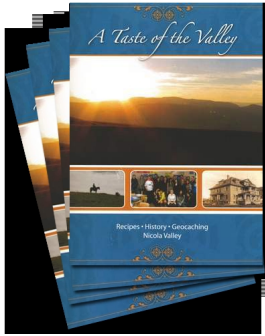


A Taste of the Valley: Full-meal deal or overstuffed buffet?

Written by Robin Poon, News Reporter

Friday, 09 December 2011 22:03 - Last Updated Thursday, 29 March 2018 21:36



Working in three genres, *A Taste of the Valley* occasionally bites off more than it can chew. Thankfully, those genres invite light grazing and let readers decide when they have had enough.

A Taste of the Valley, a new book produced by local seniors and youths, aspires to be a cookbook, a travel guide, and a shared memoir of the Nicola Valley, all within less than 100 pages.

To that end, the youthful recollections of town elders, as recorded by today's young Merrittonians, form the centre of the slim volume.

Those same town elders contribute recipes for appetizers, main courses, and desserts.

A Taste of the Valley also contains co-ordinates and short descriptions for 35 geocaching sites, the descriptions often carrying local memories as well.

The recipes and geocaches fill the margins of the book's pages.

A Taste of the Valley invites readers' interaction on three levels: absorbing grandfatherly anecdotes, sampling their favourite dishes, and combing the countryside for the secret corners only longtime residents would know about.

To someone who has an interest in the community but not a deep knowledge of it, the book offers an entertaining snapshot of the characters that populate Merritt.

Somewhat surprisingly, the locals do not only recount their lives in the Nicola Valley.

For example, Ann van Steenes recounts some of her experiences in the Second World War while living in the Netherlands and describes immigrating to Canada in the 1950s.

Of course, there is plenty of attention paid to Merritt-specific tales as well.

Stan Grimshire writes of taking a rubber-tired wagon ride with his father to Merritt. Instead, however, he ends up dropped off at a family friend's house in Nicola hauling firewood and being fed boiled cabbage.

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"So much for my exciting trip to Merritt!"

The personality filling the individual stories is one of A Taste of the Valley's strengths.

The fact that not all of the anecdotes take place in the Nicola Valley helps the storytellers' personalities shine through since they are free to truly be themselves, important considering how many individuals are included.

At times, the personality even extends to the recipes. While that works for A Taste of the Valley as shared memoir, it works against A Taste of the Valley as cookbook.

Lou Birk's recipe for calf brain soup lists no ingredients or quantities for the same. As for directions, the first step is "Devein", the second step is "Take out everything that does not belong."

Skip ahead to the fifth step, "Put brains into the water", and the sixth, "Add spices, any kind you want."

Most chefs looking for new ideas would probably learn far more about Birk than making soup from following that recipe.

Roger Shackelly's Indian taco recipe, while more refined, still leaves room for confusion. Among the ingredients listed are two "sm. cans of tomato paste" and one "big can tomatoes."

If everyone agreed what a small can is and what a big can is, world peace would have been achieved long ago.

However, these faults are most obvious when reading A Taste of the Valley cover to cover. By design, cookbooks, travel guides, and even anthologies of brief recollections suggest reading by instalment.

While the genres do operate at cross-purposes sometimes, at least all three are meant to be digested in small portions.

A Taste of the Valley can be purchased at The Baillie House, Merritt Printing, Vision Quest, Nicola Valley Museum, Merritt Youth and Family Resources Society, or viewed at Merritt Public Library.