

THE ARTS

Wednesday, June 11, 1997

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Mapping out a philosophy for name changes

THE news that Zaire must now be called the Democratic Republic of the Congo elicited cries of dismay from map makers, editors and geographers. Who can blame them? Imagine being a publisher who, a week before the Zairian government fell, sent out to the schools an expensive new map of Africa. Your up-to-the-minute cartography becomes, overnight, yesterday's mashed potatoes.

Life has always been this way for map makers, and for students, too. Change has recently accelerated (the former Soviet Union constitutes, all by itself, a cartographical nightmare), but name-changing is an old problem for those studying geography and history: Almost everywhere in the world used to be called something else. When you finally work out the location of a crucial place in ancient history (Mesopotamia, say), you discover that you already know the same country as the location of something current (Iraq, in that case). High-school history students have to learn that Istanbul is the former Constantinople — a mystery mulled over in a pop song of the 1950s ("Why did 'Constantinople' get the works? It's nobody's business but the Turks.") Now there's a proposal to emphasize the European character of Istanbul by changing it back to Constantinople, another potential source of confusion.



Robert Fulford
Observer

I have always wistfully imagined that things might be otherwise. In such matters, I favour stability. Given the right, I would add an 11th commandment: Thou shalt not, ever, change the name of thy dwelling place, even if you find the old name annoying. I might put in subsections, too. For instance, Thou shalt not willy-nilly change the name of thy neighbour's dwelling place. If somewhere is called Deutschland, don't think you can start calling it Allemagne or Germany just because those sound nicer. Don't change Roma to Rome for the hell of it. And, finally, when you work out a transliteration from another alphabet, don't keep fooling with it. Changing Peiping to Peking to Beijing may be some scholar's idea of a good time, but it irritates and confuses the rest of us. It also makes life hell for copy editors at newspapers, not to mention those who will try to read

20th-century books in the 21st century.

The most celebrated name change in Canadian history involved the city of Berlin, Ont. In the First World War, Berlin, Germany, was, as the capital of our enemy, the site of everything evil. The word became so shameful that Berlin, Ont., changed its name to Kitchener, in honour of a general and hero of the British Empire, Earl Kitchener of Khartoum. This seemed appropriate at the time; it was what people now call politically correct. But today hardly anyone remembers what Lord Kitchener did. Berlin, on the other hand, will soon become, once again, a major (or perhaps *the* major) political capital of Europe. Many opportunities for sister-cities promotions were lost by the haste of politicians some 80 years ago. (This is not a suggestion to change it back.)

My extreme conservatism in place names conflicts with my equally passionate wish that the city where I live, Toronto, had place names that meant something, a wish heightened by several recent weeks spent walking the streets of Jerusalem. This desire could be fulfilled only by a radical renaming of Toronto's streets, which would break my 11th commandment. Historically, the Torontonians assigned the task of naming streets have been afflicted by sclero-

sis of the imagination. In their minds, almost no artists have qualified for the honour of having streets named after them (though an alley just off Bloor Street in Toronto was named for the poet bp Nichol a few years ago). Nor, for that matter, did statesmen or scientists deserve such recognition. Instead, the Toronto namers called one major street Bay and another Front; they also created King Street and Queen Street, prudently refraining from stating which king and which queen they were referring to. One day, when their collective imagination totally crashed, they designated a major artery Avenue Road, which was like calling it Street Street, or the Rue de Rue.

In Jerusalem I've been staying on Lloyd George Street, for the First World War prime minister of Britain. Within a few blocks there are streets called Benjamin Disraeli, Emile Zola, Jan Masaryk and Josiah Wedgwood. In Jerusalem you stare at a street map and history stares back at you. There's a George Eliot Street not far away, probably named for her because she wrote *Daniel Deronda*, which has been described as "a great Zionist novel" though it was written before the political philosophy known as Zionism was invented.

When it comes to names, there's

something wonderfully specific in Jerusalem's civic imagination. The main street near me is Emek Refa'im, which in Hebrew means Valley of the Ghosts. This is where David fought a battle against the Philistines, as described in the Bible. Yes, it was right there, at the end of my block. Jerusalem people don't say, "It is believed that . . ." or "One theory holds that . . ." They just say where it was and then drop the matter, as if it were a traffic accident that happened last winter. The likelihood that the passing of three millennia created some confusion over precise location, perhaps even misplacing the battle by eight or 10 blocks, apparently occurs to no one. If the local citizens have their way, that's one name that won't be changed.

In the end there's only one argument in favour of changing place names: The befuddlement it creates can produce a certain comedy. Not long after the end of the Communist period, a joke circulated in Russia, about an old man answering questions. "Where were you born?" "Where did you work?" "Leningrad." "Where are you spending your retirement?" "St. Petersburg."

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Vancouver artist Onley honoured by Isle of Man



KERRY GOLD

Artist Toni Onley — who learned how to paint his famous water-colour landscapes as a boy on the Isle of Man — is the subject of a major commemoration by his homeland.

The Isle of Man post office issued five commemorative stamps Wednesday depicting Onley paintings that were created when Onley visited there last year. And the Isle of Man's Manx Museum launches an Onley career retrospective June 28 that covers Onley's journey from his life on the island until present day. Onley left the island at 19, when his family brought its Shakespearean touring company to Canada.

Seated inside his west-side home, Onley, 73, showed off the stamps that his fellow Manx citizens will be using throughout the year.

"I didn't think they'd know who the hell I was," he says, referring to his surprise when he got the call last year. "But apparently they did... They called me this week and said, 'All over the island,

they're licking you.'"

Onley, who is famous for his liquid, pastel watercolour landscapes of the West Coast, lived up to an Isle of Man motto that says no matter where a Manx native goes, they're sure to land on their feet. Onley once gave painting lessons to author Tennessee Williams (when Williams' play *The Notebook of Trigorin* played the Playhouse in the '70s), and his paintings are part of the collections of London, England's the Tate Gallery and Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Gallery of Canada and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Three years ago, Onley was made an officer of the Order of Canada. An average Onley oil painting sells for about \$15,000.

Since the '50s, he's also created collages, and has most recently been working with acrylic and glossy magazine page cut-outs, inspired by his ex-wife's collection of *Vogue* magazines that were left in the basement when she moved out. He's spent the better part of the last decade selling his paintings privately, but last November he showed his work at the Ballard Lederer gallery. Onley is as famous for his watercolours as he is for his opinions about art and the art world, and the fact that he doesn't use his paintings to comment on issues or politics.

"My work is an aesthetic response," he says. "Art today doesn't feed the soul — it feeds politics."

As a youth, Onley learned the art of

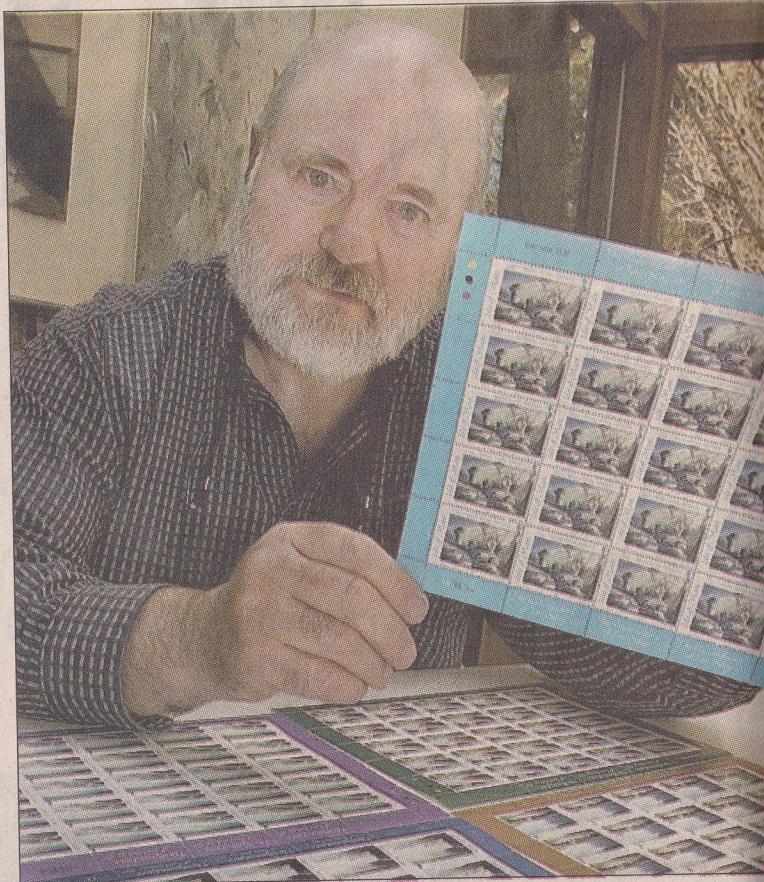


watercolour painting under the guidance of his first teacher, painter John Nicholson. He cites Nicholson's grandfather John Miller Nicholson and Isle of Man abstract landscape painter Archibald Knox as his main early influences. Onley left the Isle of Man for Canada in 1948 and has revisited his homeland about half a dozen times since.

The Isle of Man is a self-governing kingdom, and although located in the Irish Sea, less than 96 km west of England's Lancashire coastline, it is not part of the UK or the European Union. Manx residents, whose island is 53 km long and 21 km wide, hold their own passports.

"All Manx people are successful," says Onley, proudly. "Their biggest export is their people. It's virtually a crime-free place. And it was a wonderful place to grow up."

kgold@pacpress.southam.ca



STEVE BOSCH/V

Toni Onley with the Isle of Man stamps made from his paintings including 'Mull Circle & Bradda Head' (above left).

YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

Interesting Places

Where: In the North Vancouver School District's Leo Marshall Curriculum Centre, 810 W. 21st St., North Vancouver.

What: The gallery houses the Gordon Smith Teaching Collection of Canadian Art. The collection consists of 155 original paintings, drawings, sculptures, and prints by some of Canada's leading artists and is used as a teaching resource by teachers from North and West Vancouver.

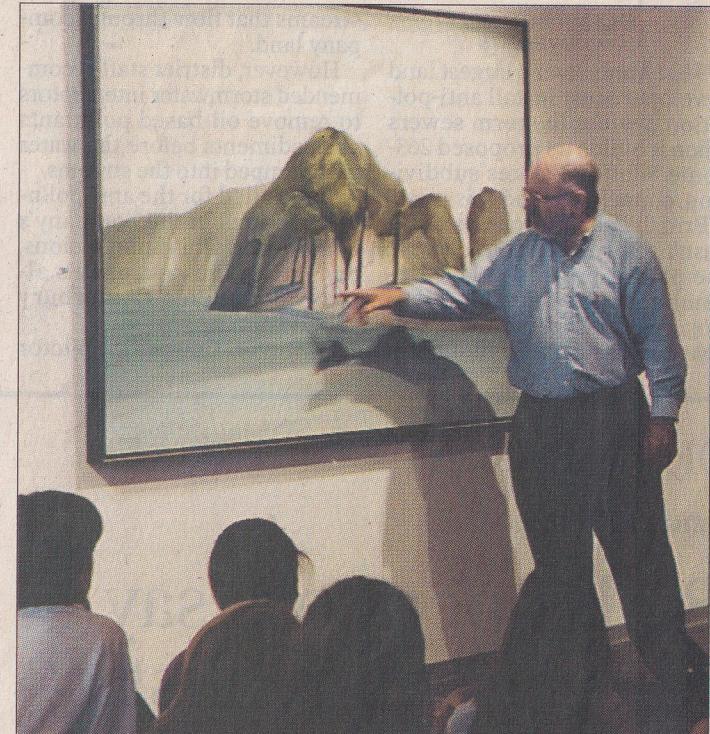
"The gallery is a snapshot of the National Gallery in Ottawa," says the Artists for Kids Managing Director Bill MacDonald.

Features: It is used for art enrichment programs and for teachers to bring their classes to for the day and is also used for special art workshops led by such artistic icons as Robert Bateman, Jack Shadbolt, Gordon Smith, and Guido Molinari.

MacDonald says the Artists for Kids fund began in 1990 when the district entered into a "business partnership" with artists Bill Reid, Shadbolt, Smith, and Bateman.

The district agreed to purchase one of their original works each in return for the artists donating a series of their original prints for the district to sell.

Since then, MacDonald said the program has grown to the point where they have 25 "patron artists" donating prints every year, some of which are sold for up to \$4,500 each. The proceeds go towards art education programs and to buy more pieces of art for



MASTER CLASS: Artists for Kids Gallery patron Toni Onley discusses his painting "Red Rock Lake" with a group of students.

ARTISTS FOR KIDS GALLERY

the gallery's permanent collection. He says the gallery is now considered one of the finest portfolios of original prints in the country.

The gallery will also be holding its fifth-annual Paradise Valley Summer School of Visual Art July 5-17 at North Vancouver's Outdoor School near Squamish at

which artists Marcus Bowcott, Doug Biden, Wayne Ngan, and Charles van Sandwyk will give workshops in drawing, painting, sculpture, and raku.

MacDonald adds the prints are sold at numerous special events held throughout the year and special viewings can be arranged by calling him at 987-6667.

Toni Onley

1928 ~ 2004



artist, educator, inspiration, friend



artists4kids.com

BALLET BRITISH COLUMBIA
JOHN ALLEYNE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
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RCMP divers recover wreckage of Toni Onley's aircraft, which crashed into the Fraser River Sunday. The plane will be turned over to the Transportation Safety Board.

Body of artist Toni Onley missing as police raise wreckage of plane

Police divers, who worked in strong currents and low visibility, will not continue the search

BY CHAD SKELTON
VANCOUVER SUN

MAPLE RIDGE | The RCMP began pulling the wreckage of Toni Onley's plane out of the Fraser River Tuesday afternoon.

But by late Tuesday, there was still no sign of Onley, who crashed his float plane into the river around 1:30 p.m. Sunday.

And police said they don't know what else they can do to find the body of the famous painter.

Onley's plane was located Monday in about 10 metres of water at the bottom of the river, sunk into the mud.

On Tuesday, using a crane and barge, police began pulling pieces of the 30-year-old Lake Amphibian four-seater out of the water. The wreckage was in three main parts: the fuselage, the engine and the tail section.

Ridge Meadows RCMP spokeswoman Corporal Rhonda Stoner said the wreckage will be turned

over to the Transportation Safety Board, which is investigating the accident.

Divers located most of the aircraft parts within a 13-metre-square area at the bottom of the river. Before lifting the wreckage out, divers searched directly underneath to ensure Onley's body wasn't trapped beneath the wreckage.

Police said its divers at times had to fight strong currents and had virtually no visibility.

In a statement released Monday afternoon, police said they do not believe there is any purpose in continuing to search with divers.

They said they would consult with recovery experts to determine if anything else can be done to locate Onley's body.

Onley, 75, was a renowned B.C. watercolourist. He learned to fly in the 1960s and often used his planes to travel to remote parts of the province to paint.

He owned three planes during



Artist Toni Onley

his lifetime, equipped air crevasses in Onley broke waited all night.

Why we deserve our government

Malaise of ordinary Canadians whelped our scandalous oligarchy

In November 1999, Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson visited and addressed the student body of Surrey's Queen Elizabeth secondary.

It was never explained why among all the schools of the Lower Mainland she chose Queen Elizabeth, especially since the school had been plagued with brawls between white and South Asian students the month before,

but I assumed that as the Queen's representative in this country Clarkson, through the school's name, was indulging in a little self-allusion. Here I am, she seemed to be saying through her itinerary, the Queen incarnate.

I had never been a fan of Clarkson's, having watched her go from media hack to High Establishment cultural maven, and felt that for all the things her govern-

nor-generalship supposedly symbolized — the immigrant experience, multiculturalism, hard work — it actually symbolized something quite different, the corrosive, co-optive power of this country's governing elite. I thought she had sold out and up. Insider stories of imperiousness and high living had dogged

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PETE McMARTIN
VANCOUVER SUN

COLUMNIST

See OTTAWA HAS B8

Famed artist left behind 'an unparalleled record of B.C.'

By Keith Fraser
Staff Reporter

The daughter of Toni Onley, the renowned B.C. landscape artist killed Sunday when his small plane crashed into the Fraser River, believes something went tragically wrong with the aircraft.

Lynn Onley says her 75-year-old father had been travelling a lot recently, including a trip to Dubai for an exhibition of his work, and hadn't been flying his four-seat LA4 Buccaneer amphibious aircraft.

She said her dad took the plane out on Sunday afternoon, probably to check its hydraulics and other systems.

"I think really something was wrong with the plane," said Lynn, 51, who is also an artist. "That's basically it. And they'll find that out when they investigate." She wouldn't speculate at what went wrong.

A half-dozen RCMP divers continued to search the river 10 kilometres east of Haney yesterday and officials brought in a sonic-equipped boat to find the amphibious plane.

Onley, an experienced pilot who was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1999, was the only person aboard.

Family and friends, as well as members of the B.C. arts community, were devastated.

"I talked to him every single day and he was my very best friend," said Lynn.

"I told him everything and he told me everything. He taught me how to paint. We painted together. We flew together. I feel

like my arm has been cut off."

Onley's former wife, photographer Yukiko Onley, said his death has hit hard.

"I feel my life will never be the same. He made the greatest influence on my life."

Married to Onley for 15 years, she was a frequent companion on his flying adventures.

"He's been a pilot for 40 years and he's a very cautious person as a pilot," she said.

"He was a very reliable pilot."

Onley's friend, David Lemon, flew with Onley three or four times and felt he was in good hands.

"He was a very close friend and he was a peerless friend," said Lemon, owner of the Magic Flute record shop in Vancouver. "There was no kinder man I knew. We always had a great, enjoyable happy time together. I'll miss him intensely and profoundly."

Onley recently returned from Dubai, where he gave a show on his paintings of the desert.

"He was a great traveller and this was a wonderful new range of work that he was producing," said Lemon.

Onley was known for flying into small lakes and glaciers and painting from there. In 1984 he crashed on Cheakamus Glacier in Garibaldi Provincial Park and survived to tell the tale.

"He's given us a record of B.C., an unparalleled record of B.C., in his inimitable, totally recognizable style, totally reflective of the feeling and the colour of the British Columbia landscape," said Lemon.

Onley himself once said of his penchant for flying and painting: "Tom Thomson [a Group of Seven artist] had his canoe. I have my plane."

Scott Watson, the director of Vancouver's Belkin Gallery, called Onley "a man's man" and an adventurer. In the 1970s, Onley sold part of his art inventory for \$1 million.

"It was an enormous amount of money at that time, an unheard of amount of money for someone to give a Canadian artist," said Watson. "He immediately bought a Rolls-Royce."

Vancouver Bau-Xi Gallery owner Xisa Huang remembers Onley as a "really outstanding person, a good artist, and a good businessman."

"He was really alive and always interesting," said Huang, who represented Onley in his early years.

"He really did speak up for the arts community by being a personality, by making news, by flying his own plane to the sites that he painted."

Lemon said Onley took tremendous pains with his plane and with safety and never took chances.

"I don't really understand how this could happen, but accidents happen in small, light planes."

Vancouver artist Alan Wood was a frequent companion on Onley's flying adventures.

"I always had total confidence in him," said Wood. "I used to live on Galiano Island. The agreement we had was that he would circle around my house a few times, which meant he was giving me a buzz and he was going to land at Retreat Cove. And I would go down

and pick him up in my car and he would come for lunch."

Premier Gordon Campbell called Onley "a national treasure."

"Through his watercolours, he captured the beauty of our rich West Coast landscape and gave expression to it for all the world to enjoy," he said.

The thrice-married Onley is survived by his daughter Lynn, his son James and a grandson. He was born on the Isle of Man, came to Canada in 1948 and settled for a time in Ontario. He moved to Penticton in 1955.

Known for his water colour landscapes, he's had exhibitions in galleries across Canada and around the world.

The federal transportation safety board is looking at whether Onley's aircraft might have clipped a power line that ran across the river. It said that until the fuselage is inspected, the cause of the crash cannot be determined.

Onley's aircraft was last seen doing "touch and go" procedures over the river.

At the time of the crash, a Canadian Coast Guard hovercraft dispatched to the scene was carrying Fisheries Minister Geoff Regan and a group of aides. The hovercraft, which was on its way back to the Sea Island base and had nearly arrived, carried on to drop off Regan and his officials before continuing on to the crash site.

A coast guard spokesman said the rescue effort was delayed a maximum of five minutes.



YUKIKO ONLEY

— with Canadian Press
bfraser@png.canwest.com

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— with Canadian Press

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— BCTV on Global

Toni Onley crash landed his light plane on a glacier near Garibaldi Provincial Park in 1984.

Artist wrote book

Following is an edited excerpt from Flying Colours: The Toni Onley Story, about the crash of his Wilga 80, a small Polish-built ski plane, on Cheakamus Glacier on Mt. Davidson in Garibaldi Provincial Park on Sept. 7, 1984.

While I painted on the Cheakamus, the wind picked up. Taking off from a glacier in a strong wind could be tricky, even dangerous, so I put down my watercolour, unfinished, and hurried John (Toronto photographer John Reeves) back into the plane.

As we taxied down the mountainside, the snow began sticking to the skis. Halfway in the run, I could see we'd never reach flying speed. I chopped the power, turned the plane and headed back up the slope.

"We'll take another shot at it," I

radioed John over the headset.

On my first try, I had laid down tracks in the snow so this time, I swung the Wilga into the grooves. As we gained speed, I pulled full flaps, the lateral controls at the rear of the wings that create air resistance and lift the plane off the ground. Nothing happened. We were rattling down the glacier at 50 miles per hour. I glanced at the flaps. They dangled from the wings. Then I noticed the snow swirling past the window. That meant a tail wind had caught up to us and eliminated the air resistance. We careened off the tracks toward a gaping crevasse that sliced across the lower end of the glacier.

I had to make a split-second decision. If I cut the engine and stopped the propeller, our momentum would still carry us over the glacier and the plane would drop into the crevasse. I left the power



Greg Osadchuk — The Province

Above, B.C.'s flying artist Toni Onley in 1987, with paint brush and plane. Below are two of his works, Bedwell Harbour, left, and Giants Head.



Onley 'knew flying was worth the risk'

By Ian Austin
Staff Reporter

The clichéd epitaph, "He Died Doing What He Loved" came to mind when I heard the news that Toni Onley had died at the controls of his beloved airplane.

I had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to watch Onley practice his twin passions of flying and painting.

We met at the Boundary Bay Airport, and he lovingly showed me every nook and cranny of his plane with his characteristic wit and charm.

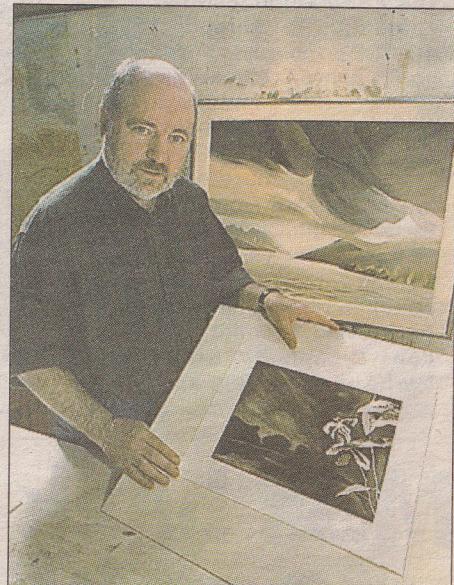
The takeoff was noisy, bumpy and a bit uncomfortable, but the sheer glee on Onley's face calmed me somewhat as we set out across the water.

The flight wasn't long — within minutes we were making our final approach to windswept Tumbo Island, a serene, picturesque Gulf Island right out of a Toni Onley painting.

Skilfully easing the plane on to a narrow inlet between Tumbo and Saturna islands, Onley confidently battled heavy cross-winds, put the plane down on its pontoons, then beached the craft on a particularly scenic stretch of Tumbo.

Flying complete, it was now time to indulge his other passion.

The cacophony of flying gave way to the calming sounds of nature, and Onley gathered his thoughts before settling down to work.



David Clark — The Province

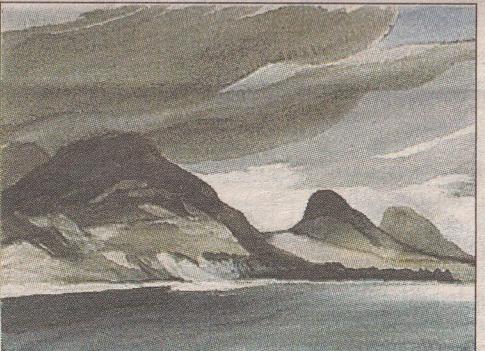
Toni Onley poses before a show for the Wildlife Rescue Association in 1992.

On the way back, I brought up the 1984 crash in Garibaldi Park that left his plane suspended precariously above a crevasse.

He knew he'd cheated death, and retelling the dramatic tale seemed to make him all the more alive.

He knew, of course, it was risky busi-

of his works, Bedwell Harbour, left, and Giants Head.



about his '84 crash on Cheakamus glacier

on. We leaped into the air and slammed into the far wall of the glacier.

A spasm of pain jolted me awake.

Jagged strips of metal from the fuselage pinned my legs under the wrecked instrument panel. The engine had been rammed through the cockpit and had punched out the control panel. My shoulder harness had sprung open and my seat had been wrenched off its mounting. My hand still clutched the throttle. And my ring finger bled, cut to the bone. Probably, it had been caught between the throttle and the pitch control on the instrument panel.

I turned to John. His seat had been almost thrust out of the aircraft. He sat

buckled into it, his head slumped forward, blood dripping from his mouth. I struggled to free my leg, then shout-

ed, "John, are you all right?" Once or twice, he flinched, indicating he lived, though apparently suffering from massive internal injuries.

I reached over to John and slapped his face to revive him.

His eyes snapped open and he twisted in his shoulder harness. "What kind of a place is this?...I hope they have a good wine cellar."

He had lost his memory.

"We crashed, John... we crashed."

He turned to the window. The Wilga was wedged into a narrow crevasse. It had jumped the first crevasse, and slot-

ted into a second, narrower one. If the plane suddenly tilted backward, it would pitch us through the rear window and we'd tumble into the first crevasse, about 90 feet deep.

Fortunately, the blood trickling from John's mouth only came from a cut lip. Except for a swollen cheek that made his face resemble that of a friendly, oversized chipmunk, he seemed all right. I helped him unbuckle his harness and he shifted to one of the other seats in the cabin.

John was peeking into the hole in the floor. With a crooked smile, he added, "Toni, I suppose you realize this crash scotches our story. CP Air isn't going to publish anything that ends in an airplane crash." He turned to me. "So what do we do now?"

"I turned on the emergency locator transmitter. We wait for help."

in quotes

"Toni, I suppose you realize this crash scotches our story. CP Air isn't going to publish anything that ends in an airplane crash."

— John Reeves,
Toronto photographer

indulge his other passion.

The cacophony of flying gave way to the calming sounds of nature, and Onley gathered his thoughts before settling down to work.

Out came his easel and watercolours, and with the same confidence he flew the plane he flew into an artistic frenzy.

With remarkable speed and expertise, a sheet of paper quickly became an impressionistic rendering of the nature surrounding him.

Within minutes and with only a few deft strokes of his brush, Onley captured the feel of the place with the signature look that could only be the work of one man.

suspended precariously above a crevasse.

He knew he'd cheated death, and retelling the dramatic tale seemed to make him all the more alive.

He knew, of course, it was risky business flying into remote, weather-prone areas of British Columbia.

He also knew it was worth the risk to easily visit some of the world's greatest landscapes.

He knew, of course, one day he might die at the controls.

He also knew he had no choice but to continue the life he loved, risks and all.

Toni, rest in peace.

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Toni Onley, in hospital, sports finger bandage.