

A Conversational
History

roberts
street
social
centre



our landlord, K-P, runs K-PC computers around the corner. rent has always been cheap, and we've been able to totally transform the space, so jelle did an interview.

Jyelle: We've already officially done our introductions but we can do them on tape too just for fun.

K-P: Oh I think that'll be lots of fun.

Jyelle: Okay good, so I'm Jyelle Vogel, last name, and I've come to interview you, Ken-Porter, and I was mainly going to ask you some questions about the RSSC, as it's now called.

K-P: It's now called the RSSC? I don't get memos on that sort of thing.

Jyelle: No, and I think yesterday I remember you talking about the reason you don't really get updates is so you don't have to say no to anything.

K-P: Yes, I find that really works.....it's easier to get forgiveness than it is to get permission.

Jyelle: That's true. So, the RSSC has been around for five or six years, it started off as the zine library primarily. What's your history with the building? Did you ever live in it?

K-P: No, right, I tried to a couple of times, it just one way or another didn't work out. We live upstairs here, right, which is around the corner and since it's around the corner, right, the idea of moving a couple of doors, you know what's really the point? Right, I love the idea that during those cold winter mornings it is that long hike down the stairs without even having to open the door! (laughter) I've always liked the idea of being close to work.

Jyelle: Mm-hmm.

K-P: Right, Roberts Street.....you know my primary direct living functional benefit is, where I park. I've been parking there, right, for a lot of years, including from the previous owner, I rented parking from him for a number of years.

Jyelle: Who was in the building before it was Sarah and Sonia? And there was another girl, before that, too?

K-P: Well, there's been a whole slew of interesting people, Victoria was in there for a number of years, all these folks know one another. I'd have to actually go look up just who all has been there. But it's an interesting collection of folks who had a genuine social and/or art interest, or both.

Jyelle: Well then how did it get so art-involved? Do you have those interests?

K-P: Well, I do as well, but it wasn't.....my background and influence I don't think has had a whole lot to do with it, other than one of permissible. Among my many backgrounds I do have a degree from NSCAD.

Jyelle: Oh, you do? What did you take there?

K-P: Interdisciplinary study.

Jyelle: Interdisciplinary. Cool.

K-P: Art!

Jyelle: How did you get involved with computers then?

K-P: At the art college. You've probably realized that most people at the art college are broke, and you've noticed that.....wealth, right? Most of the art college students are not wealthy even if they have family that does.

Jyelle: Right they themselves often don't have-

K-P: They generally don't have any. And it is interesting because art, right, often serves a segment of society that is a position to enjoy it. Which is kind of an interesting paradox. Although there's also statistics that suggest that about 8% of the population make art because they have to....it's like a disease. You're just driven to do this, right, it's got to be done.

Jyelle: (Laughter) That's an interesting way of thinking of it. It's true, I think that the RSSC in a way is trying to maybe bridge the gap between that difference of making art to serve people who can afford to pay for it, because it's more of a social centre, I think that's the idea. But well, maybe that's where people wouldn't say it's quite art, but it's an artists' collective and they had all sorts of residents living there from all over the country and the States this summer. But it is true about the-

K-P: There's nothing wrong with making art. There's nothing wrong with the enjoyment of art. There's nothing wrong with wealth. They're just all unrelated.

Jyelle: But you just said they were related.

K-P: As activities they're unrelated, they tend to overlap though because there's an interest in beauty, there's an interest in the passion that art can, right, release.....8% of the population are doing this, not all of them are well known. Arts Canada isn't listing all of us.

Jyelle: Hmph, Arts Canada. Do you have any opinions on the fact that there's no, there's not really that much arts funding here in Nova Scotia cause the Arts Council was disbanded a number of years ago?

K-P: Was the Arts Council being disbanded a good thing or bad thing since it had nothing to do with generating funds, right, for artists? It was about generating funds for a very limited group of artists. You know, the RSSC is probably a better example of how to create an infrastructure, both financial



and cultural, to promote art. It's a far more useful thing than, "oh good, we have a preset notion that a certain size grant would really help a different level of artist." So that the ones who most desperately need it get the really small grants, the ones who are financially much better off get much larger grants. This is not really about the promotion of art, this is about the promotion of a normal financial infrastructure. Roberts Street, I kind of see.....there will always be this energy, and there is a need for it to find a location. And trying to find that location only in formal, government-structured locations is probably never really going to be the healthiest.

Jyelle: Right, that's true.

K-P: You're not going to get a lot of things without buying commitment, waiting for the government to set up something that will turn very old and grey.

Jyelle: Well, maybe that's the perception we have and that's why all these smaller places are starting to rise. It is nice to get recognition from people who have power, but -

K-P: It's nice to get recognition, period.

Jyelle: Yeah, period. Do you foresee the Roberts Street Centre being there somewhat permanently? They've been there for a number of years already.

K-P: The main reason why Roberts street has run so well has been Sonia and Sarah. In most projects succession is the key to success.

Jyelle: Right, like who follows in the footsteps of these people who've put so much into the building?

K-P: Absolutely.

Jyelle: There's two non-profits within the Roberts Street Social Centre, registered non-profits. So the zine library and Inkstorm are two separate entities within that building over there... It's kind of amazing, but they manage to pay the rent by people renting out spaces for meetings, for doing workshops for all sorts of things and it seems to be fairly self-sustaining even without the grants. But the grants definitely make it more secure, for sure. Because we have a pocket of money in the bank, so were something bad to happen - say the roof that needed to be fixed, or the locks needed to be changed.....we had sort of an incident where one of the members, ah, one of the new members was not exactly very trustworthy, anyways we had some money stolen.

K-P: You mean one of the people was a *people*? In people organizations, everything works fine until you run into the *people*.

Jyelle: Well you're being probably realistic, but maybe more skeptical than you need to be.

K-P: The reality is you go where you are celebrated, not where you are tolerated.

Jyelle: (laughter) you have good sayings.

K-P: None of them are mine.