

They drank beer, but talked water

- The Guardian (Charlottetown)
- 13 Oct 2012
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“So, Louie, I bet you feel like a right fool now, don’t you?” Swifty Stewart taunted Louisa, as she brought another round to the table.

Hat MacInnes and the boys had been in her boot – leg joint most of the afternoon.

“And just why would I be doing that?” Louisa snapped back. “Why should I be feeling the fool?”

“Yeah, why should she?” demanded Mousie MacKay, coming to Louie’s defence.

“Good lord, don’t anyone of you know what’s goin’ on?” asked Swifty. “Don’t you read the papers?”

“Well,” said Hat, a little cautiously, “I read the papers and I didn’t see anything that should make Louisa feel foolish. This week, it was all about the cruise ships and how damn appreciative we should be about all the people they bring in.”

“Yeah, one day there were 8,000 of them clogging up the streets. Three huge hulks, the biggest damn boats I’ve ever seen,” said Rifle Burhoe. “I guess it’s good, but other than the tour buses, the horse and buggies and a few restaurants, I’m not sure who benefits. But, why should Louie be feeling foolish?”

“Jeez, you guys got short memories,” said Swifty. “Don’t you remember earlier this summer, Louie wouldn’t put our beer in a glass. We had to drink it out of the bottle. Remember she didn’t want to have to wash the glasses, she didn’t want to waste any water. The crisis, boys, the crisis! Don’t you remember the crisis? No washing cars, no watering your lawn and Louie stopped washing dishes.”

“Now it seems all the while we were being urged to conserve our water, the city is blithely pumping thousands of litres aboard those big – mother cruisers every time one ties up to the dock. We all should be feeling foolish. I know I am. I was sneaking out at night to wash the cab. Chicken Little up at city hall was crowing about the sky falling, and all the while, taps on the wharf were wide open.”

“You say it’s thousands of litres, but you don’t know that for sure because city hall isn’t saying how much is involved,” said Hat. “And just because the cruise ships are taking on water doesn’t mean there isn’t a shortage.”

“And why isn’t city hall saying how much water is involved? If there really is a crisis, I’d be more than a little upset that some fancy-arsed tourist from Boston gets a crack at my water supply before I do,” barked Mousie. “There’s no way the people of Charlottetown should have to do without just so those guys on those boats can shower every time they come out of the swimming pool. No way!”

“Well, Mousie, you’re right. There’s no good reason for city hall not to say how much water is going on those boats, however, secrecy in government isn’t unusual. The provincial government looks like it’s covering up something when they won’t let civil servants testify before legislative committees. The federal government works hard to ensure Canadians know less and less about how they operate. All the information in Ottawa is tightly controlled by the Prime Minister’s Office. It’s becoming a major concern.”

“Yes, but if government won’t tell you basic facts, what can you do about it?” asked Louisa.

“Well, the first thing you can do is make them understand that you expect them to be forthright,” said Hat. “You, us, we all have to engage them and demand they show us the evidence, the facts they are basing their decisions and policies on, or we’ll give them the boot.”

“The trouble is, Hat, there’s been a lot of engagement on Plan B,” said Mousie, “and it doesn’t appear to have done any good.”

“Yes, but in fairness to the government on that one, it has laid out its reasons for the project,” said Hat. “However, people don’t accept them. That’s not quite the same as refusing to provide a simple statistic – how many litres of water are going on the cruise ships?”

“Do you think providing water may be one of the ways we attract the ships to come here?” asked Rifle.

“Even if it is,” said Swifty, “they should still tell us how much water is involved, especially since they made such a big deal about how little water we have.”

“Ah, well, as my dear old mother used to say,” said Mousie, “it’ll all come out in the wash.”

“Providing there’s still enough water to do one,” said Hat.