

Dancing *with the* Light

THE JOY AND
TRANQUILLITY OF
HENRI AND
TANGACHEE GOEBL

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In 1894, two mining men from Nanaimo by the names of Scovell and Westwood discovered gold on Henry Ruckle's farm. The men dug out a ton of gold-veined quartz, shipping it by scow to Tacoma, Wash.

On analysis, the ore was found to yield \$16 per ton. Considering that in 1894 one dollar was the equivalent of \$27.03 today, this was an amount large enough to attract the interest of Vancouver Island mining tycoon James Dunsmuir.

In 1896, it was reported in the Salt Spring Island Parish and Home newspaper: "The gold mining at Beaver Point has every prospect of proving a success . . . We understand that Mr. Dunsmuir has bought the claim where the mine has been opened, and already has men working upon it. Several other claims have been taken up . . ."

For better or for worse, the gold soon petered out and, within a few years, the story

of the gold strike read more like a fairy tale than an actual occurrence.

But did that gold really peter out? Henry Ruckle's farm, now Ruckle Provincial Park, is the southern Gulf Islands' most popular get-away destination. Today it attracts off-island visitors and residents alike; in its own way it has become a modern-day Klondike.

Located just a short walk from the northern boundary of Ruckle Park, Henri and Tangachee Goebel have created Dancing Light Cottage, transforming their own bit of paradise (where they have lived for the past 27 years) so that others can experience this magical part of Salt Spring Island.

The cottage is exquisite, as one would expect from this remarkable couple, rare island nuggets themselves. Situated on six acres, the cottage is set on a rocky knoll with a view through the forest to the surrounding ridge-tops. A true island retreat, the only sound is the wind in the trees, the thrum of bees and the occasional buzz of a hummingbird or croak of a raven.

As beautiful as the cottage is, with its blue-and-white tiles, artwork by well-known islanders like Rosamund Dupuy and Jill Louise Campbell, twisted-iron handrails to a loft that is every child's dream hide-away, and a master bedroom guaranteed to make you feel like you don't want to go home — ever — it is the half acre of sun-drenched garden that is the property's most breathtaking feature.

There is a pond full of white water lilies so beautiful you half expect to see some Laotian princess gathering them like lotus blossoms in the misty dawn. There are flowers and veggies, berries and fruit trees, and exquisite natural sculptures in wood and stone from the island's beaches and the nearby bedrock loaded with those same veins of white quartz mined more than 100 years ago.

Henri has tapped into this treasure in a way that's not surprising when you get to know him. At the base of a bedrock wall thrusting out of the earth like the back of a breaching whale, a small cave rings with the reverberations of his Buddhist prayer gong whenever he meditates; the flickering light of a small candle the only other accoutrement.

Henri and Tangachee have been devoted meditators their whole lives. Many times I have seen Henri plunk his not-so-well-padded-as-some rear-end down on a hardwood floor and sit, unmoving, in a state of serenity, long past the time my body is screaming for relief.

On my most recent visit to Dancing Light Cottage, a pretty "wwoofer" from Whistler was gathering in the garlic.

Tangachee calls this "transforming garlic" because when it is dug up it looks just like an unwashed bulb. Within a few hours, though, it transforms itself into this gorgeous purple-striped braid, decorated with dried flowers from the garden (with a little help from Bonnie, the wwoofer) that Tangachee sells at her stand at the Saturday market, along with her jams, jellies, chutneys and beautiful photographic greeting cards. She has been a staunch member of the market since 1993.

The idea of growing garlic that transforms itself is particularly apt in this garden. Henri and Tangachee have dedicated their lives to their own transformation in the purest sense of the word.

In 1976, Tangachee graduated from Oxford University with a master's degree in molecular biology. Her professor was affiliated with Madurai Kamaraj University in southern India; Tangachee applied to it. She was already practising yoga and becoming more and more immersed in Eastern studies.

"I left England," she says, "travelling on the back of a motor bike through all the places I had dreamed about: Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. I taught at the university for one and a half years, where I got my name, Tangachee, meaning 'younger sister' in Tamil, before relocating to Rishikesh in the Himalayas where my real search for a spiritual teacher started in earnest. I did my yoga teacher training — although it was never called that back then — at the Shivananda Ashram in Rishikesh.

"When taking a trip in the Himalayas, following the source of the River Ganges, I found myself in the holy town of Badrinath, where I met Henri, a fellow seeker. We travelled together in India for two years after which time Henri proposed and said, 'Come and live in Canada with me,' and so here we are!"

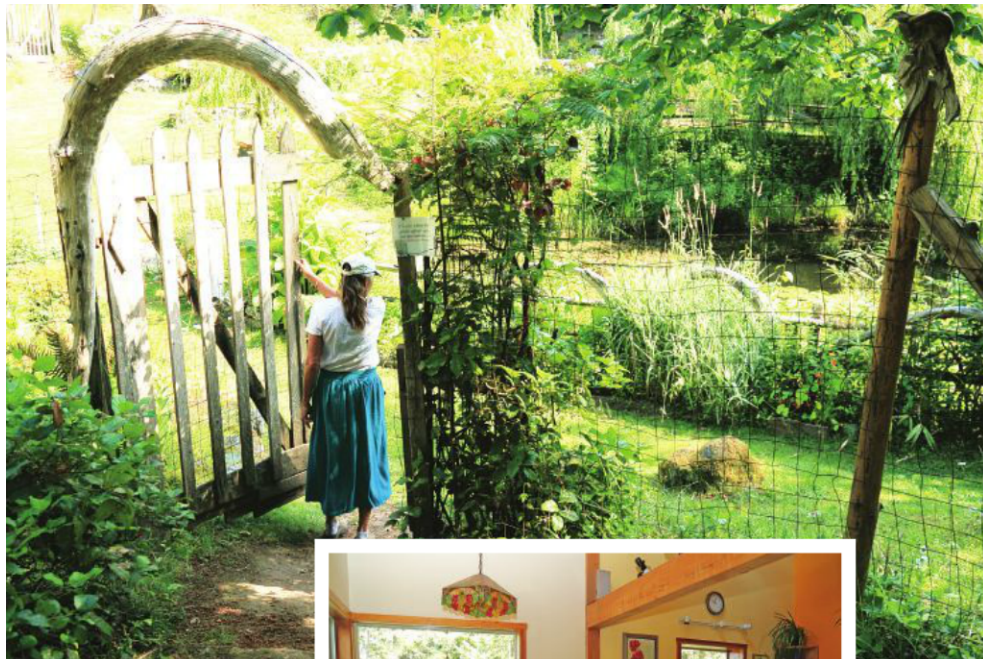
Henri was equally grounded in yoga and Eastern spiritualism. Born in Vienna, he grew up in France and emigrated to Canada in 1965 when he was 20 years old.



From top: Garden decoration with a whimsical message and some quartz rocks, one of the special things about the Goebels' property; charming Dancing Light Cottage guest bedroom. Previous page: Tangachee and Henri Goebel, who have lived on their Beaver Point property for the past 27 years.

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“I fell in love with B.C.,” he says. “In the ‘60s you could find a job anywhere. My specialty was electroplating metals, a much-needed trade. I spent my summers at Long Beach near Tofino, living on the beach in whatever shelter I could find, or make, like so many other young people searching for themselves during that bears-and-berries time.

“In the winter I lived in Vancouver, one block from Stanley Park. I was in excellent shape — on my best days I ran the seawall three times. One day somebody passed me a book by Baba Ram Das called *Be Here Now*. It affected me deeply. I went to India, gave up my possessions, and for three years lived as a sadhu, a wandering seer with nothing but a robe and a begging bowl. It was an incredible experience. I learned a lot about striving, craving, aversion and all the other tricks our minds love to play on us.”

Henri and I had talked about this before and, as I recalled, he had told me that this time in his life taught him that he need not fear the future — whatever he required would appear: food, a place to sleep, a friend. Henri now corrected me.

“Not exactly, Roger,” he said. “What I meant is that if your awareness is in the present, the present will look after you.” Ah, yes — the central principle of a yogi.

Henri continues. “That’s what it is like for us with Dancing Light Cottage. Faith comes when slowly we realize to accept people the way they are, and to accept ourselves the way we are. I don’t know why I am the way I am, and realizing this, half my work is done. My journey is now to celebrate the joy and beauty in life.

“When we came to Salt Spring, we had one child and one on the way. We came here because of the Salt Spring Centre of Yoga. We lived very simply — a 400-square-foot cabin with no hot water and no indoor plumbing, just the way so many of us who came to the Gulf Islands, and still come, began.

“Now, 30 years later, we have so much to celebrate.



From top: Tangachee heads into the garden; dining and kitchen area of Dancing Light Cottage.

Below: Statue found in the meditative gardens.

Perhaps best of all, our children who grew up on this magical island; by doing so we have given them a priceless gift that will last their lifetime.”

“When we moved to this property,” Tangachee continues, “something made me want to put my hands in the earth. I had never been a farmer or a gardener, but I found a spot where someone had tried to scratch

out a small plot. I threw down some seeds, and they came up! It was a miracle, a fundamental connection to Mother Earth and nature. I wanted to be as sustainable as possible and grow food for my family year round. That may have been more a dream than a reality, but I have never looked back and every year my garden continues to provide bountiful amounts of food and love.”

“Many people believe that the natural crystals that occur in this part of the island have a vibration that is healing and inspirational; it not only transforms our garlic, year after year, it continues to transform us. If we can pass along just a little of that to the people from all over the world who come here seeking peace and tranquillity, and a little bit of healing, we feel we are continuing on our path.”

Dancing Light Cottage offers guest accommodation for up to four people.

Visit www.dancinglightcottage.com to see more beautiful photos of Henri and Tangachee’s property. ✨

