

PRICE TAGS

Structure



After seeing this picture of the Burrard Bridge, Graham McGrava sent along a prose/poem he wrote a couple of years ago.

Men in cloth caps used to walk across bridges

Men in cloth caps used to walk across bridges, cedar slivers on their remaining digits. Tramping home to save the streetcar fare, enjoying the sunset, or money for a drink.

At the False Creek edge I look at the bricked up doorway of the embankment tower where freight rail was to carry over to downtown, through rows of boats in the civic marina, to ferries, gin bins, and fishing charters plying the channel

I wonder what my men of the sawmill and the wire and chainforge would have said if this sunset had swung into their line of vision a half century ago?

“Are people so down on their luck they have to huddle in small boats under Burrard Bridge?”

“How does produce get to town if the streetcar doesn’t run any more?”

“How do people make a living with the Island factories all shut down but one?”

“Why brick in a perfectly good staircase?”

It is only the last question that stumps me. Fifty years of peace-time, and, for all our wealth and wisdom that sucked the choking fumes from the city's heart and lungs, we are now so afraid of dark corners in our stairwells, that we see nothing unusual in bricking them up.

When we dispose of history like this, how different is it from our man of blackened fingernails tipping barrels of tar and sludge to drain through the ground. What is the toxin, what the waste?

My grandfather spent his working life inside steam ship boilers, caulking them tight. Spent weekends caulking his insides with ale. He lived to his nineties. I never met him, expunged from my father's life like tar in the ground; a door bricked up around the family tree. What is the toxin, what the waste?

And what am I doing now, that in fifty years time will cause uncomprehending pause, to an otherwise untroubled sunset following a day of rain?

*Graham McGarva
Saturday 10th June, 2000
Burrard Bridge, False Creek, Vancouver, Canada*