

SATURNA ISLAND TRUSTEE REPORT MAY 2014

By Pam Janszen

It is my turn to write the Scribbler article, but I haven't been to the meetings lately due to some health issues so I asked Paul if he could write again this month and he said, "What do I write about?"

Yikes, there is nothing that we haven't already said about our bylaws and nothing really new to say. Other than to be a bit controversial, and muse whether we want a vibrant community full of activity and kids (as experienced on this last Easter weekend), or a quiet community with almost no people and no activity to disturb the few souls seeking solitude from life.

Which made me think that maybe I did have something to tell you after all. Maybe it isn't new, maybe we've already said it over and over, but I think it's worth saying again.

These past years as a Trustee have put me in contact with people from here to Gabriola to Howe Sound and the story is always the same. Our islands, once vibrant communities full of activity and kids, are dying. Those folk with the famous "drawbridge" mentality don't need to worry; there are no hordes at the gate trying to get in, no crowds waiting at the door to burst in and disturb our quiet life, whether they are rich retirees or young families. For sale signs are rampant; sales, not so much.

On Saturna we aren't keeping even, we're losing ground. We did have a thriving community when I moved here 24 years ago. There were more than 20 kids in the school, now if it weren't for the SEEC program we wouldn't even have a school. And I have learned, while doing homecare on Mayne and Galiano, that the story is the same there, there are far less kids in the schools than there were 20 years ago.

In fact, last month's Scribbler ran an article about a Mayne Island group called the Mayne Island Early Childhood Society, which is sponsoring a project called the Southern Gulf Islands Early Years Initiative, which arose out of their concern for the ongoing viability of their community. If my health allows, I'll be joining them on May 31st for their inter-island round table discussion of topics related to the well being of families with young children.

Have you been to the Christmas school play or the Halloween fun at the Rec Centre or any one of our many events with the kids running around, having fun, and adding the energy that only young children possess? Can you imagine Saturna without a school, our community without kids? I can, and it presents a sad picture, a diminished community.

And of course, you will have to imagine Saturna without the parents too, that group of young people who still have the energy to do things like be our Fire Chief or run a garden shop or clean your house. There were lots of us in that group when I moved here, but now we are all in our fifties and sixties and losing steam.

We are becoming the old timers, but sadly there are way more of us than there are of those moving into the younger group. How will Saturna function without that demographic? Not as well as it used to if you ask me.

We need to revitalize our community. As Trustees we can't make that happen, but we hope that we can make it a little bit easier for someone who tries to make a go of it here to succeed. There won't be a stampede, but maybe we can re-grow our community one slow step at a time. Because we can all imagine the alternative, and it is not good.