

THE DAHINDEN DIARY

Sunday, January 29 2006



The other day I saw this yellow rose in the front yard. As one poet put it, “If winter’s here, can spring be far behind?” However, this little fellow is really pushing the envelope; the usual first flowers of spring have not yet shown any color. There are probably a number of reasons why the rose bloomed— proximity to the building, southern exposure, early spring weather (global warming?)—but whatever the case, it beat the odds and bloomed as we can clearly see.

René Dahinden, who left us five years ago this April (2001), had something in common with that particular rose. He had a very difficult childhood, minimal education, and not much luck in life. Nevertheless, he did “bloom,” as it were, and made many contributions to the great storehouse of knowledge we have on hominology. Whether or not the sasquatch is ever confirmed as a physical being, his name will forever be connected with the being.

There is another saying that sticks in my mind from high school days, “The evil that men do lives after them while the good is oft interred with their bones.” René was a “difficult” man, and certainly upset a lot of people. Many of us who knew him cannot help but to dwell on certain “negatives.” Nevertheless, he was also charismatic, colorful, very humorous and definitely a “thinker.” Once he and I were standing outside his place and a large crow landed and walked across the grass. As we both observed it he said, “looking at the way that thing walks, you can see that they came from the dinosaurs.” This is true; a crow walks like a tyrannosaurus. Every time I see a crow walking around, I think of this. René did have a lot of good points, and I, for one, do remember him for such, and truly miss him.

As is most often the case when a person is no longer around, their life story gets a little messed up in book, magazines, web articles, and so forth. Some time ago, I wrote a summary of René’s life and asked his ex-wife, Wanja Twan, to read and sort of approve it for me. She corrected a number of things and I revised it accordingly. The following is the summary. Please use it as a reference if you wish to write about René.



René Dahinden (1930–2001)

The Dahinden Diary

Born illegitimately in Lucerne, Switzerland, on August 23, 1930, René was placed in a Catholic orphanage at the age of one month. About one year later, he was adopted by a middle-aged couple who ran a stationary wholesale business; however, the legal requirements for the adoption were never completed. His new parents were fairly well off so René’s infancy and early childhood got off to a good start. René enjoyed skiing, was taken on trips, and had the luxury of spending his vacations at a summer home.

At about age nine, his foster mother died. His foster father took a new, younger wife within a year or so who unfortunately did not take a liking to the boy. So at age 11 René was sent to a boarding school. In René’s words, “Neither of them wanted me, so I was put in a boys’ institution in Lucerne.” Life at the school was fairly good. He attended regular school, worked on the school farm, and occasionally was sent out to work for outside farmers. Nevertheless, the last two years had hardened him to the ways of the world, and this was reflected in his character.

Remarkably, a little over a year after René entered the school, his natural mother showed up and claimed him. By

this time she had married another man and had two children. René joined the family, but his homecoming was a catastrophe. He lasted about four months before he was fostered out to a farming family.

While the recent years had been trying for René, past hardships paled to those he would now face. “Life was hard,” he once exclaimed, “There was absolutely no time allowed for play. As soon as I got home from school, I had to start the chores, and I worked at them until bedtime. It wasn’t that these people were cruel. They just had no time for affection.” He remained at the farm for three years and then tried again to live with his mother and her family. Now 15 years old, he stayed about two weeks and then struck out on his own.

Finding work when and wherever he could, he survived the next three years with little trouble. When he turned 18, he had his mother sign the necessary forms for a passport. For the next five years, he wandered all over Europe, working long enough at one job to get enough money to move on to another one. In Sweden he met his wife-to-be, Wanja Twan, in September 1952.

The following year, René decided to immigrate to Canada, and shipped out in October 1953. He went to work on the farm of William Willick near Calgary, Alberta. While there, he and Willick heard a CBC radio program about a Daily Mail expedition to find the yeti. This aroused René’s interest and he remarked to Willick, “Now wouldn’t that be something—to be on the hunt for that thing?” Willick responded, “Hell, you don’t have to go that far; they got them things in British Columbia.” René pressed his boss for more information and found out that he was not kidding.

René moved to Williams Lake, British Columbia the following spring, where he found work at a sawmill. He spent his spare time doing sasquatch research. Wanja came to Canada in 1955 and the two married the following year. Their first son, Erik, was born later that year. In 1958, René operated a boat rental service on Harrison Lake, BC. Wanja worked at a local bank. In those years, skeet shooting was held on the muddy fringe of Harrison Lake by a traveling skeet club. Wanja commented on the lead pollution caused by the spent shot, stating that the shot should be retrieved. Her comment gave René an idea and he thereupon recovered several tons of it for a profit of about \$2,500.

The couple’s second son, Martin, was born in 1963. By this time, René was totally consumed with the search for the sasquatch. Indeed, over the last ten years he had made a name for himself in the field—very little happened in the

West, sasquatch-wise, without René’s involvement. He left his job in Harrison and concentrated on lead shot salvaging at gun clubs, eventually working full time, at the Vancouver Gun Club in Richmond, BC. The club provided him with living facilities on club property.

By 1967, René was spending very little time with his family. He had made a conscious decision that nothing else mattered except the sasquatch, including his family life. Erik was then eleven and Martin four. Fortunately, Wanja was a responsible mother and able to carry on reasonably well without René. The couple formalized the situation with a divorce in August 1967. While Wanja was not happy with things, she understood that René’s passion would give him no peace until he solved the sasquatch mystery. The two remained good friends to the end.

René’s relentless search for the sasquatch took him all over California, Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia, where he spent weeks at time in the wilderness. In an effort to get a scientific analysis of the Patterson/Gimlin film, he traveled to England, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Russia. In 1973, a full account of his life and findings was published in his book, *Sasquatch/Bigfoot: The Search for North America’s Incredible Creature*, by Don Hunter with René Dahinden (McClelland & Stewart Inc.).

Although René’s research convinced him that the sasquatch existed, he never actually saw a sasquatch. His many attempts to get assistance from governments or major research organizations met with bitter disappointment. Nevertheless, René’s burning drive was to either find the sasquatch or die in that quest. He took full responsibility for his actions and never looked back. René passed away on April 18, 2001 after losing a battle with prostate cancer. As they took him to the operating room, he told the attendants, “If I don’t come out’a this, I’m gonna be damn mad.” Those were effectively his last words, and I would bet they echo in the minds of the hospital people who heard them every time they wheel someone “down the hall.”

Epilogue

It is now 2017 so another 11 years have passed since I wrote this article. René would now be 87 and certainly still trying to find sasquatch as we all are. Am I surprised that that this is the case? Absolutely. I thought technology would come to our rescue, but folks we have a mystery here.