

## CRAWFORD KILIAN / The Early Days of The Capilano Review

When I recently looked through some of the first issues of the Review, published from 1972 to 1974, I was struck by how well I recalled the graphics—the photos, drawings and collages that Pierre Coupey had chosen. They were not mere complements to the texts; they demanded attention on their own terms.

The whole magazine demanded such attention. It reflected a young but surprisingly strong and self-confident culture at Cap College in those early days.

The college had begun as a kind of appendage to West Van Secondary. A two-storey wooden portable had been grafted onto the high school's west wing. This was our overcrowded office and administrative space; we taught in high school classrooms after 4:30, Mondays through Thursdays.

The faculty hired in those days tended to be young, and many of us were still in grad school, working on our degrees. Others were former high school teachers, a bit older but not by much. We all recognized that the college was still a kind of improv act, working with minimal support and maximum imagination.

Linked as we were to Vancouver's universities, we had a good sense of the local arts and literary scene. Some of us were poets; others were writing fiction. We were also keenly aware of an intense political atmosphere: At least one early faculty member was a US Army deserter. A kind of American exile community was already established in Vancouver, and the universities—especially Simon Fraser—were undergoing profound challenges from radical students and faculty.

While no one articulated a political philosophy for Capilano College, something was clearly in the air: in high school classrooms decorated with photos of acceptable literary and historical figures, students talked about protesting the Amchitka nuclear tests in the Aleutian islands. (One of my students would go there on the original Greenpeace voyage.) Environmentalism was becoming an issue, while the American war in Vietnam seemed to go on forever.

In this highly charged atmosphere, many of us young instructors saw ourselves as agents of social change. We were providing post-secondary access to students who would otherwise never have it. We were battling the imperial arrogance of the

universities (who even wanted to approve the faculty we hired to teach academic courses). And we were helping a new generation to find its voices.

*The Capilano Review* was one of those voices. Its first issue appeared in 1972—not that long after the English department had successfully begged for its own electric typewriter. Pierre Coupey was not only its first editor, but also its energetic promoter. He knew both the young writers and the old established authors, and he recruited them both.

Earl Birney, one of Canada's best-known poets, contributed a "semiotic" poem in the first issue—what we also called a concrete poem, one typographically organized to look like what it was about. That first issue also featured poems by Evgenii Evtushenko and Andrei Vosnesenky, two poetry superstars of the Soviet Union.

The contents pages featured the names of little-known Canadian writers who would eventually become famous: George Bowering, John Newlove, Susan Musgrave, Jack Hodgins, bp Nichol, Audrey Thomas, Lionel Kearns. Bill Bissett was then so obscure that he still spelled his name with capital letters.

Whether we realized it or not, *The Capilano Review* had provided a foothold for a whole generation of Canadian writers. They in turn made us part of the country's literary community.

It also gave students and faculty a voice and a venue. Our photography students displayed their very impressive work in its pages. A student named Janice Harris published a story; she would later become a long-serving councilor in the District of North Vancouver, and a one-term mayor.

Meanwhile, faculty contributors included Bill Schermbucker, Pierre, Gladys (later Maria) Hindmarch, and me. Other contributors became faculty later, including Stan Persky and the winner of the 2006 Governor General's Prize for poetry, John Pass.

Some of those early contributors would go on publishing in the Review for years. Others went on to other publications or other locales and careers. But in revisiting those early issues, I see something that *The Capilano Review* identified and nurtured: a spirit of experiment, of testing limits, of gambling on innovation, a spirit that we would go on expressing in our future work as writers, artists, teachers, and citizens. Those who now create the Review have a heritage to be proud of.