Mission gearing up for festival season

For the Love of Reading

Lynn Easton

Festival season has begun in Mission. That means it's time for me to hop on the first West Coast Express of the day and head to big-name events in the big city. No, in this town, festival season means it's time to get out the lawn chairs and blankets and dig in for a blissful summer of home-grown entertainment.

Time to begin the non-stop celebration that seems to occur for no more lofty purpose than to gather together — at any excuse.

And imagine this — children are part of the plan. Included. Involved. Important. And not just as an afterthought or a grudging nod. There's something special in our B.C. grappling with the idea of creating "family friendly" communities. Mission residents don't seem to have the same dilemma. They just make it happen.

I remember my first summer through festival season in Mission and the moment I realized with a quiet glee that we were incredibly lucky to choose this community to raise our small family.

It was around midnight in late July. An almost full moon was rising. The Northern Southern Lights were giving a subdued show behind us as we drove away from our first trip to the Mission Folk Festival with our one-year-old child asleep in the backseat. I turned to my partner and whispered what had become a joke between us that summer as we traveled from one community event to another. "Nothing ever happens in Mission," I said. "Nothing at all."

That first summer I recall watching the banner over Murray Street change almost weekly. Children's Festival, Mission Pow Wow, Canada Day, Renaissance Fair, Mission Folk Festival.

We went to them all. Some of these gems aren't around anymore. Other creative, active Missionites keep coming up with more such as Reading Riot and the wildly popular Twilight Concert Series held twice every week at the bandstand at Fraser River Heritage Park.

Last year, these concerts helped me stop auto exits than once. With my partner out of town part of each week, the summer heat beating down at home, and my own desire to be somewhere bustling with people, the Twilight Concerts were just the ticket.

Stick around town awhile and you'll know half the acts that appear at the bandstand throughout the summer. Eventually someone you love will be on stage too.

I noticed a look on the faces of the kids at festival which only exists in places where children are valued deeply and equally for who they are. For those Missionites who do this as a matter of course, let me tell you how rare you are. I first saw this genuine child-friendly environment when I lived in a tiny Swiss village where children had no fear of adults and an assurance that they were important. I've seen it on the Gulf Islands where children run the show. Where they know they are valued as important voices. Where they look you in the eye and smile.

And I see it in Mission.

Each year, like so many others, our family makes the trek to the Mission Folk Festival where a collection of incredible world, Canadian, and local musicians gather. There are rarely any children's entertainers as such. Few clowns. Hardly ever a kids' tent. Yet the children are joyous. Our two kids plan their summer around the weekend of the festival — even hooked — under no circumstances. They love the music, they love the shopping, but mostly they love to gather. Children know when they are welcome and it is this feeling as much as the music that brings them back each year. They love the idea that a whole bunch of people, some of the people they recognize only from the festival, gather together for three nights and two days each year with nothing much for the adults to gain but a sunburn and a bad back.

I'm sure that in a month from now I will be heading home at midnight with the worn out tape purchased at the festival of Celtic Northern Lights softly. The Northern Lights will dance on queue and the kids will crash out in the backseat. And I'll be thankful for the weekend and for all those Missionites who continue to understand how important it is to gather — the kids — and for the rest of us.