

Introduction

For over thirty years I have stood spellbound by the massif of Mount Arrowsmith: 6000 feet above sea level towards the sky above. I have spoken to the mountain, but the reply has always been silence. Not that I was expecting Arrowsmith to speak. Years ago, a friend and I drove in his four-wheel-drive sports vehicle as near as we could and reached the top of Mount Cokely, a peak standing next to Arrowsmith like a younger brother. Pastor Barry Hansen from Nanaimo has for many years and continues this very day to climb Mount Arrowsmith regularly like a refreshing outing on a sunny afternoon. He sends me pictures of his climbing adventures on winding trails through forest, to the treeline and beyond over barren basalt rock, and ever upwards until he reaches the lofty summit at 5967 feet, that is, 1819 meters for fans of the metric system. If I'm willing to pay for a helicopter, it's \$600 for a forty-five minute flight to the top and back down. A quick photo-op, that's all. Nevertheless, the mountain has inspired me beyond measure to embrace my artistic journey and encourage my spiritual quest, though Arrowsmith's height has humbled me *and* raised me up.

But, I have chosen to begin my memoirs with two stories.

One: the unique circumstances surrounding my birth, and two: the unique circumstances surrounding my rebirth. By unique I do not mean spectacular, but simply a peculiar way in which events and people crossed paths to affect my entire life story. In between these two accounts lies a multitude of other stories. Nevertheless, I will inevitably encounter all of them with fond memories of many worthy milestones including my beloved wife Alice, without whom this memoir would not have been or continue to be a celebrated lived experience. Not to forget our children, their spouses, and our grandchildren, as well as family and friends along the way.

That is why I remain spellbound by the massif of my account among real people in real time; those who have inspired me beyond measure to embrace my artistic journey and encourage me on my spiritual quest. Sometimes assuring, sometimes perilous, the highs and the lows have humbled me *and* at the same time raised me up.

I remember Berin, the Master Mariner of the Great Northwest who in ages past spoke about his *astula*, a recollection of stories he was afraid to lose. He was not a scribe, nor a master storyteller, but a reluctant memory-keeper who felt burdened by the task of writing a personal account of his journeys and always in search of *tulnam*, the knowledge that enabled his ancestors to survive with a hope that his experiences of life would enable those of his generation and thereafter, including himself, to survive beyond seasonal as well as daily fears of imminent demise. So, his conscience pressed upon him to write everything down.

About twenty-one years ago, I decided to gather my stories and begin writing an autobiography. However, I remained undecided about what to call it, as unimportant as that may seem to others. As a consequence my indecision kept the account on a shelf for a long time. I wondered whether Berin had been prophetic thousands of years ago by calling such a hybrid collaborative an *astula*, an author-written biographical-memoir. When I began writing, "*Berin: Tales of a Master Mariner*," I was revitalized with new resolve to finish what I had begun twenty-one years ago. It's now been 30 years since we came as missionaries to this island, and I have as yet not completed my memoir. I am 77 and Alice is 74. However, I confess there has been another event that prompted

me to pick up my narrative again and finish the memoir. Those who have been born into a large family will recognize my reason: "Sibling Rivalry".

In 2020, my older brother Beert completed and published his memoir, "*Pensées: Thoughts and Reflections*." Then in 2022, my younger sister Sylvia, completed and published, "*A Rose by Any Other Name*," which is her memoir. Therefore, I had "to do something" to maintain my status as second-oldest in the sibling-legacy of three brothers and four sisters. Not quite the middle child but instead a more precarious position as second in line to the throne. I feel your pain, Prince Harry.

But one probing question remained. Where to begin?

So I decided to begin "in the beginning," specifically, April 15, 1945, the date of my birth. The times and circumstances surrounding my birth revolved around the end of World War II. The details of my birth were first published in "*When A Neighbour Came Calling*," a series of personal accounts by various writers, about Nazi occupation of the Netherlands from 1940 to 1945. The book was published in 1985, by Paideia Press in Ontario. My personal account was titled, "*The Honourary War Baby*."

The second story, that of my rebirth, took place on the night of August 22, 1981, ten years after my mind and body were wracked by an overwhelming nervous breakdown. Today, no longer popular as a medical condition and instead downgraded to panic or anxiety attacks, I can assure the reader I was there in 1971, and the breakdown was *very real* and lasted many years during which heavy medication kept me from total collapse. One doctor, less than a year ago, when I needed a prescription filled, had the audacious bedside manner to suggest "it was all *just in my head*. I should try meditation." I didn't bother tell him I had prayed for over forty years that my life would be reasonably peaceful. I doubted if *prayer* was even in his medical lexicon. But, I digress.

First, in the beginning was born "the Honourary War Baby."