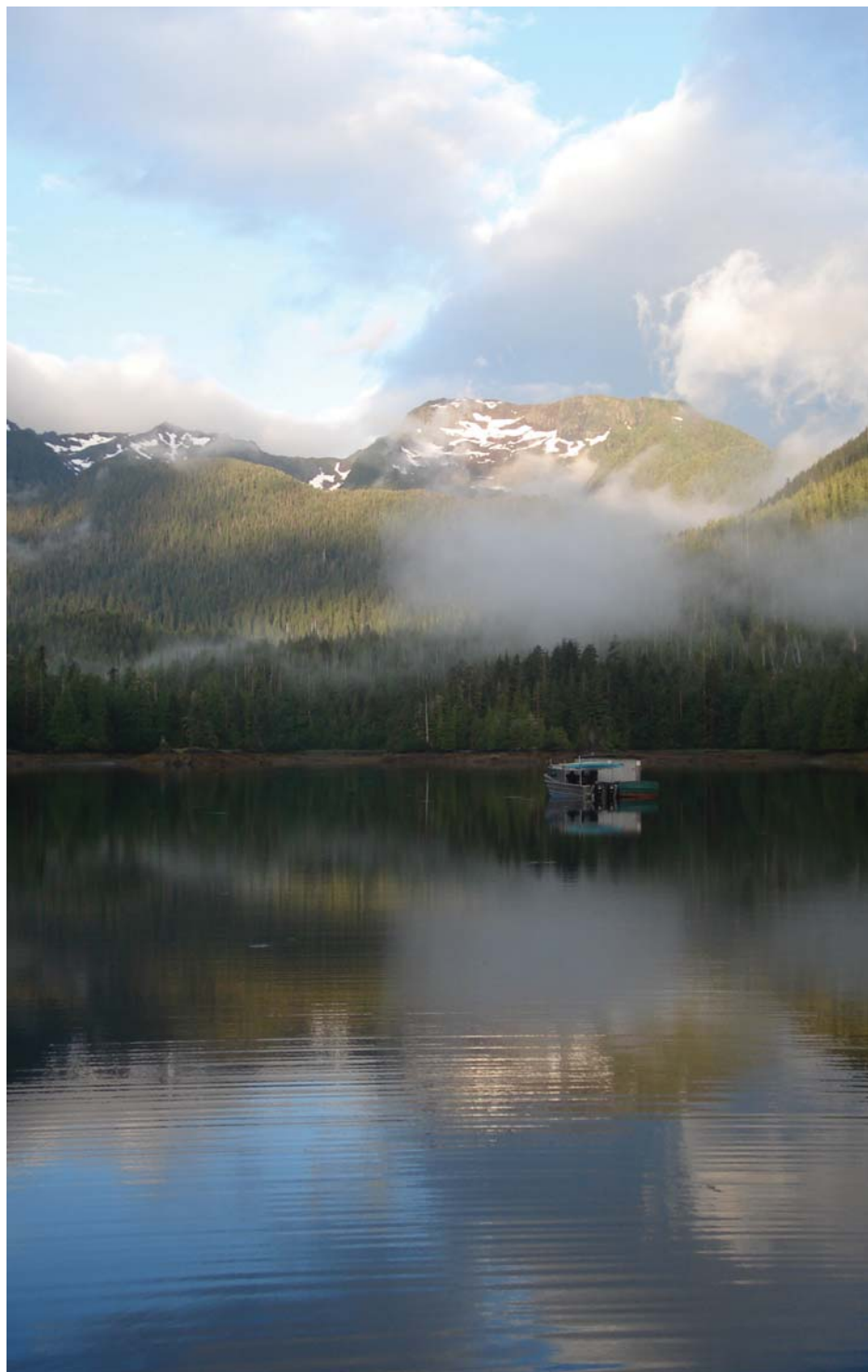
*Encountering* the natural world in diverse and inspiring ways, writers share chance or unexpected meetings. Such experiences may be shaped by difficulty, ease, silence, exuberance, active participation or passive observation, but always they are written as coming to nature. With her usual humour — but seriously — Briony Penn critiques *Sex and the City* while praising love in the forests. Bonny Glambeck illustrates the joys and woes of commuting by kayak. A simple tale of being thwarted by the elements is presented by the late Frank Harper. Carolyn Redl is cajoled down logging roads in search of a western screech owl. Joanna Robinson and David Tindall provide their findings in a survey of blockade arrestees. Their anthropological study of the Clayoquot protests brings our attention full-circle, to community concerns for preservation and sustainability, as well as a discussion of economic, social and environmental solutions. Hanne Lore guides us to Nootka Sound where we see the stray orca, Luna, as Tsuxiit, through the eyes of the Moachaht people. And we are thrilled to include

writings by the late Catherine Lebrecht, who maintained a profound reverence for the natural world. She observes wolves and raises an orphaned seal pup.

All authors in this collection, whether new or established, contribute to creating a community of writers passionately engaged in searching for home, the heart's hub, where we find purpose and a sense of belonging in creative, contemplative and aesthetically revealing ways that are uniquely west coast.

As we invite you to enter these pages, we are mindful that, because of the mass arrests during the logging blockades in 1993, it is often thought that everything is finally settled in the woods. But most of the coast, including much of Clayoquot Sound, has been logged or remains unprotected, and there are more and more controversies concerning the appropriate use of resources in these waters and on these shores. In this age of climate change, it is notable that the rainforest holds thousands of years' worth of stored carbon dioxide, and Clayoquot is one example among many that warrant greater attention. Indeed, parts of the Sound are being logged by various companies as this book goes to print. It has been important to us to produce this book on Ancient Forest Friendly paper. We know nothing is ever certain in our changing world, but perhaps, in our own ways, wherever we are, we can each find a moment to preserve not only the specialness that is home — as in our case, the west coast — but find ways in our everyday lives to make changes, to redress the ways of life that put all the world's paradises at risk.

— Christine Lowther  
& Anita Sinner  
February 2008



Moresby Camp, Haida Gwaii. (PHOTO: JEN PUKONEN)



SGang Gwaay, on the exposed southwest coast of Gwaii Haanas, the UNESCO World Heritage Site, also known as Anthony Island. (PHOTO: JEN PUKONEN)