

# CAMPBELL RIVER MIRROR

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In the summer of 1981, I attended the Vancouver Folk Festival and heard a group of seven Hungarian women performing astounding vocal harmonies.

The oldest woman appeared about 70 and the youngest girl about 12. As the women sang, the elder woman held out a brass pot and called out, "Cast your rings into the pot. Learn your fortune."

I pushed through the crowd, cast my ring into the pot and waited. As the women sang, the grandmother drew the rings from the pot, one-by-one, handed them to the owners, and whispered a fortune to each person. When my turn came, she whispered in my ear: "Red hollyhocks growing above the hedge. They will be very important to you."

Red hollyhocks? That's my fortune? I mused over this for several weeks. I looked up hollyhocks in a botanical book and discovered that they were used for healing and rituals some 60,000 years ago. Okay, maybe the hollyhocks are a metaphor for my health.

Later that summer, I went to Cortes Island to visit my friends Lee and Shivon Robinsong. As we walked through the forest one day, I told them about my cryptic Hollyhock fortune. We came upon some abandoned buildings on the beach, the former Cold Mountain Institute, an abandoned gestalt therapy centre from the 1970s.

I wandered into the main farmhouse to have a look. The buildings appeared neglected and a bramble poked through a broken window. Someone should look after this place, I thought.

At that moment, Shivon rushed into the room, quite excited.

"Rex, come here. You have to see this," she said.

I followed her out onto a deck, facing a magnificent cedar forest and an enormous garden overgrown with blackberries and grass. Except, there before me, above a hedge, stood bright red hollyhocks, just as the Hungarian woman had described.

Now, I am a fairly practical person, not generally inclined to mystical epiphanies. Listening to fortune tellers was not my usual way of making life decisions. Yet, my head spun and my knees felt weak. My rational brain could not put all this together. Was destiny having her way with me?

Later, Lee, Shivon, and I talked about acquiring the land, living there, and creating a community of artists and homesteaders. We casually began referring to the little

settlement as Hollyhock. A year later, with a larger group of friends, we scraped together a down payment, took possession, and named it Hollyhock Farm.

Today, the thriving centre is simply known as Hollyhock, offering a seminar and workshops, hosting about 2,000 guests each year. My three boys grew up there in the forest and on the beach and now return in the summer to wash dishes for the guests and see their old friends.

The old Hungarian fortune-teller must have passed on by now but perhaps the little girl is now a strong, lovely woman almost forty. Someday, she too may whisper fortunes to unsuspecting souls and reveal secrets of the universe.