

Russell follows Oldman River

Andy Russell
The Life of a River
 A Douglas Gibson Book
 McLelland and Stewart

interview and review by Alan Small

Andy Russell's new book, *The Life of a River*, is not just a history text of the Oldman River. It is actually a biography of the river personified.

Russell follows the river's life from its conception, just after the ice age, to what could be its grave — with the Oldman Dam as its headstone.

Says Russell: "The Social Credit government of the fifties had a grandiose scheme to export water to the United States. It would take water out of the Peace River, bring it over the summit which is 1500 feet high, and by a series of dams and canals, they would bring the water down to the border. The whole thing starts at the border."

Part of the scheme, called the Prime Plan by the Socials, was the Oldman Dam. Where the dam is placed, however, will create a flood basin that will cover thousands of acres of ranchland.

Russell fought this development in the late sixties, making many speeches throughout Alberta. When the Lougheed Conservatives got in, they put the plan on hold.

"For the first four years, he was the best premier we had, who would care for the rivers on the east side of the Rockies. Then he turned completely around," Russell comments.

Russell and some friends of his got together and defeated the plan one more time. Now, Don Getty's government has brought the issue back. Russell is fighting with the book.

"They opened the whole bag of worms up again," Russell says. "I'm getting a little bit fed up with this sort of nonsense."

Ken Kowalski, the Minister of the Environment, has said that the Oldman Dam would "ensure an adequate supply of water to meet present irrigation needs." He has also said that 1,700 jobs would be created and \$42 million of agricultural production would

result by the addition of 170,000 acres of irrigated land.

"It really isn't needed," Russell said. "They can't sell what the farmers are raising on the irrigated land now, and they're proposing to increase it by 170,000 acres." Another added problem, Russell adds, is the increase in the salinity of the soil of irrigated land. To alleviate this, extensive drainage systems would have to be built.

"They aren't giving a damn about the condition of the land," Russell states.

Russell is also concerned about the dam site, which is in the Fincher Creek area. He believes that because of the heavy sandstone deposit underneath where it will be built, the dam will be unsteady and might collapse.

"The decision to put the dam there for irrigation purposes just doesn't hold water," Russell said.

The book offers many portraits of southern Alberta: some of them humorous, some of them not. Many of them are his own, such as the fishing stories he recounts. Some of them are handed down from generations past, while others are from the Blackfoot tribes that live along the river. There are also a couple of chapters on the failures of other dams in the world, such as the Aswan Dam in Egypt to the Grand Teton Dam debacle in Idaho, where fourteen people lost their lives when the "flood control dam" burst and wiped out a whole new development.

Anyone with an interest in Albertan history would enjoy the book, as the 72-year old Russell is and still proves to be a writer who can write the stories he learned years ago as if he heard them the day before.

The book jacket claims the book to consist of a gentle blend of Western history, Indian lore, landscape description, cowboy yarns, fishing stories, and politics. Russell mixes all of those topics in a *Life of a River* in a way that the reader never tires of the same type of story, whether it be the cowboy yarns or the political tales.

But all these stories have a common purpose. They are trying to keep alive the Oldman River and its memories. It certainly does that.



To Russell, the decision to dam the Oldman River "just doesn't hold water."

Leno gets laughs

review by June Chua

Fantastic! That one word describes Jay Leno: comedian extraordinaire.

He gave a memorable show on Saturday, touching on many subjects that everyone could relate to. (He even had a running joke on Regina.) Major pet peeves such as horror movies, television programs and commercials, Sylvester Stallone, American decadence, McDonalds and the battle of the sexes were elaborated upon.

The best thing about Leno is that he observes things from all perspectives. He talks about kids being forced to eat on little card tables at family gatherings, the male ego (fixing door knobs and crushing pop cans) and female duality of ordering "half a pea" on a date but "pigging-out" when there are no men.

He is constantly berating the American mentality. For instance, Leno asks "how do you tell some poor starving Ethiopian child that Mr. Potatohead is for playing and not for eating?" — commenting that we prefer to eat synthetic foods while doing strange

things to real food.

Interaction with the audience is a large part of his show, asking people about their professions or personal lives and coming up with some laughable comments. (By the way, he came up with four ticket agents sitting in the front row, three economic students, two real estate agents, and one girl who was "upgrading" her marks at Alberta College).

It is Leno's delivery of the jokes that makes him outstanding in his field. And because his remarks are aimed at all age groups and both sexes, no one is really offended. Moreover, his language is not overly obscene considering the many sex/sexual jokes.

The only irritating part of the whole thing was the half hour wait due to some ticket mix-up. However, Leno's show made up for that inconvenience and he quickly won over the crowd, which ranged from high school students to the middle-aged.

After a long, thunderous applause, Leno returned for an extra ten minute "encore," relying on audience feedback for a few more jokes.

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