

April 12, 2014 (March letter)

Dear Samantha,

Your March letter made it on time, but not early enough for me to respond within the same month – so here's my March letter in April.

It sounds like you had a lovely relaxing time on your break – and got in some hanging out with your “cousin”. It's nice that the distance between you doesn't get in the way too much. When I grew up I had four cousins in town and two of them in Winnipeg. I also had a couple of second-cousins that we played with a fair amount. As I indicated in my story of the Newton farm, this was one of the places that we met and hung out together – of course, without the TV and movies, however, since we didn't have TVs around until after I was about 12 years old. Video tapes didn't get available until well after that. Movies were only seen in movie theatres.

How was the test for which you were preparing? What subject was it?

Which books did you read? I guess it wasn't “The Book of Small”. I thought you would like it since it is about growing up in Victoria – plus Emily Carr is an interesting Canadian. Do you know about her? There are many of her pictures around and she has written a number of stories. I think that her family home is also identified by the historical society. It was on “Birdcage Walk” (now Government Street) in the James Bay district of Victoria. She talks about walking to the Presbyterian Church at Pandora and Blanchard. You might recognize one of her paintings – like the ones I have included here. She painted



the one with all the totem poles (Kitwancool) in 1928 and she painted the one with the tall trees (Odds and Ends) in 1939.

She has plenty of paintings inspired by Aboriginal Peoples – as you can see. She spent some time in the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwai).



She ran a boarding house in Victoria for many years (she named it the “House of All Sorts”) so there is a whole series of her paintings that are inspired by Victoria scenes.

There is another nice connection that our family has with Emily Carr – since a friend of your Great Grandfather (Jack) wrote a book about her. Doris and Jack Shadbolt were artists about the same time as Emily and Doris wrote a book named “Emily Carr” that has become an authoritative one on Emily's work.

You may remember seeing a picture in Dorothy Shaver's house that depicts a prairie sky. It was painted by George Swinton – another of the BC painters from about that time. George wrote a book about Jack Shadbolt. I think they were all involved in the Vancouver School of Art that has now been renamed as the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. You may remember seeing it from the times you have gone to Granville Island in Vancouver.

There is also a copy of a painting by Emily Carr at your Greatma Shaver's house. Do you remember seeing it? Do you know which painting it was?

I think that one of the exciting things about the study of history is when I discover how the lives of individuals get revealed and wound up with the major events taking place. For example, I don't expect that as Emily, Jack, Doris, and George were going to the Vancouver School of Art with their friends that they would now be identified together – and that the school would be given Emily's name. Similarly, when Jack, Dorothy, and George Swinton had meals together or were visiting for a coffee that they would have anticipated how it connects them to these important people and events.

It makes me wonder what people will see when they look back in 50 or 80 years and tell stories about your house on Camosun. Do you think that some of those stories will be about how Samantha Jones once lived there and how she went to school across town each day, would take the ferry to visit her cousins in Langley and Abbotsford? Or maybe the stories will be about how she was inspired by the people hanging around the soup kitchen on her way to Metropolitan United, or learned how to compose photos by wandering the streets of Fernwood, or dreamed up a plan for a better way of teaching young people while travelling on the city bus.

It's impossible to know what those stories will be, but as we look at the past, we know that the little events are often the basis for the big ones.

That's also why I enjoy the Dear Canada series that you have been reading. It's all about the intersection of personal stories with the public ones. And it's why I have been enjoying the genealogical searches into our own family history. They have turned up a book written by my father's cousin Mary Wiebe. She wrote about the difficulties and travels of the Mennonites from Russia to Canada. If you think you might like to read it, I will see if I can find it for you to read.

We are looking forward to seeing you all in May. Fran has taught her last class for this semester and will be on sabbatical for a year – starting in June. We are also planning to move in to the basement suite on 48th avenue for a few months starting in the fall. It will be wonderful to be closer to you all.

Love,