

February 14, 2017
(January Letter)

Dear Samantha,

I was very impressed with the events and pamphlet you organized for the senior's centre! It included some interesting trips, was very clear and informative, and was nicely formatted for older eyes. I guess I shouldn't be surprised since you come from a long line of organizers.

Your great-grandmother Shaver got her BEd degree by learning how to organize pre-school and elementary-school kids, your grandma Shaver has been organizing others since her days working for the Vancouver Parks Board (and before that, I presume), and your mother ... well, you know how good an organizer she is!

I should also have expected it after your first Bumblebee Café. I guess that was your first lesson in event planning.



I have even done some planning of this nature as well. I remember that the first major one was a conference when I was the President of the SCM at UBC. It was a conference on Mythology organized at Rosario Beach in Washington State. Of course, I was not the only one involved in the organization since it involved about 150 people who had to be bussed to the location, and accommodated at the site – along with fed and organized for meetings.

The setting was beautiful. It was at the Marine Laboratory of Walla Walla University near Deception pass. There were two things about the location that I remember well. The first was the sound of the pebbles on the beach as the waves washed up on them, then fell back. Each time the waves retreated, one could hear the rattle of the stones as they rolled over one another toward the ocean. It was a soothing sound – one that quickly caught my imagination as I thought about the years, centuries, and eons that this must have occurred, with no one to listen. You can see a photo of the beach on the left.

The location was also home to some spectacular cliffs – high above the crashing surf. I can remember hiking to the top of them and crawling out to the edge so that I could look at the rocks below. Even though I was flat on my belly as I got to the edge, I still felt the fear and attraction that accompanies my visions of heights...like the feeling we felt walking on the glass floor at the CN Tower.

The other big conference I remember was many years later (in 1993) when I organized one in Wolfville, NS for the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF). This was an international conference with about 200 people. One of the big challenges was that it was held in Nova Scotia and I didn't know of places and organizations in the region that could provide places and supports for the conference. Once again I was lucky to have a nice network of people that could help me out. I have included a photo from it below so you can see how "young" I was.

This conference was held in a converted barn close to the town. It was a perfect place for a conference on rural issues since it had a rustic quality to it with huge wood posts and beams all around. When we turned the location into a dance party one of the evenings it had all the trimmings of a barn dance.

Fran was also involved a lot in organizing events. It started with the CGIT about the time she was the BC Provincial President. Later, when she was in Montréal she organized several annual meetings. The first was the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association (CSAA). This was a meeting of a few hundred scholars with sessions for people to present papers and have workshops. I forget which cities they were in, but the meetings were held in different cities in different years. We were both Secretary-Treasurer on the CSAA Executive at various times in our careers and I was President for three years – but we were never on the Executive at the same time.



Later, Fran organized similar conferences for the Canadian Association of Rural Studies and the Canadian Law and Society Association Annual Meetings. Obviously, the word was out that she was a good organizer (and willing to do it on a volunteer basis). We didn't get paid for all this work, but considered it as part of our obligation to the associations that worked on our behalf. I think it would be much more difficult to get her to organize a meeting these days!

These meetings and organizations were a huge feature of our careers and learning. Not only did they give us a chance to meet with colleagues and develop our professional understanding, but they were also a way that we got to travel to so many places in Canada and the world. If we presented a formal paper at one of the conferences we usually got most of our way paid – even as students. One of our most memorable experiences in this respect was when we had our first trip to St. John's, Newfoundland with your mother (when she was 20 months old) by participating in the CSAA conference there. This will be a good topic for one of my future letters since we cashed in our return plane ticket and used the money to bus, hitchhike, train, and drive back to BC.

Love,
Bill