

It's All About Me...

Gold Fever is Hereditary

I grew up with gold fever in my blood. My Grandpa Grigg, and his father before him, were both dreamers of gold. They spent their life searching for the [Lost Mine of Pitt Lake](#), also known as [Slumach's Gold](#), and it was those stories he told over and over. My brother and sisters soon tired of it, but I was enamoured by them, I hung on his every word. It didn't matter to me how many times I had heard them I could hardly wait for him to tell them again.

Grandpa Grigg was a logger, born and raised in Surrey. However, Surrey in those days (1890's to 1930's) didn't exist. My grandfather grew up logging Surrey, it was just a forest at that time. Whenever he was off from logging his father and him would hike up into the Pitt Lake mountains and try to follow the maps and trails left by the gold seekers before them. My very favourite story was the time he and his father were up in the mountains hiking around and Grandpa's handgun fell out of his holster and shot him, right in the stomach on his left side. Fortunately for Grandpa the bullet went right through him and out the other side, missing all vital organs in the process. Nonetheless, there was a lot of bleeding so his father mixed up a batch of flour and water and stuffed both holes with it. This stopped the bleeding and for two days they walked out of the mountains together with no further incidents. Of course, hearing the story always resulted in my getting to see his bullet holes, which never, ever ceased to fascinate me.

My Grandpa believed right up until his death at the ripe old age of 85 that the stories of the Lost Mine of Pitt Lake were true and there was gold aplenty in those mountains just waiting to be found. Of course my own father grew up listening to Grandpa's stories as well. Dad always believed it was a myth that just kept Grandpa dreaming. But because of the love my Dad had for his father, when he turned 80 my Dad rented a helicopter and took him for a spin in and around the Pitt mountains. He brought him up close to the creeks and rivers Grandpa had gold panned in his youth, and they even found an old campsite that somehow, by the garbage left around the campsite, Grandpa believed was once Volcanic Brown's (a legendary prospector who, like many others, had succumbed to Slumach's Curse and died in the mountains).

When we were young my Dad took us 5 kids, and Grandpa Grigg, on a day's outing to Yale where we spent the day learning how to gold pan along the banks of the Fraser River. Yale, as you may remember from our province's history, was the farthest up the Fraser that paddle wheeler boats could bring the fortune seekers during the gold rush. Yale was a jumping off point for prospectors heading up north to Barkerville and all of the other many gold rush locations. There were a lot of Chinese that resided in Yale during that time and they panned, and panned the banks of the Fraser precisely where Grandpa had us kids all lined up with our little pie pans. Despite the decades of intense panning by generations of gold pans, every one of us kids ended up with flakes of gold in our pans. Grandpa, of course, had the most. It was on that trip I first learned the meaning of "gold fever" and have had it flowing through my blood ever since. The sight of shining, sparkling, flakes of gold peering up at me from the bottom of my pan never ceases to excite me. I absolutely love it and continued to carry a Free Miner's Licence and pan right up through my early 40's. I haven't done much panning in the past 6 years or so but I'd love to take Lee out and give her the thrill. The Oyster River has very good gold in it. I had a favourite spot I used to pan at that always had good results, more than just flakes...actual chunks... but I haven't been up there in over 12 years so I'm not sure you can get down to it anymore. The thing about the logging roads running along the Oyster River is that the river is way, way deep down in the valley so the farther up the river you go the more difficult it is to get down to it. I guess I should go explore it again. Maybe there are some new logging roads that will allow better access. Come to think of it I believe I will give it a try once I have recovered. The river will be at its lowest point of the year so there will be lots of bare riverbed to explore.

Anyway, when I turned 16 and could drive my Dad's car, I started taking my best friends on excursions to Yale. By this time Grandpa had given me his gold pan, the one he had been using since he was a kid. I bought another pan and used these two pans to teach my friends how to gold pan. They too loved the excitement of seeing the bright, shiny flakes of gold in the bottom of their pans. So much so that one of my girlfriends still spends her summer holidays every year at one river or another camped out and panning. She brings her Mother and her brother and her dog with her and makes it a family vacation. She has now panned way more rivers in this province than I ever have and has quite a collection of gold from her decades of exploring. But one thing to note

is that to this day you can still get very good showings of gold from the banks of the Fraser River at Yale. It is my belief that gold is still flowing down this river every spring during the winter run-off.

All of that said, while I was working at the Takla Lake logging camp in 1982 I had not only brought my accordion, I also brought my gold pan with me so that I could explore some of the rivers around camp. When the owner, Frank, learned that I was interested in gold, and gold panning, he told me he had his own gold camp 50 miles from the logging camp and that since the spring breakup he and his son, Josh, were going there to work it during the logging camp's shutdown days. He knew that I was doing a lot of travelling on my 4 days off, so he asked me if I'd rather join him and his son at his gold camp for the 4 days. Well I sure didn't have to think about THAT offer!! I jumped at it...and it was during my stays at the gold camp that I REALLY learned the meaning of gold fever. My God, to this day I have never seen nuggets like the ones we were plucking out of his sluice. They were rocks, very heavy rocks. I have some pictures of that gold camp so I'll share them with you and explain the workings a bit. Frank was not just a nice man, he was a very bright man.



He had built a simple little cabin on the bank overlooking the river. It was an open cabin with no rooms in it, just cots lining the walls and a big woodstove keeping it warm. The nice thing about it was the kitchen was open and spacious. It made it easy to prepare and serve meals, which is what I was doing for the three of them (there was also a native man there from the local reserve that was running the front end loader).



Frank had what was called a “grizzly” built at the logging camp which was the main tool he used in washing the gravel. He had built it so that there were no moving parts, just lots of jets spraying water down on the gravel the loader was dumping into the bin.



The loader would get his buckets of gravel from an area he was working 20 feet away from the creek side (it's illegal to use equipment on the riverbed and cause slurry in the water). I would never have guessed that there would have been gold there. I mean, he had just logged it and cleared off the topsoil. Who would have thought there would have been gold under those trees. Yet as the loader scraped off layer upon layer of gravel, each day the gold got coarser and coarser. By the time he had reached bedrock I was blown away by the nuggets he was plucking out of there. You could actually walk on the bedrock and find nuggets laying in the crevices. It was very cool, and very exciting. Anyway...I digress....



Once washed, the big boulders would roll down the front of the “grizzly” into a discard pile, and the gravel would drop down through the grates into the sluice.



The first day I was there I was amazed at the water pressure he was using. I was absolutely sure he was washing away all of his gold and at the end of the day his sluices would be empty.

Right before dinner Frank would shut down the washing and they would empty the sluice. He had made it all with bungee cords so that you could easily lift off the screens and pull up the mats beneath. Once the mats were exposed we'd pluck up the bigger chunks of gold and drop them into a jar. Then the mats were washed into a big water tub where all of the finer gravel and gold would be dropped. The water would then be drained from the tub,

leaving only the gravel.



The gravel was then run through a spiral separating machine that would leave the gravel on the bottom and cause the gold to spiral to the middle and drop into a gold pan.



By the time this process was finished the gold pan would be primarily gold, with a very little bit of black sand.

While one guy was cleaning the gold, the other one would put the sluice back together for the next day. Once these tasks were done they would come in for dinner and bring their loaded gold pan in to me. It was then my job to heat the pan up on the stove to dry out the gold and the black sand while we were eating dinner. When everything was completely dried out and ready to go, I would dump the pan's contents onto a large sheet of white paper. Now this next step took a bit of practice, but I eventually got pretty good at it. While gently shaking the sheet of paper, you would blow lightly on the mix of gold and black sand. The black sand being lighter would slowly blow off the pa-

per, leaving just the pure gold.



This picture is an example of a single day's work, not including any nuggets we would have picked out of the sluice, or the bedrock, by hand. In the course of 4 day's work Frank would take home a large Cheez Whiz jar filled to the top. It was so heavy it took two hands to lift it. (Cheez Whiz was a staple in the logging cookhouse. It was amazing how many jars we'd go through each shift).

I had the privilege of several trips out to his gold camp during that spring. It was by far the highlight of my experiences at Takla Lake. For years and years to follow I dreamed almost every night of having my own gold camp just like Frank's. Of course, it never did happen. It costs a lot of money to get into something like that and I just never got there. I did, however, stake a gold claim one time in hopes of doing just that.



In 1987 I was working in a coastal logging camp that was running a "2 week in-1 week out" shift. It was great because it provided a whole week off with which you could go places and do things. So I started out by going down to the Archives at the BC Legislature and researching expired claims. I thought that by reading the Archives and seeing what had been mined and what had expired I would be able to simply scoop up an expired claim and make it my own. Of course, in those days there were no GPS devices so it was a little bit harder than one would expect. Nonetheless, I picked out a creek on the outskirts of Horsefly Lake and together my sister, Kerry, and I set out to stake our claim.



When we arrived and found our way to the creek we discovered it was dried right up. That was not a problem for me though because that meant it wasn't a fish creek and I could mine it without worry.



So we proceeded to figure out where to put in our initial claim post, and then blazed a trail to our outer claim post.

It was a proud day for me when I had both posts in and I was now the official owner of my own gold claim. Unfortunately though, I never did have the opportunity to test out the creek or mine the claim. Shortly after staking the claim my employer changed the shift to a 10 & 4 so I never did have another opportunity to work the claim and it eventually expired. Although it was a disappointment, the experience my sister and I shared in staking the claim was a wonderful adventure for us. It was a dream come true for me that I once staked a gold claim in my name. Kind of one of those "1001 Things to do Before You Die" moments for me.

Like my grandfather before me, I will always dream of striking gold somewhere. However, it's becoming more of a dream than a reality. Life gets more complicated as you



get older and it becomes more and more difficult to put in the time and money you'd need make that dream come true. Nonetheless, all of the years I have spent along peaceful, beautiful, remote creeks and rivers washing gravel out of my Grandpa Grigg's pan has been very rewarding, and fulfilling. It has been a wonderful hobby, and continues to give me sweet dreams, with gold nuggets dancing in my head (to hell with sugar plums).

OF NOTE: I'm sure you have all been wondering...but despite the amount of gold that passed through my hands at Frank's gold camp, not once did I ever pluck a nugget for myself. As easy as it would have been, my integrity was stronger

than my gold fever and I never once breached Frank's trust in me.

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