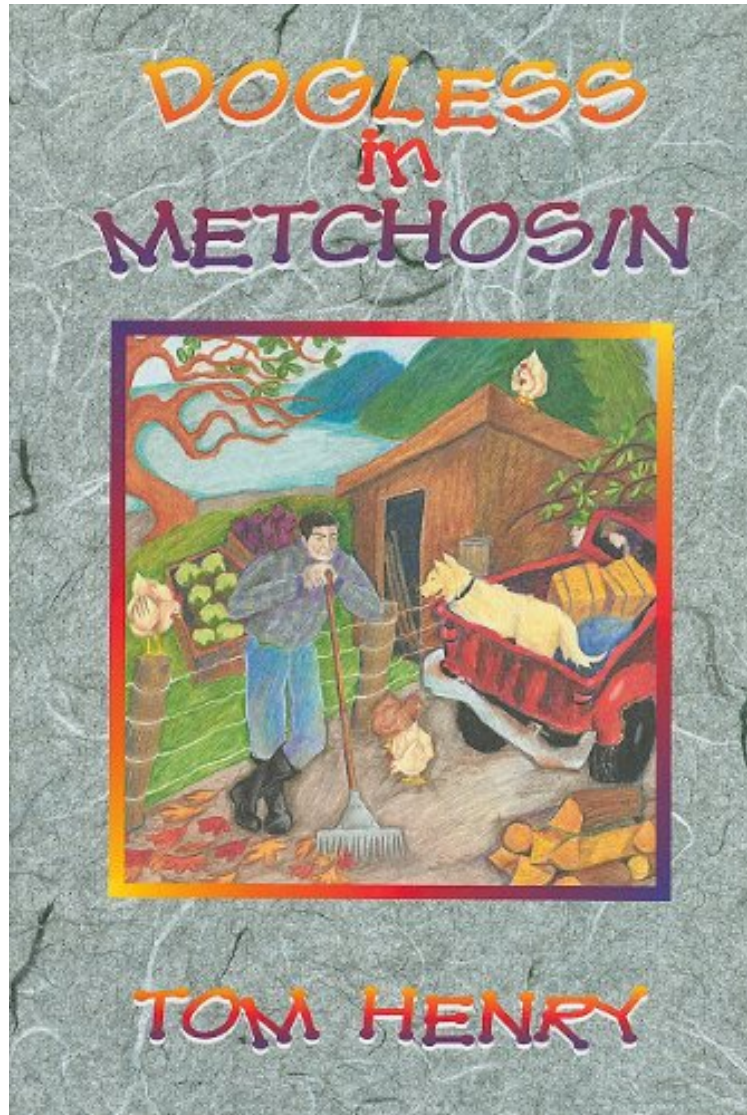


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Dogless in Metchosin

Tom Henry

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Tom Henry : Dogless in Metchosin before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dogless in Metchosin:

Honest, offbeat, and very funny, Tom Henry's stories about living in the country have been broadcast weekly on CBC Radio in British Columbia and have become favorites among listeners in the city, the country, and everywhere in between. This cassette collects some of the best of Henry's anecdotes from Metchosin, a rural area on southern

Vancouver Island where he lives with his family.

About the Author Tom Henry was born in Duncan, BC in 1961. He earned his BA in history from the University of Victoria, and has worked on tugboats, in logging camps and owned his own firewood business. A former staff writer for Monday Magazine, Henry has authored several books including *Westcoasters: Boats that Built BC* (winner of the Bill Duthie Booksellers' Choice Award), *The Good Company: An Affectionate History of the Union Steamships* (winner of the BC Historical Federation's Lieutenant Governor's Award), *Dogless in Metchosin*, *The Ideal Dog and Other Delusions*, *Paul Bunyan on the West Coast* and *Small City in a Big Valley: The Story of Duncan*. Henry's audiobook of readings from *Dogless in Metchosin* is popular with listeners who know him from his CBC Radio "Country Life" column. He lives in Victoria, BC. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

HUNDRED-CHICKEN SOUPS

Somewhere around the middle of September, the incremental change of the seasons that slowed in summer gains momentum. Flowers wilt, the maples give up the first of their deluge of leaves, and day by day the morning trip out to the woodpile is more bracing. In the never-ending cycles of rural work, it's time to prepare for fall. This September, I'm working at a small farm up the road. I cut firewood, trim a laurel hedge and generally try to keep things tidy for the landlady, who I'm going to call Frank. For this, Frank pays a reasonable wage, plus at the end of each day she gives me two quarts of homemade apple juice. Most of this I guzzle while driving home. I always get the juice, but I haven't seen any cash since July. Instead I've been swapping Frank goods for labour: thirty pounds of lamb and mutton for unplugging her septic line; a stack of butchering books, including Vernon Lutner's classic, *Meat Trade Secrets Exposed*, for laying plastic over her runaway comfrey patch; an antique ten-foot Kenmore freezer, one of two she hasn't used since her children moved out, for cleaning out the barn. And last week, I traded a ten-gallon pressure cooker for raking the pea gravel on her driveway. A lot has been made of these sorts of deals - barter, my friends in Vancouver call it - and how they short-circuit the tax department and all the rest of it. But that has nothing to do with the reasons I like to trade goods for labour. Normally, rural labourers are paid at the end of each day while standing in filthy gumboots at the edge of a hot kitchen. The man or woman of the house can't find the right change, a country music station blares, and when you pull out your wallet, a cloud of straw and lint falls on the floor. What do you do? Apologize and reach for a broom? Leave it and say nothing? I've been standing in kitchens and getting paid cash for years, and I still don't know. Arranging a swap, on the other hand, is much more pleasant. You both go over to the item in question and, depending on its size, either put your hands on it or kick it. Then you talk, and talk, and talk. Eventually the owner gets antsy (Frank always pushes her wicker Maquinna hat off her forehead at this point) and says, "What the heck. Prune the apple trees out back and you can have it," and the deal is done. Another thing about swapping is that you generally get better quality goods than you do buying new. When I buy something new I just go out and get it - usually from a chain store. I don't study warranties or manufacturer's specs. When you trade for an item, at least around here, you're probably dealing with a person over sixty. And people over sixty, I've noticed, are all A-students of home economics. They have favourite brands, wrap instruction manuals in plastic bags and get things serviced. The freezer I swapped with Frank, as an example, came with a well-worn green hardcover book entitled *Your Home Freezer* and was microscopically clean. Frank says she did research before she bought it. Swapping also gets you tips. That's something you definitely don't get when you work for cash. These tips come as accessories - a hatchet to go with the handsaw, a rack for the food dehydrator. My nephew, who also does this kind of work but is better spoken than I am and doesn't smoke, has landed some real deals: bicycles, skis, fishing rods. As a perk for yard work, a widow in Victoria once gave him a whole workshop worth of skill saws, vices and woodworking tools. Other times, the tips aren't so tangible. Like my most recent deal with Frank, that pressure cooker. I picked it up after work one day and zoomed home for dinner. Later that night, I poked through the owner's manual (twenty-five years old and spotless) and found a single sheet of foolscap. On it was a recipe for chicken stock, written in a tight, careful hand, and addressed to me. The recipe itself takes all of one page and half of the other side, and is a formula for large-scale soup making. It calls for three full-sized free range chickens, "approximately" forty-eight cups of water, plus a wheelbarrow full of peppercorns, onion, salt, celery (stalk and leaves) and hot chilies. What I like is the note Frank squeezed onto the bottom of the second page. It's about how she and her husband used to buy fifty or a hundred old chickens each fall to make soup stock for winter; and how they'd starve the chickens for twenty-four hours, then push them through the mechanical plucker; and how they froze the giblets and lungs, but used the feet (scalded and skinned) to give the stock gelatin and body, and how they had soup every day for thirty years and were never sick. It's a personal essay that closes with a touch of the seasoned swapper: "If you want to try the above," Frank writes, "I can show you a quick and easy way to break a chicken's neck! Or perhaps you know?"

ESTATE CAR

Every morning at about seven o'clock, my family wakes to the sound of the landlord's Suzuki 4x4 zooming up his long driveway to get the newspaper. Unmuffled and underpowered, it makes the same sounds as my three-year-old, Lily, guiding her toy dump truck through dishes on the counter. Vroom! Vroom, vroom! Vrooomm! Vroooooommmmmmm! If the wind isn't blowing too hard I can keep my head on the pillow and follow the 4x4's progress to the top of the drive, half a mile away. The Suzuki is the landlord's estate car. "Estate car" is the high-handed phrase people in this part of southern Vancouver Island use to describe the unlicensed, uninsured and generally dilapidated cars and trucks they need for errands on

their property: fetching the newspaper, hauling hay to the livestock or dragging the power washer back from the shop. Sometimes you'll see these vehicles dashing illegally along a country back road. Property owners have at least one, and they are as much a part of the landscape as satellite dishes, forty-five gallon fuel drums and claw bathtub watering troughs. Spotting an estate car is easy, if you know what to look for. Because they often undergo fairly radical changes - either unintentionally through run-ins with hemlock stumps, or intentionally at the hands of owners with oxygen/acetylene torches - you can't identify them by make and model. It's far better to concentrate on smoke and noise. Smoke is as common to estate cars as fleas and bad breath are to dogs. This is because their engines are worn and out of tune. The smoke isn't always your #1 Pennzoil either, as owners tend to dump whatever goop is on hand into the engine. Like bar oil for the chain saw. That comes out of an old engine as a sour pink mist. Run into a nasty haze on a country road and there's a good chance an estate car is nearby. As for noise, odds are that you'll hear an estate car before you see it. Not only is it impossible to keep a muffler on a vehicle that's in regular contact with boulders, ditches and chunks of wood, but the throaty brap that comes out of a straight pipe lets deer know something's coming as well. The surest way to tell the difference between estate cars and regular vehicles is to look at the driver's face. If the driver looks like he just goofed the morning away eating raisin pie, drinking coffee and talking with friends about hunting moose in the Chilcotin, then he's in an estate car. If he looks as if he wished he had goofed the morning away doing all those things, instead of diligently paying bills in town, then he's in a regular vehicle. My landlord is a good example of what driving an estate car can do to a person. When Dave shows up in his main vehicle, a swanky 1993 red Chev 1-ton with duals, he's all business. The engine stays running; he doesn't leave the cab. "Any more trouble with the Dixon seal on that water pump? Good. Well, if you notice the pressure climbing over 120 psi switch to the bypass and hit number two, just like I showed you. Gotta go." Then he drives off too slowly, like he's trying to figure out if that big leafy plant we've got in the vegetable garden is legal or not. Dave in the Suzuki is a person transformed. The first thing he does after roaring down the driveway is shut the engine off. (Actually it stalls.) Then he gets out, slams the driver's door twice, smiles, and wanders around the passenger side and gets down on all fours, peering intently. "Loose wheel bearing," he says, reaching an arm obscenely far up into a wheel well. "Pass me the vicegrips, will you?" There's a pair of vicegrips under the Suzuki's passenger seat, and I've got so I can lay my hand on them without looking. What exactly Dave does with them I don't know, but he usually taps a bit, tries to tighten something, slips, makes a face and says he'll get to it tomorrow. Then he gets up, wipes his hands on his pants and asks if there's any tea. Two hours and five cups later, having rearranged the province's tree farm system and played a marathon game of peek-a-boo with Lily, he leaves with a wave and a toot. If it's after dark by this time, I'll stay at the open door and listen, to make sure he gets home all right. (Excerpts)