



GNOME'S HOLLOW ON NORTH PENDER ISLAND

By David Morrison

If you go down to the woods today, you're sure of a big surprise. If you go down to the woods today, you'll meet pointy-hatted, undersized guys.

Not as originally written for Teddy Bear's Picnic, I know, but my personal adaptation seems a suitable way of introducing you to one of the more entertaining accommodations I've had the pleasure of staying at in recent times. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Gnome's Hollow!

Housed in a dramatic cedar log house at the south end of North Pender Island, this B&B is, for many reasons, a true delight. Nestled into a mossy rock knoll in beautiful, atmospheric woods, the setting could hardly be prettier. The surrounding terrain has something of the Middle Earth or enchanted forest about it, which, considering its inhabitants, could barely be more apt.

Inhabitants? Well, you see, wherever one might wander, inside or out, at Gnome's Hollow, one will encounter plenty of new folks to become acquainted with. Hiding both in plain sight and a little more concealed, 170-plus (and counting) gnomes and gargoyles dwell here! They are in the trees, sitting on rocks, lurking in foliage, posing on furniture. They are hanging from plant pots, snoozing on the deck, chuckling in doorways, playing in the garden. They are just about everywhere, and setting about the task of finding as many as possible is tremendous fun! "Oh look,

there's another one! I can't believe we didn't spot him before! Hey, there's another down there!"

As much as I'd like to believe that they did, these little guys didn't take up residence here of their own accord. I'm sorry to shatter the illusion, but the invasion is in fact the work of Gnome's Hollow's jovial owners, Dave and Tania Schissler. Over time they have inventively positioned their little chums around the property for their own and their guests' endless amusement. It's a theme and gimmick that works a treat, especially in such a magical sylvan location, yet it all started as a happy accident. Dave was walking around the property and spotted a gnarled old tree root that in his mind's eye resembled a guardian of the earth's treasures.

"When I saw it I thought it looked like an ugly old gnome," he begins in explanation. "As I was walking past I said, 'Hi, gnome!' My (then) 16-year-old son said, 'I'm not saying hi to a stupid old root!' I said, 'You'd better be good to him, because he'll get ya!' The next day we were walking past and I said, 'Hi, gnome.' My son walked right past, slipped and got a twig in the butt! Every time after that, he'd walk past and say, 'Hi, gnome,' out of the corner of his mouth!"

And so it began.

"Every place we go we try and pick up a gnome," Dave continues. "Tania's sister gave us some gargoyles that we put out every Christmas, as they're Christmas ornaments, so that's how they started."



Noting our aim to locate every single gnome and gargoyle, Dave laughed and wished us luck. “We have had guests who have tried to find them all, but the most anyone has ever found is about fifty,” he says, not exactly letting us down gently. “Every room has two or three, but guests can’t stay in every room! There are a dozen in this room (the Guest Lounge) alone. There are a couple hiding in my desk drawer! And I have a miniature gnome about an inch-and-a-half high, who drops his drawers and moons you!” Fortunately, we did not have a meeting with that little rascal.

An engaging man, Dave grew up in “a small town south of Calgary.” Following eight years in the Air Force, his professional background includes many years’ installing computers. Tania, from Winnipeg, is of Ukrainian heritage and has worked in computer science. Having spent three decades in the UK music industry, including six years as a promoter, I was interested to learn that she also spent

some time at the famous Winnipeg booking agency, The Hungry Eye, booking Canadian tours for the ilk of The Rolling Stones, Diana Ross and Neil Diamond. “I also went to school with Burton Cummings and used to see Neil Young coffeehouse shows when they were free!” she adds, arousing my eternal jealousy in the process.

In 2011 the Schisslers celebrate twelve years of marriage, twenty years together and ten years’ running Gnome’s Hollow. Dave actually bought the land two years before meeting Tania in Calgary, but didn’t start building the house until a decade ago. Although their new home and business had been some time coming, Dave knew from the first moment he saw the land that this was exactly where it had to be.

“I was going to put an offer in on a piece of property on the south island, but then I saw this place,” he recalls. “I walked about fifty feet into the property, walked back out and said, ‘I’m buying it.’ There was nothing here—it was raw land—but the sun was beating down, the moss was glowing on the rocks, and it was beautiful.”

“We had decided we wanted to do a B&B, so one of the priorities was making it fit into the property. We built the house around the trees—you’ll see the ninety-foot Douglas fir growing through the deck—so everything was kept as natural as possible.”

Such environmental responsibility comes naturally to Dave and Tania. Dave is in awe of the natural world and trees in general, so loves living amongst them. Tania does a lot of work with animals as a wildlife rehabilitator. “In the past I’ve worked with wolves, coyotes, burrowing owls, barn owls—all sorts of animals—and I worked for five years in seal rehab,” she says with pride.



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Reduce your water use on World Water Day

(NC)—Clean water and its availability for the future generation is not often a top concern for Canadians. We're more concerned about saving electricity and our hydro bills than taking shorter showers. But according to the UN, two-thirds of the Earth's population will lack adequate water supplies in 2025. It's a fact that should make us sit up and take notice, especially since we literally cannot live without water. Per capita, Canadians are the second-biggest water consumers on the planet, behind Americans. The average Canadian uses approximately 335 litres per day, while 1.1 billion people worldwide who are water poor must survive on five litres per day.

This March 22 is World Water Day and you can start making simple lifestyle changes to conserve the planet's water supply

- Take a shower instead of a bath, and keep your showers short.
- Turn the faucet off while you brush your teeth, shave, or wash your face.
- Rinse dishes, vegetables, and fruits in a filled basin, rather than under running water.
- Replace an older toilet with a modern low-flush one.
- Install water-saver aerators on your faucets and water-saver heads on your shower.
- Go to a carwash that recycles its water.
- Encourage water conservation at the office.
- Resist buying bottled water. Instead, drink from the tap or bring a stainless steel water bottle to work that you can refill.

Since water is a global resource, help underprivileged communities conserve their water too. Build a rainwater harvesting tank through an international development organization like Christian Children's Fund of Canada. These tanks harvest, protect, and retain rainwater for daily use in places where drinking water is contaminated with bacteria and disease.

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As a born entertainer, online gaming enthusiast Dave came to the B&B concept well equipped as a host, but Tania came with previous practical experience under her belt. "When I was in Calgary I had a four-level split and I did a bit of B&B there. So when we moved out here we thought, well, we both like meeting people, so just fell into it and decided that's what we'd do here," she explains.

Gnome, gnome on the range...

Alongside their faithful "guard-goyle" dog, Jaegar, Dave and Tania have created a pet friendly accommodation featuring three lovely rooms full of gnome...er, home comforts. The Garden Room provides gorgeous views of the surrounding woods and the specially constructed, twelve-foot waterfall running parallel to the room. Naturally, it is liberally festooned with spouting gargoyles, fishing gnomes and their mischievous like!

As its name would suggest, The Captain's Room (or Quarters) is a joy for guests with an interest in all things nautical. Artfully decorated with such as maps and charts, fishing nets and images of great ships of yesteryear, it boasts a cozy cabin feel.

Because it is so personal, my favourite of the three rooms is Our Bapcha's Room. Full of nostalgia, it features a beautiful gallery of historic photographs, all of which show Tania's immediate family and ancestors. Antique furniture, old paintings, ornate Ukrainian Christian iconography and a consequent sense of "lived in-ness" make this a special space.

So, that's Gnome's Hollow for you. It's as charming and comfortable as it is rustic and quirky, and as such the ideal home away from gnome...er, home...from which to discover the beautiful Penders. So if you do go down to those woods today, sure of that big surprise, it's only the gnomes and gargoyles, so you'd better believe your eyes! ■

Gnome's Hollow is at 4844 Cutlass Court on North Pender Island. For further information please visit www.gnomeshollow.com. For bookings call Dave and Tania Schissler on (250) 629 3844 or email at info@gnomeshollow.com.