

Q&A with Darrell Noakes

Author of *Bunking with History*

Winner: Gold Award: Best Article Saskatchewan 2014

Westworld Saskatchewan, Spring 2013



TMS: *How did you get the idea for this story?*

DN: Well, we were planning a vacation (from Saskatchewan) out to Maple Creek, B.C. and I found this new bed and breakfast while I was looking for a place where we could stay on the way back. I was just thinking about booking it as a part of our vacation when I got the email from Sheila (Hansen, Editor), asking if I'd be interested in the assignment.

TMS: *Sheila Hansen (editor) says that you were a natural fit for this assignment, based on your knowledge of Saskatchewan and your interest in history. How did that develop?*

DN: My interest in Saskatchewan developed when I moved here 32 years ago. I grew up in B.C. and in high school I had a social studies teacher who made us map 6,500 places in the country. So when I got to Saskatchewan, all these cities that had just been dots on a map – I was able to visit them.

TMS: *So in addition to the travel that you do for work, you also travel around Saskatchewan for leisure?*

DN: Well, it's funny because I recently connected with my first girlfriend from high school. We hadn't seen each other in 35 years, but now we're living together (romantically). Awhile back, we went to the northern part of Saskatchewan to visit the crooked trees near Speers. We stopped for lunch and Sandra mentioned that the streets were called Railway and Main. And I said there's one of those in every town in Saskatchewan. She didn't believe me, so we've started a personal project that in every town we follow Railway and Main to see where they go.

TMS: *You obviously worked hard to create, not only a historical aspect to the story, but also to give the reader a strong sense of place. How did you do that?*

DN: It's interesting how our experiences shape our sense of observation. I used to ride a tandem with a friend of mine who was blind, who has since passed away. He would take the back and I – or another sighted friend – would take the front and we would describe what we were seeing. I'd talk about the clouds and he'd say "Ok, so how many are there?" And I'd describe that to him. He had sight when he was young, so he was able to imagine the visuals we'd be describing. Sometimes he would say things like, "Near as I can tell, there are six

different kinds of crickets in that field.” These experiences with this friend form my sense of observation, and that’s how the sound of the crickets got worked into the article.

***TMS:** And you took your own photos for this article. What’s that like, trying to write and imagine a good photo at the same time?*

DN: Well, it’s a left brain and right brain sort of thing and I have to remind clients of that. When I’m interviewing, I’m thinking in terms of the words and the story, and I have to take a break before I can do the photography. The brain functions and the creativity required for each task are so different. So when I’m doing a story like that – or any story that involves a timeline – I keep a journal. You’ll often find me wandering around, sometimes I’ll use a voice recorder, but I prefer sitting down with a lined journal book. I’ll write what I’m feeling at the moment, what I’m seeing, then make notes in the margin about what I’d like to include in the story. So I think, “If I’m going to talk about this, I should get a photo to go along with that aspect of the story.” The words give you a feeling, and you want to try to capture that feeling in a photograph. It’s a shifting of gears in my head, to get out of the literal mode and into the visual mode.

***TMS:** Congratulations again on winning the award - how did that feel?*

DN: Well, what won the award was getting the feedback from the editor, we went back and forth three or four times. I couldn’t be in Vancouver (to accept the award), but I wanted to say, “Look, it wasn’t my story it was *our* story.” Without the support and guidance of the editor and the art director, (the story) wouldn’t have won an award. It’s really nice with a magazine like *Westworld* because I also work with the art director as a photographer. So between the editor, the art director and me, we’re each bringing our strengths into an assignment to bring it to the best it can be. Everybody that contributes to that process understands their expertise and what we’re trying to do. The reason *Westworld* wins those awards is because of the working relationship between the art director, editor, writer and the whole team.

Erin Isings conducted this interview for TMS.