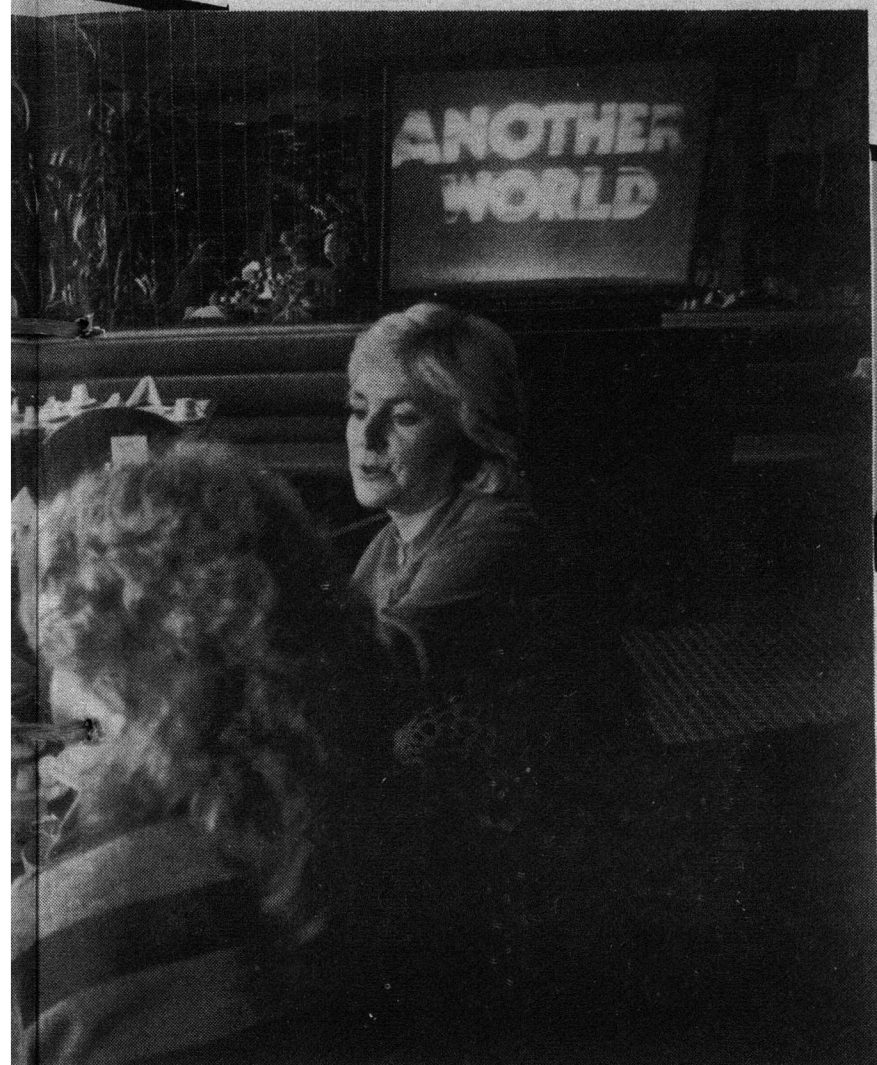


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Diane Christie, hostess of Tea and Soap, lounges while Steve Schnetzer and Linda Dano

THE STORY

Men have been doing it for years. They gather around a large screen TV in some bar or lounge, watch football, or hockey games, drink beer and socialize (male bonding and all that).

But women have been traditionally denied this (and most other kinds) of social interaction. Housework, after all, is quite the solitary activity. While men more traditionally wandered off to hunt, farm and whatever else they do, the mothers and housekeepers of history have kept to themselves with often no other company than the kiddies.

Granted, more and more women are joining the workforce, but a substantial number still choose to remain at home (and a growing number of men, too) and the problem is still there: they're lonely.

Housework takes less and less time and the way our cities have become most people have lost touch with their neighbours.

So today's homemaker sits alone at home and watches the soaps.

Pretty boring, huh!

But all that could change. The Convention Inn is hosting Edmonton's first (and only) Tea and Soap. It's hosted by CHED's *Another World Update* lady, Diane Christie, every Tuesday and Thursday.

So Angela and myself trudged off last Tuesday to sip some tea and catch up on *Another World*.

So here we were, Angela (snapping photos of everything that moved (or didn't), me, Diane Christie and all the other soap addicts smoking cigarettes, drinking tea and watching Rachel try to hire a French-Canadian guide to find her husband, Mac, who is lost in a forest near Lake Louise (actually in Central Park, or at best, the Catskills).

"Is that supposed to be a french accent? He has it one moment and it's gone the next," said Diane about Rachel's prospective guide. Diane should know, after all she herself is a franco-Albertan from Vimy. In fact it turns out that Diane (then Diane Fortier) went to school with

some women from my hometown (myself being a Franco-Albertan from Falher).

Overall conversation was a little slow since most of it was limited to commercials. But we made up for it after the soaps were over.

"Another World has more of an audience in Canada than the States. The woman who plays Rachel on the soaps said that it was indicative of Canadian nature since this soap is not as violent as the rest," said Diane. Americans tend to prefer soaps with a little more violence (a higher body count with the vacuuming).

Whatever the reasons *Another World* is still the undisputed king of the Alberta soaps.

And I had yet another cup of tea.

It turned out that the Tea and Soaps resident psychic, Phyllis Hayes, was off for the afternoon. Hayes reads palms, auras, tarot cards or tea leaves. So I stepped in and whipped out my own tarot cards and did a few readings over still more cups of tea (by then my fifth and sixth).

"Another World's my job. The *Another World* update that I do for CHED (twenty to five, weekdays) began a few years back when Rachel and Mitch came to town.

I was writing for the Sun at the time (Rob and Diane Christie Report). So Rob and I thought why not do an update on the soap opera for that week. Rob took a vote on the air and got over 200 phone calls to the Keep the Update On the Air line. And I've been doing it for the last three years. Mind you, we started the update right at the height of the boom when a lot of women went back to work and weren't catching the soaps every day," said Diane.

"But there are some days when I don't know what I'm going to say on the update, nothing happens. Borrrring. I have to keep it down to a minute and a half."

By this time it was about four thirty and Angela and myself excused ourselves and headed off for the real world.

Tell the truth, it was sort of fun. Soaps have a lowest common denominator appeal, but the appeal is there. And it's a lot more enjoyable to watch the suckers with other people than all by your lonesome at home.

The one thing I forgot was to visit the little boy's room before I left the Convention Inn. After all that tea, it was a tense bus ride back to the Gateway offices and a hurried scurry to the first washroom I could find.

"So here we were, with all the other soap addicts smoking cigarettes, drinking tea and watching Rachel try to hire a French-Canadian guide to find her husband, Mac, who is lost in a forest near Lake Louise."

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