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Graham McGarva and designed by Lois Klassen.

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A Long Story, this...

Graham McGarva

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1. Waiting Dream (1998)

Waiting for the ferry
at the edge of my dreams
wood dock bobbing like the old
twenty years back
tumble down shack
by the log booms
Before - I planned all this I could say -
with brand new park
and separate lanes for cyclists and pedestrians
that thread a billion dollar weave of housing, shops,
coffee bars and a sales pavilion;
all the seeds for metropolitan life.

But closer to the truth - what I really planned,
what I always dreamed about, was this moment,
sitting in thin sunshine a foot above lapping water,
a city Sunday afternoon thrumming around me.

And the almost young woman
sitting nearby on the dock knows none of this
(*My thoughts of trespassed lunchtimes twenty years ago
swept away & returned*) Nor should she know
She was a teen her angst in Middle-East turmoil
Now her mind is a world away
still unattached lines etch determined eyes.
She too awaits the ferry at the edge of her dreams

2. Tidal Flat (2007)

You see when you get there

There is no there there

Only Here

And Now.

As these paths emerge from the shores

of the Olympic Village

are they mine?

Do I look at the deck and bridges and benches

and boulders and artificial island

and claim ownership of territory I trod

as I dragged the plan through the labyrinth

of competing expectations –

through the Olympic rings security cordons
and insecurity cordons to the open water
of the Millennium bid
and the current frenzy of construction
like ravens gorging at the belly of the clam?

Today I settle for completing my journey around
the Creek I first saw as hitchhiker thirty years back
when all that greeted me
as I arrived overland from Canada
were rotting pilings of abandoned docks
at the foot of Terminal and Main.
(How many can say in this country
that their memory predates Quebec?)

But the truth is
we are all hitchhikers
and this is all leased land
even for those whose origins and myths
predate my presumption
of being from that golden generation of creators
whose palimpsests made this multi-tongued place
the story that it is.

You see when you get there

There is no there

There

Only the here of now.

Contemplating the full surround
of the Creek's many tongued shore
my answer to Authority and Ownership
dwells In the certainties
we place in the mouths of infants
with respect to sacrificial clams
and the ongoing
education of ravens

3. Home Work (2016)

Where is Vancouver?
It used to be where I was going
And then it started
To go somewhere else
Not like a child growing too big
To be walked across the street
But like an intimate companion
Whose whispers turn to silence
Not rejection because
We still share the same bed and
Can touch if our legs stretch But touching is become
Like bumping into a texting pedestrian
Pavement crossing with near oblivion
Instead of mumbling hello

To people we know
By virtue of passing them
With a smile of recognition
As though we both knew where we are going

Still I continue to work on this

Graham McGarva is a Vancouver-based poet and community advocate. Arriving in Vancouver in 1973 as a hitchhiker from the UK and eventually spending 40 years as an architect and city builder, Graham McGarva has had an instrumental role in the formation of False Creek communities. In 1984 McGarva and his wife Suzy Baker, launched their architecture firm with installations at Expo Centre and BC Pavilion for Expo 86. Graham then took a key role in the redevelopment of the former Expo 86 Lands for Concord Pacific Place, including the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre. Through the 2000s he led the planning process for Southeast False Creek and the Olympic Village. Today McGarva is one of the leaders of RePlan, a community sponsored initiative to partner with the City to negotiate new land leases, and enable regenerative infill for the pioneering urban community of False Creek, where he and Suzy have lived since 1978. Having worked full circle around False Creek, McGarva, retired from the business of architecture in 2016, now focuses on poetry and community advocacy along the shore of False Creek - where he started out in 1973.

