

# TRAVELER

Welcome to Our 25th Year

All Travel, All the Time

May/June 2009

## 50 TOURS OF A LIFETIME

Go Now! It's Never Been More Affordable

New!  
**TRAVELER'S**  
Sudoku  
China

TRY IT FOR  
**FREE!**  
See Page 8

« HIGH ROAD TO  
MACHU PICCHU

PAGE 68

NEWFOUNDLAND'S  
SNUG HARBORS

PAGE 82

TREASURES  
OF GERMANY

PAGE 92

**PLUS:**

Baltimore on Foot Page 64 Paris for Less Page 42

Montana's Great Outdoors Page 110

Insiders Kyoto Page 62

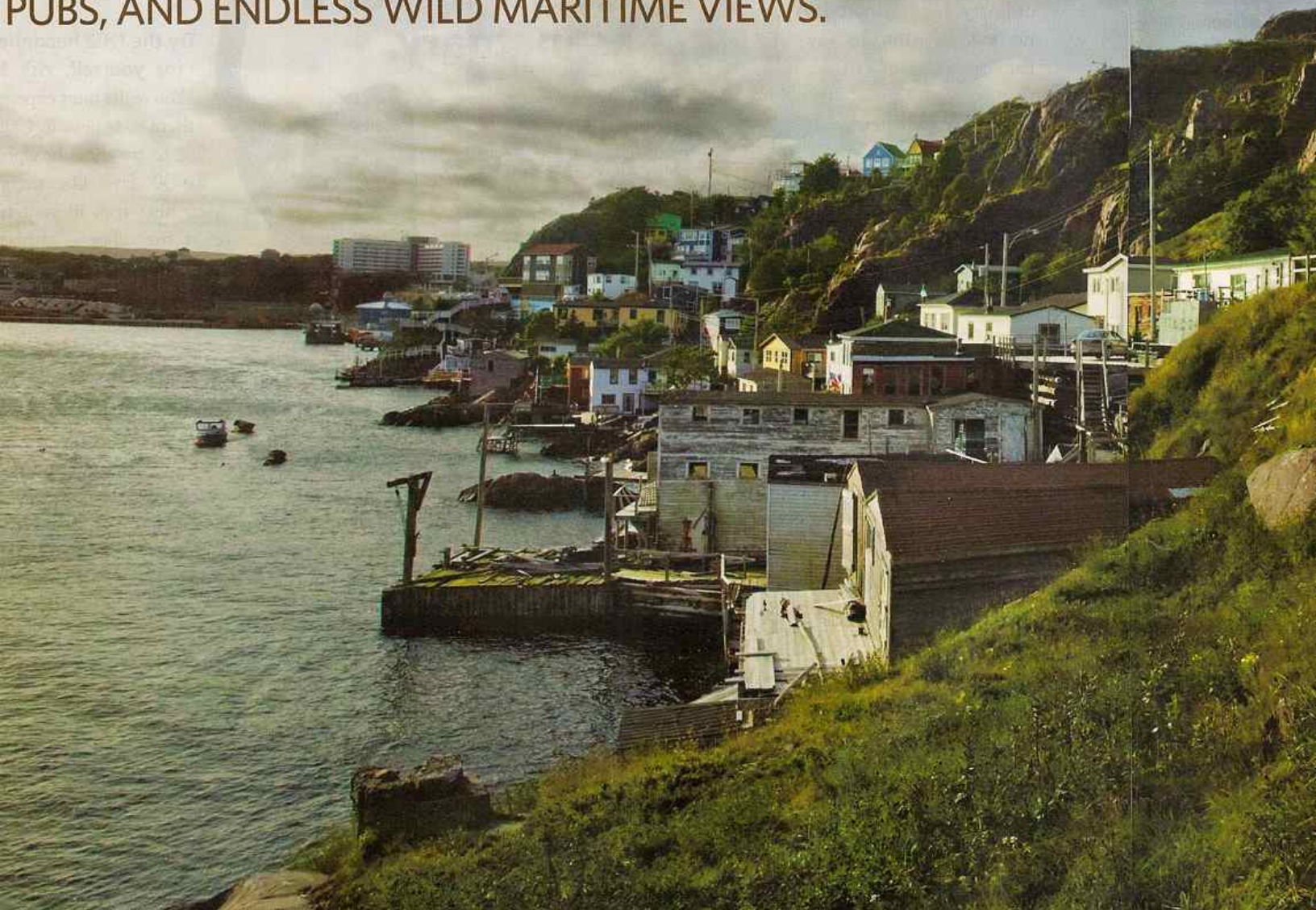
\$6.99 CANADA

06>



# SNUG HARBORS NEWFOUNDLAND

A SELF-GUIDED TOUR ALONG THE ATLANTIC COAST  
OF CANADA'S EASTERNMOST ISLAND TAKES IN  
THREE HOMESTAYS, A CLUTCH OF WELCOMING  
PUBS, AND ENDLESS WILD MARITIME VIEWS.



# CHARLIE PEARCEY WAS THE FIFTH GENERATION OF HIS FAMILY TO GO TO SEA, IN THE

days when cod were thick in the Atlantic off eastern Newfoundland—when you could haul up ten tons from a single trap and cruise back through the Narrows into St. John's harbor with your boat riding low from the plenitude of the harvest.

"From Torbay to Petty Harbour, every village had its fishing water," Pearcey says.

"It was all cod. From May to December we'd be at it." Pearcey opens the door to his twine loft, the building where he once spent winters repairing his nets. "Everything was cotton in those days," he says. "You had to mend every hole by hand."

The unimaginably vast stocks of cod are gone now, exploited by big trawler ships

whose nets sweep the seafloor like vacuum cleaners. The decline of the longtime fishery has brought big changes to Canada's easternmost island—a rugged and sparsely populated land of small coastal towns—and to its capital, St. John's, a green and pleasant city set on a perfect natural harbor just a few miles from Cape Spear, North America's most easterly point.

Charlie Pearcey's seagoing days ended long ago. He's turned his twine loft into an informal museum on cod fishing, packed with gear and memorabilia. He proudly points to a model of his 35-foot Newfoundland trap skip and pulls out a receipt dated 1957, recording his father's sale of 10,830 pounds of cod for \$216.60. He shows a photo of the house where he grew up, just down the street. In 1959 a snowslide swept it, with his parents inside, into the dark water of St. John's harbor.

Pearcey's loft clings to a rocky harbor-side cliff in a section of St. John's called the Battery, where multicolored cottages dot the steep slope like an artful movie set. The neighborhood is even more appealing for being unselfconscious about its eccentric picturesqueness. Not long ago the Battery was so decrepit that banks wouldn't issue mortgages; now it's a hot property in the Newfoundland capital city. And no wonder—its views stretch from the Fort Amherst lighthouse, guarding the Narrows, to the city waterfront and the hills cradling the harbor like the sides of a bowl.

Pearcey is happy to greet a new face, happy to tell stories that, though not so very old, link him directly to the days of sailing schooners, when cod was the king of fish and immigrants from England's West Country and Ireland's County Waterford came to Newfoundland to make new lives. His openness and willingness to share is typical of Newfoundland—and that, simply put, is the idea behind CapeRace Cultural Adventures ([www.caperace.com](http://www.caperace.com)).

"It really is a different dynamic when a traveler meets someone independently, rather than as part of an organized tour," CapeRace founder Ken Sooley tells me. "In my travels, my best times have been when I stumbled onto something on my own."

**Opening pages:** Scenic North Head Trail skirts St. John's harbor. At right, fog settles over the tiny harbor of Bonavista. The village's Ryan Premises National Historic Site tells the story of Newfoundland's fishing industry. In 1992, cod fishing was banned, putting 40,000 islanders out of work. Traditions such as a "kitchen party" (left)—an informal gathering with song, dance, and drink—keep spirits up.



When I signed up for CapeRace's program, I was given the use for three nights each of three fully furnished houses: a modern, window-filled one in the Battery in St. John's and restored older houses in Heart's Delight and Bonavista, two small coastal towns ("outports" is the Newfoundland term). I was also given a guidebook with suggested destinations and activities, from museums and pubs to hiking trails. "In the book we have the high points that most people would do anyway," Ken says. "But then we try to lead you into situations where you might meet the people that we think you should meet."

It's a "tour" with no set itinerary save a place to lay my head at night, with the goal of immersing visitors in the landscape, history, and culture of Newfoundland, which, together with mainland Labrador, forms Canada's seventh largest province. The

program is also something of a gamble for CapeRace, depending as it does on a traveler's own adventurousness and ingenuity, as well as serendipity and just plain luck.

I hadn't been in Newfoundland long, though, before I realized that it's a gamble with good odds for success. I felt welcome every place I went on this rocky, foggy island, where countless families have lived in the same towns for a century or more. At the Duke of Duckworth pub in St. John's, a local newspaperman spoke of this reputation for friendliness: "There's a tradition here that when you're walking down the street you make eye contact and you say something—usually about the weather."

There's always plenty of cheer down along George Street, St. John's own version of Bourbon Street. Pub bands pour out blues, pop, and rock, but I was looking for traditional Newfoundland music.

"If you want to hear the real thing," a local told me, "be at Erin's Pub on Water Street for the Friday night jam." And so I was. I drank Smithwick's ("Do you mind if I put a little Guinness head on it?" the bartender asked) while musicians played songs like "The Rambling Pitchfork" and "Stack of Barley" on wooden flute, tenor banjo, guitar, fiddle, bodhran (Irish drum), and button accordion. Even if you didn't get up to dance, you couldn't stop your feet from bouncing to the music.

**A NOTE ABOUT** Newfoundland weather: Its rapid fluctuations are the closest approximation I can imagine to meteorological bipolar disorder. You're greeted by a morning of gloomy fog and drizzle on a day when you've planned a hike, and you're ready to head for the airport to book an early flight home. Two hours later the

**Nesting gannets dot the rocky cliffs of the Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve, on the Avalon Peninsula. Among the world's largest and most accessible seabird rookeries, Cape St. Mary's is one of six seabird sanctuaries protected by the Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Park System.**



sun spotlights a gorgeous rocky headland, and you're wondering about the price of a plot of land where you could build a cottage and learn ways to cook moose.

I experienced it all on my drive from St. John's to the eastern shore of Trinity Bay. Clouds early, sunshine in the pretty village of Brigus, light rain as I toured the archaeological site at Cupids (the second oldest English settlement in North America, after Jamestown), dense fog as I crossed an expanse of stunted tamarack that locals call "the barrens," and sun again as I arrived at my house set smack on the rocky shore in Heart's Delight. (Towns named Heart's Desire and Heart's Content lie just up the coast; no one really knows where the names came from, though they may derive from the names of schooners that once frequented the area.)

The house at Heart's Delight is owned by Ken Sooley's family, and its spare-but-cozy style—picket fence, linoleum floors, antique washbasins, record player with

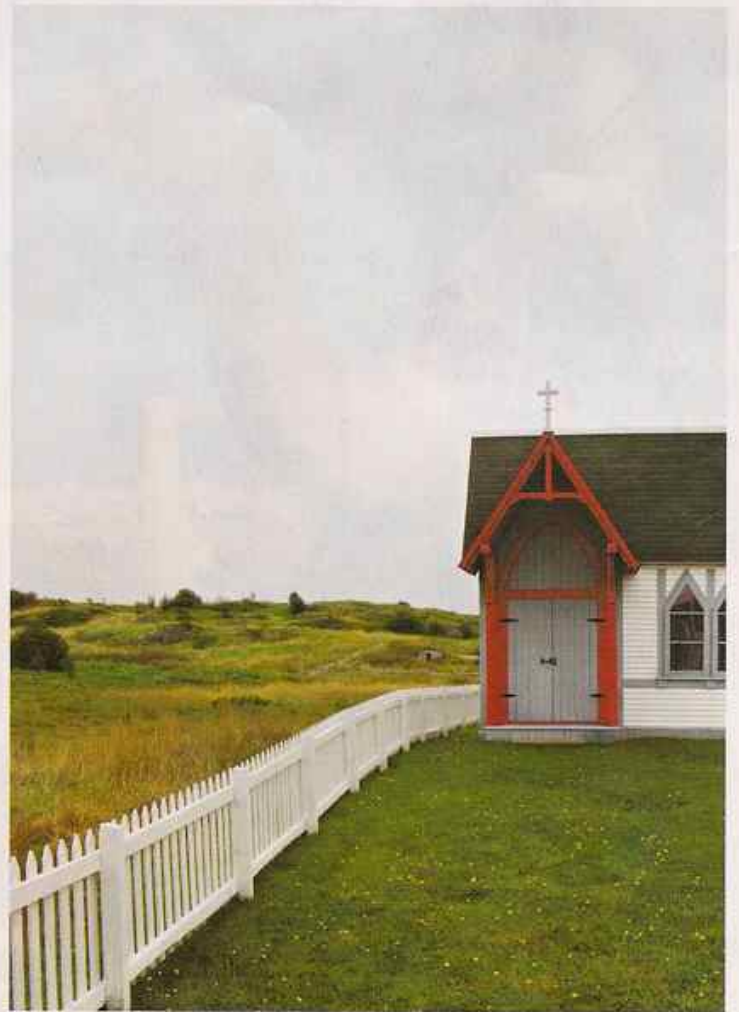
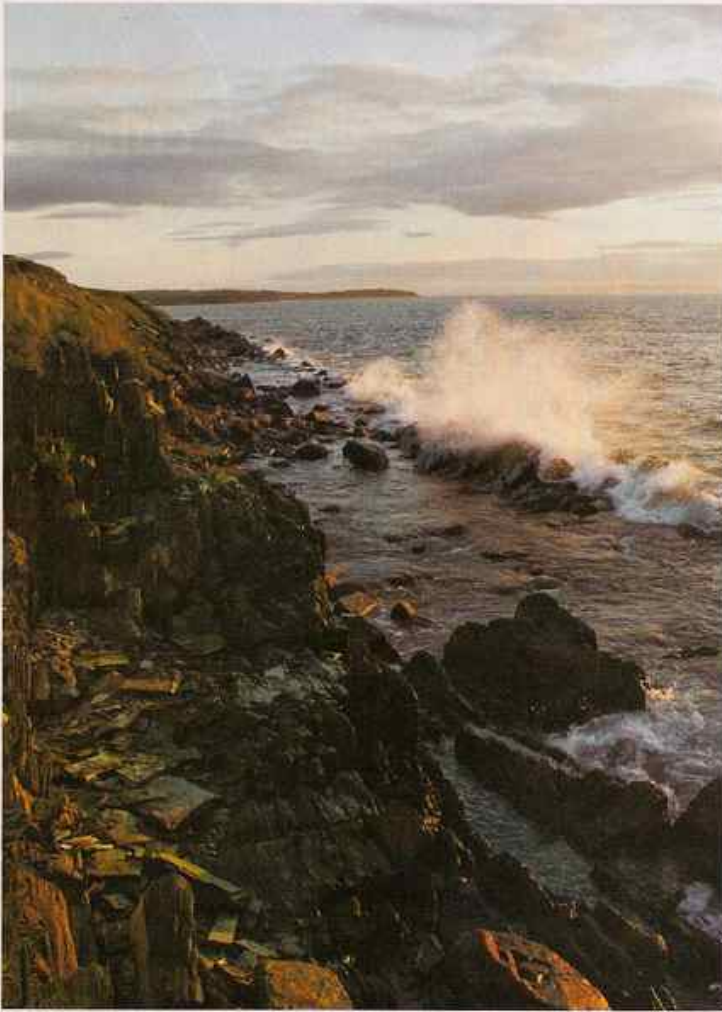
LPs of local music—aims to give the feeling of life in an early 20th-century outpost. After I'd settled in I spent a couple of days poking around the northern Avalon Peninsula. I hiked the craggy Trail of the Eagles at the village of Salmon Cove and talked to local folks about everything from squid-jigging to the proper way to avoid violent vehicular encounters with moose. (Advice on this last, unfortunately, is as varied as Newfoundland weather, ranging from aggressive horn-honking to lights-out, engine-off passivity.)

At the urging, not to say insistence, of my guidebook ("the only must-see on your trip"), I made the two-hour drive to Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve, where tens of thousands of seabirds breed in a setting of high cliffs and massive rock stacks. The weather's mood swing this day headed south along with my route: sun as I drove along the convoluted shore below Placentia, turning to fog and spitting rain as I walked a mile across moorlike

grasslands to the exposed lookout point. Just below, gannets soared and dove along sheer walls of rock well over 300 feet high, looking like giant snowflakes caught in swirling winds. Nesting birds crowded every square foot of Bird Rock and adjacent cliffs—white adults and fuzzy dark young yet to make their first flight.

I can't imagine anyone, nature lover or not, failing to be moved by the scene at Cape St. Mary's: the cliffs, the headlands arrayed one beyond another in the distant fog, the noisy fecundity of the seabird colony. As for the house at Heart's Delight, you should ask yourself: Could you be happy with the simple pleasures of exploring the shore that's literally your backyard, picking your way along the wrack-strewn rocks and seeing what you find, if what you find is a sea urchin test, the gull-ravaged carapace of a crab, the unexpected burst of color of a patch of bluebells? Could you be happy walking the quiet trail to Western Point, between Heart's Delight





**Clockwise from top left:** The waters of Trinity Bay crash below the walking path leading from the village of Heart's Delight. St. Paul's Anglican Church in Trinity stands on the site of an earlier church built in 1730. Locals pick wild blueberries on the grounds of the lighthouse at Heart's Content.



and Islington, to watch the sunset turn the red sandstone to gold as the waves crash against the ledges with the force of Trinity Bay behind them? The answer, I'm willing to bet, will be yes.

AS I HEADED WEST and then north along a peninsula where the vegetation became increasingly sparse ("A rabbit would have to pack a lunch," as one Heart's Delight resident had described it), I came upon a town of modest, multicolored houses (white, red, yellow, blue, gray, tan) scattered along a rocky coastline, around a harbor full of fishing boats. Church steeples rose here and there, and it was all regularly enveloped by fog. If you have a stereotypical picture of Newfoundland in your mind, it quite probably looks like Bonavista.

My century-old, two-story home—like the Heart's Delight house, a time capsule from a decades-past fishing village, though well furnished and comfortable—stood across a gravel road from Bonavista Bay, facing the harbor-entrance "tickle," as Newfoundlanders call a narrow, tricky passage. Called the Thomas Moulant House, for an early 20th-century owner, it was just a stroll from a small lighthouse, fishing docks ("stages" is the local term), cod-drying racks ("flakes"), and a boardwalk trail around an inlet pond. Best of all, I was practically around the corner from a friendly pub cum coffee shop called Walkham's Gate, where I always found conversation and advice.

On the east side of the Bonavista Peninsula, near the town of Port Rexton, I walked the Skerwink Trail, one of the most famous hikes in Newfoundland. It packs a lot of scenery into just over three miles of cliff-hugging path. Weirdly shaped rock stacks appeared in the fog like monstrous Henry Moore sculptures as the trail wound in and out of mossy woods decorated with old-man's beard lichen. My favorite moment of the walk, though, came when I topped a small rise and, as suddenly as a curtain rising, the town of Trinity appeared below.

Snug in a harbor that made it an important port for thousands of immigrants, Trinity vied with St. John's to be capital of Newfoundland before settling into its position as the province's premier tourist village. Trinity is beautiful and knows it. An outdoor pageant, a resident theater company, historical tours, and a couple of fairly upscale restaurants (a rarity outside St. John's) combine with a charmingly squatty red-and-white lighthouse, an 1892

Anglican church, and the splendid setting to put it on every traveler's itinerary.

As I stood there on the cliff looking over Trinity, the sun came through the fog, and four orange sea kayaks set out from the lighthouse spit toward me. If the Newfoundland tourism commission could put that moment into a brochure, I'll bet it would suddenly get a lot harder to book inbound flights.

THE NEXT MORNING I drove to the small harbor at New Bonaventure, a few miles south of Trinity, where I met Bruce Miller. A longtime fisherman, he now operates Rugged Beauty Boat Tours, taking small groups out to visit historic sites and look for wildlife. Born into a family that lived in nearby Kerley's Harbour for generations, Bruce knows the land, the people,

## IF YOU HAVE A STEREOTYPICAL PICTURE OF NEWFOUNDLAND IN YOUR MIND, IT PROBABLY LOOKS LIKE BONAVISTA.

and the history of this part of the coast firsthand. As we motored past the Ragged Islands and Wolf Head toward the island called Ireland's Eye, Bruce's stories came nonstop, including one about the Canadian government's controversial resettlement program of the 1960s, in which residents of remote villages were pressured to leave their homes and move to larger towns.

We passed sea cliffs showing rock strata contorted by tectonic forces of some distant geological era and stopped to look at a slender waterfall tumbling down a crevice. Seabirds called guillemots swam and dove around us, washbasin-size jellyfish drifted in the limpid water, and three otters stopped their rambunctious play on a rock ledge to watch us pass.

"My Uncle Joe says that when you come in through the tickle into Ireland's Eye, you're just as safe as if you were in God's pocket," Bruce said, and indeed the green harbor we entered must have been a welcome sight for sailors when the

easterlies blew. Before resettlement there was a community of nearly 200 people here. Bruce pulled out photographs showing schooners along a busy waterfront, the hillside crowded with houses. Now we saw only scattered piles of graying lumber and, on a rise, the alcove of a church standing beside collapsed walls and roof.

We disembarked and walked up to the ruined church while Bruce told stories of life in remote outposts, when survival over the winter depended on laying in salt cod and barrels of preserved partridge-berries, blueberries, and bake-apples. As a boy, Bruce made trips with his Uncle Joe to tend and harvest potatoes on nearby Anthony Island because the ground at Ireland's Eye was too rocky to plant.

We motored away and near English Harbour passed a huge eagle nest on a rock face. Two adult birds, perched on cliffside trees, flew as we approached, but a young bird stayed put on a boulder even as we passed near, eyeing us with a gravitas belying its youth. Then, as the soft Newfoundland mist turned to drizzle, a minke whale surfaced just yards away, its long gray back and small dorsal fin shining. We whooped with excitement as it rose to the surface twice more before disappearing for good.

It was time, too soon, for me to head back to the St. John's airport. I'd seen some of the finest scenery in North America, I'd met more

companionable folks and heard more stories than I could have imagined, and I'd seen a place at a turning point in its history. It's a time when the hardscrabble heritage of seagoing people is fading but refusing to disappear, when the cod that sustained an entire island have gone, and money from new oil wells out in the Atlantic may or may not make up for the loss.

"That's where Newfoundland is at the moment," said Pat Byrne, a folklore professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland, as we lifted pints in the Duke of Duckworth pub in St. John's. "The old ways are going, and we're not quite sure what's coming behind."

But, for now, there are still plenty of people in Newfoundland, like Charlie Pearcey and Bruce Miller, who know the old stories and are happy to tell them. Go, I say, and listen.

Mel White and Richard Olsenius teamed up for "Falling for the Ozarks" in Oct. '06.

