

Hi Samantha

(My September letter) Oct 21, 2013

In my effort to get caught up I will continue the story from my June and August letters – about the jobs I have had. This one picks up the thread from after my second year at university.

In the summer of 1963 I decided to search for a full time summer job rather than the part-time one I had at Woodward's. I applied a number of places and finally got a call from Kraft Foods out near Grandview Highway in Vancouver.

The job was to work in their main warehouse – unloading stuff from boxcars, organizing the warehouse, and loading up trucks for delivery throughout the Vancouver area. It was hard work since we were lifting boxes for much of the time, but it was also interesting since a large variety of goods came through the warehouse.

I remember getting boxcars full of cheese every week or so. They came in refrigerated cars – large rounds of cheese and boxes of packaged cheese. There was not the wide variety of cheeses that you see in the store these days since people's taste for cheese was not developed and there were not many small cheese makers in BC.

I liked unloading the cheeses – especially on a hot summer day – since it gave us a chance to cool down AND most of the work was done with a forklift. The boxes and rounds were very heavy, so we avoided moving them by hand whenever we could.

Part of the warehouse was used for manufacturing processed cheese so I got to see how this was made. It was a real eye-opening experience and made me think twice about eating Kraft processed cheese. Most of the ingredients were bits and pieces left over from a wide variety of more specialized cheeses. They were dumped into a large vat along with some sort of liquid and food colouring, then mixed up by huge mixers, and squeezed out into a brick-like shape before being packaged in small boxes – Yuccch!. The name of the result was "Velveeta". I have put a copy of an ad for that cheese from about the time I was working at the warehouse. The individual slices that are sold today were not made then, so most of the processed cheese came in these boxes.

When a boxcar would arrive filled with marshmallows, this was a very different story. A couple of us could unload a whole car in less than an hour, because each box was huge – but relatively light. I was not surprised to find the occasional box (and bag) that had been broken open. Of course we wouldn't have wanted the 'spoiled' food to go to waste!

I worked at the warehouse for most of the summer – but quit in time to hitchhike with my brother Bob, to Toronto. I was going to the national conference of the Student Christian Movement (SCM) – a group that I had joined at UBC. Bob was going along for the ride. I will tell you about that adventure in another letter.

By the time the following summer came along (1964) I had decided to join a "Work Camp" organized by the SCM. These were summer activities in which about 15 students would live together for the summer, organize their living and food preparation, and study some theme – while working in related jobs. I became particularly interested in the one being organized in Vancouver to study factory workers, so I applied and was accepted.



There were about 15 who moved into a large old house on the corner of Crown and 8th Ave in Vancouver (4082 8th Ave). I checked the Google map and was able to get an image of it – as it looks today. You can see it here.



We decided to organize ourselves like a commune. This meant we would all share our salaries at the end of the summer – no matter how much we made. This was quite a decision, because some of the students got jobs that paid high wages while others got those with low wages.

Similarly, some people worked extremely hard while others didn't have many demands at all. There was even one guy who didn't get a job all summer – even though he tried the best he could (or so he said). I went back to my work at the Kraft Foods warehouse.

At the end of the summer we each prepared a budget for the next year and shared it with the others. I remember one evening we sat in a circle, went over each person's budget, and discussed whether their budget for food, or accommodation, or even underwear, was reasonable or not. It was quite an exercise! I was surprised how everyone was okay with this. It seems that it was more difficult for us to put up with each other's cleaning standards than with their share of the finances!

By the time the next summer came around (1965) Fran and I had become a couple (it was from about Christmas). We decided that we would both join summer work camps – but this time, in Toronto. I joined one that was studying mental illness and Fran joined one that was studying inner city work. They were both very different topics, but it was nice to be in the same city.

I lived with about 12 other students in a church building at 765 Queen Street W in Toronto. Our beds were set up in one of the Christian Education rooms and we used the church kitchen to do our meals. We all worked at a mental hospital down the street (999 Queen St).

In those days the treatment of mental patients was very different than today. Many of them were moved to large institutions. I worked on what was called a "back ward" of the asylum – one where the most violent patients lived in a locked ward. There were a large number of patients in the ward. Most of them lived 2-to-a-room. In order to maintain control on the ward, the patients were regularly drugged with largactil – a drug that is used for depression, but make people more docile at the same time. There was even an 18-year old boy on the ward. He was there because he was difficult to control on the open ward. It reminded me of the type of place featured in the book "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest". Have you read it?

It was a depressing place to work but there were some opportunities to make their situation a bit better (other than to keep their toenails cut). I remember one time when Fran and I got permission to take one of the

patients to the Canadian National Expedition. We had a great afternoon letting him do something that he hadn't been able to do for years.

At this work camp we didn't bother pooling our wages since we all worked at the same place and at the same wage. I think that Fran's camp made the same decision even though they worked in different jobs at different wages. If you ask her about the details she can fill you in on her jobs in a bottle factory and selling hats at Woolworth's.

At the end of the summer Fran and I hitchhiked to see her grandmother Hamlet in Thunder Bay (it was called Fort William then). That was the time we got stuck in Wawa – remember that place? After visiting Grandma we took a train back to Toronto to attend a conference in Bala (north of Toronto).

By the time the next summer rolled around I had finished a few years in university and was invited to go to Prince Rupert to work at the Native Friendship Centre. They wanted me to work as a custodian and at the same time conduct some research that would help them decide what to do with the Centre.

It was an interesting place – they had a few beds for homeless people to sleep and a daycare during the daytime. There were a lot of people who travelled through town on a circuit among Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, Prince George, and Prince Rupert. Here's a photo of the hallway that I had to keep clean. The guy leaning in the doorway is Graham – the person I worked and lived with.



I met a lot of nice people during my stay there – including some of the men who stayed there, the other guy who worked with me, the janitor and his family, and a nice old woodcarver who made some beautiful totem poles. I have included a photo of the janitor and his son.



The only problem was that I was a bit lonely – I missed Fran.

After I finished that job, wrote my report, and headed back home I got another request to do some research. This time it was to investigate the situation with an unwed mother's home in Vancouver. In those days being a single mother was very stigmatizing. The United Church had responded to this stigma by setting up a home where young pregnant girls could go to live until after they gave birth. It used to be fully occupied.

Over the past few years the demand for rooms had diminished so the church administration wanted to know whether this was a long term thing – and if so, what they should do. So they hired me to investigate the situation and write a report.

I enjoyed doing this type of work so I guess this got me thinking about doing more training in sociology. It seemed to me that this would not only be useful but it would be interesting at the same time.