

## NFB FILM DAY

The Club's NFB Film Day on Wednesday, February 21, was a great success, with more than fifty participants - and many favourable comments during the day.

Together with filmmakers and producers, we enjoyed four recent NFB productions, in a programme which featured imagination, dreams and discovery. After the screenings, we talked with the filmmakers concerned. We laughed with Claude Cloutier, director of the animated short *Sleeping Betty*, which had the audience in stitches, then we were touched and overwhelmed by the wonderful characters, aged between 72 and 94, who 'starred' in Serge Giguere's magnificent documentary *À force de rêves*. The director was there to share his own moving and humorous experiences in making the film, often only armed with a hand-held camera and directional mike.

After a lunchtime get-together in the cafeteria and many happy reunions between former colleagues, we made our way back to the Pierre Perrault Theatre to see this year's Oscar-winning animated short, *The Danish Poet*. The film's director, Torill Kove, and producer, Marcy Page, were already in Los Angeles, preparing for Oscar night! We were fortunate



to have executive producer David Verrall and digital imaging consultant Sue Gourley to tell us more about the making of this co-production with Norway, narrated by Liv Ullmann. Finally we were transported to the bustling world of late nights, long hours and hard partying with young, English-speaking telemarketers in India's largest city, in *Bombay Calling*, followed by a frank and friendly exchange with producer Adam Symansky.

We would like to thank all the participants, whom we look forward to seeing again at our next Film Day.

**Anthony Kent**



### NFB CLUB'S NEW E-MAIL ADDRESS

**info@nfbclub.ca**

- You wish to comment on our Newsletter?
- You would like to write an article for the Newsletter?
- You have news to share with other NFB Club members?
- You would like the Club to organize new activities?

Wherever you might be on the planet,  
do write to us!

From now on, the Newsletter  
will feature a selection of members' letters.

Hope to hear from you soon!



# MEMBERS' LETTERS

**Jacques Gagnon died in Cuba on January 24, 2007. This text is from his will.**

I'd like people to get together and show their friendship on the occasion of my death, not to underline my absence but to **celebrate my life**. The get-together should be just a party, nothing else.

I have been lucky. Many of my dreams have come true and I think I've been true to my ideals. In this spirit, I sincerely hope that my children, grandchildren and friends will put their hearts into defending common human values, i.e. love, justice, solidarity (especially with the less fortunate), tolerance and peace. Everyone's happiness depends on it.

*Jacques*

## Whitman Trecartin, Halifax

George Barnhill (Barney) died on December 6, 2006 in Liverpool NS. George served in the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps from 1939 to 1946, serving overseas for six years as a Warrant Officer. He was also in charge of movement and control of troops in the United Kingdom during the Battle of Britain, the Blitz and throughout the war. He had the duty of bringing 365 Canadian war brides and their children to Pier 21 in Halifax at the end of WWII, in 1946. He was the only Canadian soldier on board.

On discharge he entered the motion picture business in London England. In 1951 he returned to Canada and joined the National Film Board of Canada, where he worked in all aspects of the film business. George retired in 1983 and moved to Queens County. He was a third degree Mason of Canada, Lodge #3527, London, England, a member of the Royal Canadian Legion, branch #38, Liverpool, N.S., and a member of Trinity Anglican Church, Liverpool.

### Members' Letters

**From now on, the Newsletter will include a selection of letters, to encourage more input and feedback from Club members across Canada and around the world.**

**We look forward to hearing from you...**



## IN-HOUSE FESTIVAL

In the past, the "In-house Festival" of recent productions from the English Program and the "Festival Maison" of the latest French Program films were organized independently. Now the two branches collaborate on the "In-house Festival Maison", which this year ran for two full days, January 17-18, in the Theatre Pierre Perault (#1) and the Colin Low Theatre (#3), followed by a morning of animation workshops in Theatre 1, on Friday, January 19.

This year, for the first time, the coordination team was offered a number of seats. We only had a very few days to tell some other Club members about the offer and I was one of the fortunate participants. **(For situations like this, the Club plans to prepare an electronic mailing list, in order to be able to contact members at short notice via e-mail in future.)**

The programming is set up to run parallel screenings in the two theatres, so a choice has to be made! After nine years of retirement, it was a joy to see some of the excellent new productions and next year we will definitely have much more advance notice, in order to ensure that other interested Club members can enjoy catching up with the NFB's latest films....

*Anthony Kent*

**Newsletter Coordinator:**  
Colette Gendron

**Photos:** Micheal Hazel

**Translation:**  
NFB Translation Services

**Printing:**  
NFB Print Shop

# A REAL CHRISTMAS STORY!

For everyone who still believes in Father Christmas...

*Louise Carré, Florida*

Over recent years, I've been going to the seaside on my bike for Christmas. Follow me.

Off I went on December 25. A journey of 40-minutes. I arrive. Some farniente with elder sis and niece. The sea's not very welcoming so we just enjoy the sun and the spacious view. At noon I go as usual to get my little grilled cheese and tomato sandwich, whole wheat, please, at the restaurant by the quay.

It's shut. So I go to the little "down-town", thinking I can have some pizza at the Italian place further along. Shut as well!

I glance to the other side of the street. Only place open is **Flanigan's**. Not very inviting or appetizing; but I'm hungry and there's a 40-minute return journey that will need fuel. I go inside.

The young waitress is happy to have another customer, for the place is almost empty. I'm directed to a table facing the sea where I can hear the far-off waves roaring.

A little black girl is at the table, playing with what looks like a pack of cards. The waitress signals her to leave but I say she can stay, she won't bother me. I sit down.

**Hi! Merry Christmas! What's your name?**

**Ann**, she replies with a wide smile. **I'm seven.**

The waitress suggests a chicken burger. OK, and a coffee, that'll be fine. I'm more interested in my new friend.

When I was small, my mother worked in the big restaurants of the time, waiting tables. It's to her hard graft that my sister and I owe our education and our desire to discover the world -- and le Monde [newspaper]. First at Stein's, then the Café St-Jacques, then the hotel Pennsylvania. During our vacations, my sister and I would often spend several days sitting in a corner of the dining room waiting for Mom to finish work. Like Ann, we played with the salt, pepper and sachets of sugar -- nowadays Equal, Splenda and other pink envelopes -- plus of course the inevitable ketchup.

*What game are you playing? Can I play?*

She says she found the cards (rather moth-eaten) on the table. I inspect them.

**You can ask me questions**, she says.

*What river flows through Jordan?* I read from the card (brilliant questions for well-travelled adults.)

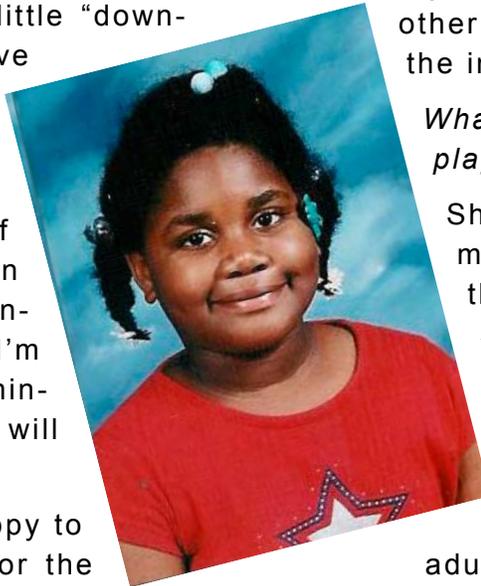
I ask one, pull a face and she laughs.

**Doesn't matter, we'll find another game to play**, she responds, picking up the cards again.

I want to talk without seeming intrusive. *Do you go to school?* -- **Yes, grade 2. I want to be a doctor.**

*Did Father Christmas bring you lots of presents?*

**No, I didn't get any presents.** She's shy about my question and about her reply, but not bitter or disappointed. Just matter of fact. I don't know what to say and there's an



awkward pause. I think of the presents and pleasures of the previous evening. When my burger arrives I ask if she'd like anything to eat.

**No, thanks, I just ate. My Dad's the cook.**

*Want a fry?*

**No, thanks.**

She takes a sachet of sugar, opens it and puts some sugar on her lips.

She has lovely hair done in a very distinctive way, with braids and little coloured clips.

*Did your mom braid your hair?*

**No, Dad's family.** She doesn't know how to describe the person who did her hair.

*You have lovely hair.*

**Mom has much more than me.** She tells me her mom is pretty. She says something about being pretty and I reassure her. She smiles. Here's her story.

She's Haitian. She's been to Haiti twice. It's dirty. As soon as she says that, she regrets having been so judgmental in front of a foreigner. I've a cousin who's a priest out there, and he said the people were very kind, generous and good. The problem is the politics ... Right, stop there. Politics is pretty heavy for a girl of seven. Anyway, how to explain the disarray of this poor, small country so close to wealth and comfort? I want to reassure her.

I point to the sea. -- *Do you swim sometimes?* -- **No, not here. In Haiti I do.** Haiti is saved by its sea, sun and the hope of its children.

*How do you say Merry Christmas ! in Creole?* She thinks, shrugs then darts off into the kitchen, returning with her dad. He speaks gently to her in Creole and glances at me. I smile.

**My dad doesn't speak English; when mom's here I'll teach them both to speak**

**it.** She follows the lines of an imaginary book with her finger. **Repeat, again. You have to repeat to learn.** She turns imaginary pages. **Repeat. Again. Again.** Her dad looks barely 18. I tell her he's handsome, he's young, and she laughs. **He and Mom went to school together; they fell in love and got married.**

She continues talking, with honesty and pride.

She and her father live with another family. Her mom's still in Haiti. **She needs a paper then she can come here. She'll work, then she and Dad can pool their money and buy a house.**

*Brothers and sisters?*

**I had a little sister but she died when I was 2 or 3. She was one month old... or a week.** She's not sure.

In the evening, look at the sky and you'll see your sister. She's a star watching over you. She smiles, happy to learn this.

**When you're good and believe in Jesus, you go to heaven.** He might give us a break sometimes, I feel like adding. I let her dream on.

**I can't wait for the 9th...Why? ... On Sunday,** (I told you already, she seems to be saying) **we're moving house.** Her father works at 4:00, they'll both sleep in the new place and they'll fetch their things the next day.

I tell her about my granddaughter. She wants to know her name, my name. Each reply leaves her puzzled and she takes time to digest the information.

She finds a game to play using the menu. I have to guess what her favourite food and drink is and she'll give me one of her cards for each correct guess.

I win 10 cards.

**My turn to guess what you like,** she says.

She asks if she can have a card even if her guess is incorrect. She wins 12 cards... She's proud because she's won.

When I tell her *I have to go*, I mention the bike and she's amazed, though I don't know if this is because of the bike itself or the idea of a 70-year-old cycling. I daren't ask which.

When I get the bill, I have a little think. I've \$20 and after paying I have \$7 and some coins. I give the waitress \$2. Then I look for my little friend. She's gone into the kitchen, no doubt telling her father there's a 70-year-old wearing a bicycle helmet -- she'd asked me my age, that of my father and mother, the name of my granddaughter, interested and surprised by my answers... and whenever she gave me a card, she called me **grandma**... probably without noticing. I did not correct her.

When the waitress fetches her, I offer her the \$5 to help her father with the move, and offer her the coins to keep. She refuses.

**I have to ask Dad. He doesn't want me to accept money from people. Ever.** She returns to the kitchen, gets permission and accepts the money.

I left, happy, but with her in my heart -- and now in yours. **Merry Christmas!**

PS: At a Boxing Day supper with friends, we decided to buy a bicycle for Ann and send it to her father so he could be Father Christmas ... better late than never. We all made a contribution by passing the hat.

**January 1.** We visited Flanigan's, hoping to find Ann or her dad. We explain the situation to the barman. Does Manuel have a car? (To transport the bike.) Yes, an old jalopy. Great! The barman's really happy with our plan. It couldn't happen to a better guy. It's Manuel's birthday today so he won't be there till Tuesday at 4. We go back. **WRONG!** He starts work at 6.

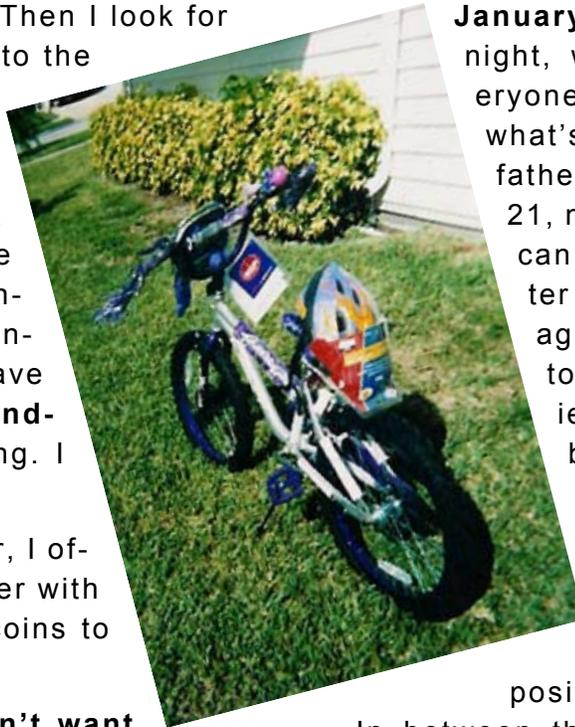
**January 4... same.**

**January 5...** Finally, at 10:30 at night, we deliver the bike. Everyone at the restaurant knows what's happening. The young father, Emmanuel, (actually 21, not 18), is there, happy as can be. He tells us his daughter has wanted a bike for ages. He gives me her photo. Her name is Anne Danielle Saint-Jean. On the back is their phone number. We also learn that he has two jobs, working at the OCEAN 123 restaurant by the sea, then at Flanigan's opposite, for the evening shift.

In between the two, he sleeps in his truck. The life of many Americans, alas!

That's it. Our friends are happy.

**NOTE:** Flanigan's with its welcoming staff isn't so bad after all. And the cards I mentioned are part of the decor. They're Trivial Pursuit cards to pass the time while waiting! **A good idea!**



# NFB CHRISTMAS DINNER

Jean-Yves Bégin

It was Olivier who inveigled me into this, with smiles and threats. "Could you write something about your impressions of the dinner...?" How could I say no to dear Olivier?

It's true that, as on every occasion when I see the old colleagues, it was an emotional experience and that must have shown on my face. This annual party brings a range of emotions, from gratitude for the original contributions and great efforts of the organizers, to all the impressions exchanged in fellowship from table to table.

What does the Christmas dinner mean to me? It's the NFB continuing as before. It's life after the NFB, where you discover you're immortal and you want it to last forever, except you're not killing yourself over work, and you can sit back and pamper yourself as a family, resting comfortably on your laurels. You recall the professional adventures of yesterday, when we had our noses to the grindstone, a time when we thought about nothing but that intense vocation, the NFB.

Those passions that inspired our careers have continued "in the afterlife", and what's fascinating is seeing what people have done with their new freedom, untrammelled by the old responsibilities, faced with some room for manoeuvre. Examples!

**Guy Maguire** spoke warmly (and excellently) about the Véloptimum internet site that he's so pleased with (the name is self-explanatory), and of his support for a young champion diver – whose personality I too found really fascinating, though I know nothing about sports. Guy

spoke so eloquently, it was clear that his job as NFB rep had influenced his new social role.

**Pierre Ducharme** spoke about international tourism, in particular that refined niche market of...Time-Sharing, explaining in detail what you have to do and have to avoid to find bargain paradises in the sun, if you carefully plan in great detail well in advance ... as I always do (not).



*Monique Lalonde, Marielle Tanguay-Kappel, Marcelle Turcotte-Fortier, Ruby Cormier*

I thought of dear **André Pétrowski**, who's finally exercising his long-repressed talent as a writer, but who wasn't at the dinner this year. I was sitting next to **Vallier Savoie**. Our paths didn't cross much at the NFB, but no matter, we found ourselves talking about Ageing (with a capital A). I could

have talked forever about health with him, it's one of my hobbyhorses. Opposite me was **Jacques Gagnon**, now a soccer writer, and his wife. I didn't really get a chance to talk to her as there was so much going on. Saw **Claude Himbeault**, with whom I had a good old natter ... and others I didn't get a chance to talk to but hope to next year. And my old friend (if I may thus designate him), whom I met at TV Ontario's French channel when he was its chairman, the outgoing NFB Commissioner, so surrounded by people I couldn't even tug his sleeve, and who took the time to send me a personalized NFB Christmas card -- hello, **Jacques Bensimon!**

I was pleased to meet my good friend **Rita Roy**, the lovely **Andrée Delagrave**, and **Janine Edoin** with her eternal smile and with whom I was surprised to find myself chatting in Spanish! It's just wonderful to pick up where one left off.

So many people, hardly enough time to greet them, like the imperturbable **Roger Blais**, who has not aged



*Nicole Chicoine, Monique Létourneau, Jacques Ricard, Huguette Marion, Louise Louise, Jean Glinn*



AT ALL, as if time passing were a joke he'd made to the accompaniment of his infectious laugh.

I thought I was speaking Spanish to Micheal Hazel, but he was telling me about bee-keeping. And yes, I shall lend you some bee books -- I don't need them anymore!

So that morning on the plane, leaving for Cuba, still under the spell of that lovely evening, I jotted down some notes. I admired the work of the valiant orga-

nizers, my friend **Antony Kent** and his warm enthusiasm. I was happy to see a first generation of pioneers being given presents in official recognition of their work. Among them was my great friend (may I say that?!) **Marie-Pierre (Tremblay)**, whose journalist's skills have made themselves apparent through this NFB newsletter.

The Airbus was on its way. There's something very definitive about a plane taking off.

## DATABASE UPDATE

You'll find a Club membership form with this issue of your newsletter .

We'd be grateful if you would complete it and send it to us so we can update Club information.

## ....AND MEMBERSHIP RENEWING 2007-2008

This year's subscription to support NFB Club's activities is \$15.

Please send your form and cheque to the order of NFB Club ONF to:

NFB Club ONF  
Room A-0115, R-1  
PO Box 6100  
Station Centre-ville  
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5

## HARD OF HEARING

An old man decided that his wife was getting hard of hearing. So he called her doctor to make an appointment to have her hearing checked. The doctor said that he could see her in two weeks and meanwhile there's a simple , informal test the husband could do to give the doctor some idea of the scope of the problem.

"Here's what you do. Start about 40 feet away from her and speak in a normal conversational tone to see if she hears you. If not, go to 30 feet, then 20 feet, and so on until you get a response."

So that evening she's in the kitchen cooking dinner, and he's in the living room, and he says to himself. "I'm about 40 feet away, let's see what happens."

"Honey, what's for supper?"

No response.

So he moves to the other end of the room, about 30 feet away.

"Honey ,what's for supper?"

No response.

So he moves into the dining room, about 20 feet away.

"Honey, what's for supper?"

No response.

On to the kitchen door, only 10 feet away

"Honey, what's for supper?"

No response.

So he walks right up behind her.

"Honey what's for supper?"

"For the fifth time, CHICKEN!"

## OLD WISDOM

After working his farm every day, an old farmer rarely had time to enjoy the large pond in the back that he had fixed up years earlier with picnic tables, horseshoe pitches and benches. So one evening he decided to go down and see how things were holding up. Much to his surprise, he heard voices shouting and laughing with glee. As he came closer he saw it was a group of young women skinny dipping in his pond.

He made the women aware of his presence and they went to the deep end. One of the women shouted at him, "We're not coming out until you leave."

The old farmer replied, "I didn't come down here to watch you ladies swim or make you get out of the pond naked. I came down to feed the alligator."

Moral: Old age and treachery will always triumph over youth and skill.

# JACQUES RICARD IN THE CARIBBEAN – Part II

## Continuation of a conversation with Anthony Kent

In the September issue, Jacques guided us to the islands of St. Martin, Anguilla and St. Barts, where we left Jacques in the light of the full moon! Now we join him again, as he takes us on his US\$450 LIAT multiple ticket multiple ticket to ten more sunlit Caribbean island destinations.

“On the Internet I had found a nice little guesthouse in St. Vincent, high up on a ridge, so you could see the Grenadines straight out in front. I rented a taxi for the day and had a great time visiting the whole island, including a place called Montreal Gardens, which is now a botanical garden. It is beautifully kept and there is a river there among the flowers and jungle. Right beside it there’s a grapefruit orchard. I asked the taxi driver if I could have one, so he went off and got me one and I ate the grapefruit right there, just off the tree. I had never tasted anything so sweet and juicy. St. Vincent is really a beautiful garden. It was the first time I saw banana trees and I learned how bananas grow – really amazing! They put them in plastic bags, the whole bunch, to keep the bugs out for export!

On January 29, I flew to Grenada, where I had booked a place on the other side of the island, near the centre of the nutmeg processing. This was 6 months after the hurricane had hit Grenada and 95% of all residences were damaged, but the hotel had been restored. I was there on a Sunday and I went to mass – and I was the only white guy in the whole church! They were singing hymns and I didn’t have a hymn book and a lady came up to me and passed me hers, so I didn’t feel out of place. I made it a point on Sundays to go to many of the churches. This is one thing I found – travelling alone is the best way not to be alone. You meet so

many people. I rented a car to drive round the island, including a visit to the big cliff, where many Carib Indians jumped to their deaths, when their island was invaded.

From Grenada I flew to Trinidad. At the airport I went to the tourist information office and they called a guy at a B&B who could just fit me in for two nights, before the crowd arrived for Mardi Gras week. After Thursday, everything was booked, so I was really lucky. It was a nice B&B in a suburb of the capital, Port of Spain. The owner had nothing to do that afternoon, so I paid him and he took me on a tour of the capital. Trinidad is quite big – and Port of Spain is really big.

A friend found me a beautiful B&B right on the southern point of Barbados, where the two oceans meet, within a hundred yards of the beach. One day, I rented a car and drove around Barbados and visited the lovely zoological garden. Another day, I took a trip on a catamaran and we went around the island snorkelling, partying,

drinks the whole day!

St. Lucia has good restaurants, but a little pricey, more up-market. By that time, I was starting to get a bit tired, because of the demanding routine. You get up, take a plane, find a hotel, pack your bags, do some visiting – and at night you just pass out! Next morning, you do some more visiting and then the next day back on a plane. So I was starting to get stuck in a routine. After St. Lucia I went to the French island of Martinique, where I rented a car and visited the domain where Josephine was born. There is a museum there, as well as the plantation, which made for a very enjoyable and interesting visit, before I flew to Dominica. There are only 400 hotel rooms on the island – and I was



*Downtown Roseau*

there during the elections. They went bananas! It was unbelievable. Just before the elections they had a big rally and the roads were blocked. Everybody had a barbecue and you couldn't get around anywhere! Then I visited the famous Trafalgar falls and the hot springs and walked around the lava field. Prices in Dominica are very good – there are no high-priced hotels. They have the highest mountain in the whole Caribbean – and it's a beautiful rainforest. Because the airport is on the far side of the island, I had to take a taxi all the way across, over the hills, over the mountain and through the lush rainforest, where it rains all the time. Now I know why they call it a rainforest!

In the capital, Roseau, I stayed in a little B&B and I felt secure there. I managed to find a couple of good restaurants, but no beaches. Most of the tourists come in on cruise ships. There are no big hotels, just guesthouses and a couple of resorts in the hills. Dominica is really wild and natural.

After Dominica, I flew to Guadeloupe, where I rented a car and drove round the butterfly-shaped island. I went to St. Pierre, the former capital, and to Basseterre, the present capital of Guadeloupe, where there is a beautiful seaside market, with delightful odours, scents and spices! It's a very safe place, with a strong emphasis on Creole culture. On the eastern side, the land is flat and cultivated, while on the western side you find the famous volcano and the hilly countryside, where the terrain is really different.

From Guadeloupe, I continued to Antigua, where I had a beautiful but inexpensive hotel. It cost only US\$50 per day, for a big room with a balcony and a magnificent view of the port. I took a day-trip on a boat to see the various sights, including the impressive volcanoes. The world-famous harbour is where the cruise ships come in and it's very attractive for the tourists.

My last stop was the island of St. Kitts, where I visited the big fort on the hill, after a beautiful ride through the lush countryside up to the fortifications. It gives you a sense of what military life was like in the middle of the 18th century. I saw the officers' quarters, which were on the side of the hill, facing the ocean. The rooms were small, but it must have been really quite comfortable, even for the 18th century. The day I was there was the start of the last sugar harvest ever. They were switching to other things, because the EU no longer gave them preferences – although they didn't know what they were switching to next!

So I returned to St. Martin, where I had negotiated a price of 900 euros for a 5-week stay, with a little kitchenette, fridge, shower, no view but a nice balcony and a pool.”

**Jacques, before I let you go, please tell us which islands you most want to return to?**

“Dominica, Grenada and Barbados, definitely! And I really enjoyed the French islands, Guadeloupe, Martinique and St. Martin, where I made a lot of friends. At 6 o'clock every day, I had to have my glass of Ricard and my iced water. But it's strange, eh, that Ricard, I only like it in hot places!”



*Trafalgar Falls,  
not far from the capital, Roseau*

**Finally, could you give a rough idea of how much somebody should budget for a trip like this?**

“\$5,000 per month. That's the bottom line. It cost me about \$15,000 for the whole 3-month trip, including accommodation, the flights, taxi transfers and daily tours - but I did not stay in the most expensive hotels.”

**Many thanks, Jacques for sharing your Caribbean holiday details with us!**

# MY 160 KILOMETERS ON HORSEBACK

Dorothy Hénaut, August 2006

Hi friends!

I have had the travel experience of my dreams! I just got back from a 160 kilometre trip on horseback in the Chic Chocs hills on the edge of the Gaspé. I have to admit I'm proud of myself just for making it through to the end, because it was very long days in the saddle, but I had a smile on my face the whole time. But let me tell you more:

Sunday, August 6th, 2006

Pleasant drive to Métis-sur-mer, just after Mont Joli on the Lower St. Lawrence coast. Picnicked at Kamouraska for lunch, then visited the crazy sculptures by Marcel Gagnon in Ste-Flavie – rudimentary humans in cement come out of the sea and up along the shore, and there are also sculptures on log rafts which float at high tide. The sculptor calls them Le Grand Rassemblement – the Great Gathering. This always hits both my funnybone and my imagination.

By six p.m. I was at *L'Auberge une Ferme en Gaspésie*, near Métis-sur-mer, which is the rendez-vous point for the horse brigade. They had had a bit of a drama earlier in the day – the horses had all gotten loose from the pasture and gone tooling down the road. However, neighbours pitched in and rounded them all up. Unfortunately, we got there too late to be part of the posse. Had an excellent dinner, and managed to sleep some, in spite of my excitement.

The next morning it seemed to be rainy, and we all dressed in rain gear (four of us, plus Pierre, our guide, and his daughter Alexandra). I was given a great big horse called Toffee, so one of the challenges of the trip was to find a bench or a stone for me to climb up on, or a ditch to put him in, so I could clamber on. But Pierre was very helpful in that regard, and had the art of pushing me up so I even occasionally felt graceful about landing in the saddle.

We had quite a bit of territory to cover to get to our next auberge, so there was lots of trot-

ting and cantering. The trotting was no problem, as I'm good at trotting, but Toffee's canter was so bouncy I'm convinced he thought he was a kangaroo. I think I have been spoiled by the horses I ride in my lessons every week – most of them are as comfortable as rocking chairs, and my bum never leaves the saddle. I certainly couldn't sit Toffee's canter, so I did considerable harm to my butt before I figured out I should stand up in the stirrups while cantering.

We traveled on paved roads, dirt roads, logging roads, through many types of forest – birch and aspen, spruces of various kinds, mixed brush, broad open fields of wild flowers, huge hay fields, alongside blue oat fields (you can't let your horse eat grains in the field, they could

make them sick). The rule was that you could let your horse grab a bite to eat (except for the grains) as long as he did not stop walking. Toffee was an expert at grabbing grass, leaves, flowers, anything, while not quite stopping. He made me laugh.

My thrill of the day was when Pierre announced that we were about to do our first (and easiest, he said) ROLLER COASTER of the week. There was a swath of beautiful grass that wound up and down and around among the trees in the forest, and we tore off on a fast canter, zooming around bends and up and down hills, and I started to get a taste for speed, which I had never had before. It was thrilling, and I was roaring with laughter by the end (in spite of my sore butt).

Pierre's horses were fabulous – lively and responsive, but absolutely bomb-proof. They ignored the farm dogs who chased after us, the various vehicles that passed. They were steady and sure-footed, because some of the footing was not easy – fragile, slippery slate, rocks, sticks and roots sticking out, lots of puddles –



who knew how deep? – we crossed rocky river beds, marshy areas. Nothing distressed those horses. This was particularly nice for me because I was able to relax about the footing, instead of worrying about it constantly, which I have a tendency to do.

Pierre stopped us for about fifteen minutes every hour and a half. Combination pee stops for the humans and a chance to graze for the horses. They were well fed, and he was very careful to keep them happy and healthy.

The first day we left at 9 a.m. and arrived around 5 p.m., having had a very long lunch in a sugar shack owned by friends of Pierre's, and we were able to buy some wonderful maple syrup and maple butter for very reasonable prices. Pierre's wife Bonnie had brought an excellent lunch to us, and she carried our maple syrup away to be picked up back at *L'Auberge une Ferme en Gaspésie* the last day.

It was a glorious day, but by the time we got to *l'Auberge du lac Malcom*, every muscle in my back and legs hurt and my butt was raw. I was far too exhausted to dive into the lake, which was lovely. Two beers and then a bath. Fortunately there were big bathtubs in the rooms, and I poured a cup of epsom salts Suzanne had packed for me into the bath and hopped in for a soak that I planned to take half an hour. But I fell asleep immediately, and slept for over that. Fortunately I had put down the non-skid rubber mat, so I didn't slip under the water. This bath really paid off, as the next day my muscles were not too bad at all. It took another day for my butt to improve.

The second day we continued to travel through very varied terrain, climbing up into hills and down into valleys, along logging roads, back roads, paths through the forest, galloping through fields (I felt like a cowboy from long ago), the scenery constantly varying before our eyes. We had lunch in a delightful little cabin run by a woman who has a very successful blueberry operation, and I was so tired I actually nodded off on the couch after lunch. This day's ROLLER COASTER was even more exciting, as it went up and down a bit more, and the footing was a mix of grass and rocks, but by then I was really getting a taste for speed.

I had figured out that if I stood up in the stirrups and held onto my horse's mane with one hand and the reins with the other that I would be perfectly safe, so I had a gas going at quite a speedy canter. By 4 p.m. we had arrived at Le Ranch des Collines Chic Chocs, Pierre's spread, a beautiful view of distant hills and horses grazing (which I painted at sundown), and a cozy bed and breakfast. Pierre's wife Bonnie and their younger daughter Courtenay gave us a warm welcome. Again another epsom salt bath, a beer with dinner, and to bed fairly early.

The third day Pierre rests both his horses and his riders. We rode for an hour and a half to a fish hatchery, and had fun fishing in a pond for the fish we would eat for dinner that night. We then had a good lunch, and after lunch we stopped not far from there at a swimming hole under a waterfall in the river. The water was not even that cold (18 degrees), and I rolled and floated like a porpoise for some time. It was absolutely heavenly – and very healing. Then back for a leisurely ride to Pierre's place again. We got back early enough that I hitchhiked off to paint from a spot a couple of kilometres away, where I had a view of fields, forests, windmills and the St. Lawrence River, which at that spot is referred to as the sea. The windmills are huge white shapes of incredible elegance. I just love them. For dinner we ate our catch of trout, perfectly fresh and beautifully cooked, and then prepared for the long ride the next day.

By then my butt was mostly healed, and I was feeling better and better. This was the day we rode to the top of the highest mountain in the area of the Chic Chocs. Our roller coaster today was through dense forest while climbing up the mountain, so it was particularly exciting as we really couldn't see where we were going. But the horses knew the path, and they loved the excitement of cantering up the mountain too, so we all had fun.

After going through some areas that had been very carelessly logged – pretty messy approach to land stewardship, I'd say – we reached the top of the mountain, and picnicked on a point looking out over rich agricultural land, with

golden wheat and blue oats, forested hills, past the windmills and finally the St. Lawrence coast and the sea. It was magnificent. And I had time to do a small watercolour of the scene – Pierre had made sure there would be enough room in my saddlebag for my smallest painting equipment.

After lunch we still had quite a distance to go before landing back at Lac Malcom. We went through different territory than before, but it was all extremely varied. Some of the logging roads went past what looked like slate quarries. The slate was in beautiful shades of burgundy red or blue, and I was itching to take some home with me to make stepping stones in my back garden, which is very muddy right now. We also rode through cow pastures, and you would be surprised at how curious cows are, rushing over to find out who we were and what we wanted.

This time when we arrived at lac Malcom, I had enough energy to go for a swim in the lake – before my beer! Again another good meal, and then to bed early, because the last day will also be the longest.

This is also the day I confessed to Pierre that I was 70 years old. I had lied about my age and said I was 65. He wasn't a bit fazed, and said he had had 75 and 80-year-olds on the trip. I felt like a youngster! And I can keep on doing this for a long time!

We were in our saddles by shortly after 8 a.m., because we had quite a distance to cover. From Lac Malcom we headed up hill and down dale toward the St-Lawrence, stopping at lunch time at an organic farm, where we were served wonderful quiches with fresh vegetables from the farm, asparagus and leeks and onions. An extraordinary woman runs the farm with her husband. Not only do they have vegetables but sheep, pigs and chickens, as well as ponies for their 7 or 8 adopted children, all younger than 10, whom they have rescued from bad situations. I don't know how she does it. But the children were obviously loving being in the country, messing about in the dirt, and they also seemed to be getting along very well together.

We continued on towards the sea, passing right under some of the gigantic windmills under construction in the area. I can't remember how tall Pierre said they were, but something like 30 or 40 stories high.

Pierre has a personal relationship with the owners of all the lands he passes through, and we would occasionally stop while he chatted with the farmer or the farmer's father. Most of the terrain we passed is through forest and farm, and we seldom had to take the local roads, except for brief distances.

We eventually crossed highway 132 – a very busy highway, might I add, but finally it was not too hard to find a gap in the traffic – I had been apprehensive about that. We passed through the village of Baie des Sables, and headed for Métis-sur-mer and Les Boules, along the shoreline. Although the shore is actually quite rocky, there was a sandy edge we could travel on. It was high tide, and the air was beautiful, and it was a gorgeous day.

We finally came to the area of the Seashore Gallop – not in the sand itself, too hard on the horses, but through a field on the water's edge, with a huge hedge of wild roses between us and the sea. The Gallop is two kilometres long, and was thrilling. I can't tell you how happy I was!

After the gallop we came to the edge of Métis-sur-mer, and then headed inland to our old starting point, *L'Auberge une ferme en Gaspésie*, where we again had an excellent meal, but not before feeding the horses all the carrots I had in the car for them.

I really felt as if I could take a weekend's rest and start out all over again. All I needed was the time and the money.....

The trip had been a dream come true.

