

Over the Back Fence  
For Friday July 11, 2008  
Approx 620 words

“It’s your problem!”  
By Alva Wood

“It’s your problem,” the members of our village council told mayor Jake Bowers.

“It’s your problem,” the village staff told the mayor.

“It’s your problem,” the regional district said.

The “problem” started long before Jake became mayor. Jake and Astrid used to come up here every summer and live in the trailer they had parked on a couple of acres alongside the creek. After he retired, he wanted to practise his woodworking hobby, so he ordered a small hog barn through Sears and turned it into a workshop.

Nobody else has greener thumbs than Astrid. She grew so many narcissusses and gladiolouses and coreopsisies that they didn’t know what to do with them. So she opened a flower shop in the front of his hog barn. And people started buying flowers for funerals.

In those days, when someone died they sent the body down to River City for embalming and then brought it back up for the service in the community hall and then sent it back down to the city again because we didn’t have a proper cemetery here either.

Jake figured we could use the old quarry for a cemetery. The village council agreed, but there was nobody to dig graves, so Jake bought himself a used backhoe.

Ever since then, he’s been burying our dear departed in the cemetery/quarry.

Except last year, Vancouver City offered to help solve our village’s chronic tax shortfalls by leasing our quarry as a landfill site. The village council agreed, provided Jake could figure out what to do with the bodies already buried there.

Jake hasn’t quite figured that out yet.

Fortunately, no one has died recently. But a few people are getting a little antsy.

“My folks are getting on,” Harvey Armitage, Ollie and Florence’s son, tells Jake. “Either of them could kick off at any time. Where am I going to bury them?”

Eleanor Frost has similar concerns about Ryan Ginger. “He won’t quit flying that damn plane of his,” she says. “If he crashes, where can I plant his pieces?”

Minister Sid Carter makes regular visits to the seniors’ home. “There’s at least three of them on their last legs,” she tells Jake. “I keep expecting to be told that Deirdre Pollack’s mum, or Rosie Green’s, or Aynsley Kastor’s, has passed away since my last visit. I can’t do a graveside interment without a grave.”

“What can I do?” Jake protests.

“It’s your problem,” they repeat.

Jake thinks about this for a long time. Then he gets Manfred Czarnecki to look up some very old British statutes. And he drafts this proclamation:

*“Whereas of late members of the publick have threatened the peace and good order of this community by presuming to grow old and and/or depart this mortal existence for reasons accidental or otherwise, and the punishments provided by the laws now being not adequate to prevent such offences: be it therefore enacted by the authority of this council, that no persons shall be authorized nor permitted to die until such time as an acceptable burial ground shall be obtained and provided, and furthermore that following proclamation of the aforesaid legislation, if any person shall fail to cease such unlawful exit, then it shall and may be lawful for every justice of the peace, sheriff, or under-sheriff and also for every high or petty constable, and other peace-officer within such county, and also for every mayor, bailiff, and councillor, on notice or knowledge of any such unlawful demise, to inform the alleged deceased that he or she has committed a criminal offence for which the punishment may and shall be death.”*

“There,” he says, signing the proclamation with a suitable flourish, “that should hold them!”