

ER-HU WHO?

A mysterious hand-crafted fiddle suddenly appears - black Chinese characters brush-painted on varnished wood, trimmed in gold, one string and tuning peg missing. Made by whose hand we do not know.

"It's from Blubber Bay. Been in my closet for awhile," Toby Hansen ventured when he donated it to the Texada Heritage Society museum last month.

Every "artifact" tells a story and that Chinese "er-hu" spike fiddle has revealed another page of Texada's honour role of "recent pioneers".

Like most isolated coastal communities in decades past, the citizens of Blubber Bay were in charge of their own entertainment. Luckily the town harboured a super type-A personality ideally suited for the task - Mrs. Victoria (Vicki) Yip.

Arriving on Texada in 1942 with her husband Quene (mine chemist and BC Sports Hall of Fame soccer champion), Victoria set out simply to have some fun!

"Newcomers discovered that Vicki would be the first one knocking on your door," says Lynne Schroeder. As coffee circle members went house to house, Victoria encouraged everyone to join the church UCW, sign up for cooking or painting classes, join the bridge club, the PTA, and take part in plays she produced. She was the unofficial "social co-ordinator" of the community. "She was one hell of a gal," says Toby.

But what about the fiddle? Gladys Fielkowich remembers "playing" this very instrument in one of Victoria's comedies. She recalls acting the role of a geisha attempting to entertain Steve Gresl who played the country bumpkin hilariously unfamiliar with oriental manners. "It was wonderful."

Ribbon dancing, Christmas feasts, pie-eating contests, an imported Shakespeare play, box lunches, baseball, swimming races, ...Victoria was the "culture vulture" of the town, taking a lead hand in organizing numerous social events. Several residents still remember Vicki's Round-the-World dinners with everyone costumed (eg. hula skirts) and presenting the appropriate international cuisine (the entry for Canada was apple pie and cheese).

Unfortunately we still don't know who made the fiddle, but this artifact with the missing string has led us back decades and has allowed us to meet a remarkable woman. Victoria Yip's generosity, kindness and artistry will always be remembered by those who lived in old Blubber Bay.

Peter Lock

In researching the story of the mystery fiddle, Gladys was wondering if anyone had photos, programmes or posters from some of the old plays and events. If so, we would like to see them! Please phone 604 486 7670.

