



Lekwungen Land

The city is a midden
with layers of collective truths
ascending from 150 feet deep

We are the fingertips
of the far left arm
touching the liquid connector
holding the larger land mass, together
Lekwengun Land
where woven blankets are laid
across graves as a way
to say, we honour those
who sleep beneath us
their song of Welcome, Victory and Journey
resonate faintly on ancient beaches
it reaches our hearts

The mayor says
"Victoria tries so hard to be cool."
it's true
but cool on our own terms
we've never borrowed from
Big Sister Van-city
glossy steel and glass style
those shiny outfits would never fit us
never had need to copy
our southern cousin
Seattle, our shores
still accessible whatever
the consequence

Victoria
I like to think
was born to handsome parents
and abandoned a while, surviving
a few seasons, independent
living a little, learning
a few things
an orphan adopting
other orphans
until finally
the family you wished for
is formed

Surely the best
definition of the city
sits outside the confines of 150
incorporation is a marriage
reciting vows in business language
between territory and people
and you can't marry the bride
without proposing to the whole
of her clan
without honouring
well at least recognizing
the relationships in all
their delicate dynamics
before congratulations are
sent

We've played the defensive
for more than a century
shaping and naming
the babies by what
we are not
lets be more
than the countries
superficial identity
of hockey, beer and coffee
brewed by you-know-who

We are standing
on bones
we drink
from oceans
ill-named and re-named
yet it all stays the same
Eighteen Hundred and Sixty-Two when it became
paper legal, a place existing
on a map, the map tucked away
as a file, finding a soul as a city
breathing life into the union
by human means

Sculptural landmarks
put in place, trace values
create one more layer
cultural excavation
within the city
atop Lekwengun Land

Poetry and legalese
co-existing on home and native land
The city, the mystery
carries questions digging in history
for answers to bring forward

It is difficult
to mark the years
as infant then adolescent
not knowing the exact
life-span
of a city still growing
not knowing the beginning
before the naming and claiming
in her majesties honour
celebration by incorporation connecting
borders crossing people's
home-lands

important councils
debate beauty ,import labour
deliberate culture, ruminant history

as her children we learn
never to judge the worth
by ones outer beauty
although we know
we are gorgeous
and would not qualify
any pageant due to
exceeding the aesthetic

Our greatest asset
is memory
the ships, the battle
the blankets, the blood
the people

that painter woman, her house
castles replacing big houses

allow me to step outside
the timelessness of this tribute
to put the queen on google-map
where her septor extends out
like spokes on a bike
towards Esquimalt, Royal Oak
Saanich, View Royal and others
she holds them up
sending citizens out from centre
inhabiting pockets of a city still
building in population
follow her roads and we find
people, not contracts
land, not real estate
culture, not tourism

We review archival evidence
the before and after
value systems shifting
replacing simple simplicity

the silent skeletons
are finally having their say

Victoria, City of Gardens
with seeds blown in
from every direction
taking root among the indigenous
resulting in rich varieties
and cross-pollinations
the plump, happy-faced poppies
delicate, shy pansies
brother-sister seeds
that grow, despite the odds
from cement cracks
thriving on thimbles of water
holding ground in bully gusts

the questions get harder
do we vote for more
lenient building bans
or take the keys to the city
from around our necks
to open doors
leading to wider highways
and faster transit

What about that mainland bridge?
This remains a dream
for the time being
future governments
can visit that museum of
possibilities

In this place
there is no need to abuse
the word "miracle"
misunderstand or exploit it
the constant sparkle
upon the water
and salmon sunsets define it
however her mysteries
remain thick
and those who protect
her beauty secrets
work harder with less
the salt cleansed air
blesses us daily
as well as the fog
and constant June clouds

here, the light is too
bright to be coloured-blind
why ignore the rainbow
growing and changing
in shades like aurora borealis
pushing one colour forward

pulling another back
constantly transforming
never stagnating
but celebrating
change

today this occasion
may be too inadequate to
hold up the whole of history in one place
but sufficient enough
to make a marker in time
to witness what no living human
today can say
they've experienced from the start

in human years, 150 is a long time
in human years, 150 is a blip

so we take our place as collective witness
to tell the next generation
that one hundred and fifty is both
long and short
for one day, when we are forced
from here
shaken or flooded or sunken back home
Lekwungen Land will sigh and say

"Take your stuff and things
leave me with my simple beauty
the same beauty that lured you here
in the first place."

The first place
Lekwungen Land

by City of Victoria Poet Laureate Janet Rogers