

# OPUNTIA

## 263

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**FROM SEA TO SEA TO SEA**  
by Dale Speirs



SINC, BETTY, AND THE MORNING MAN by Donald Lamont Jack (1977, hardcover) is about the history of Toronto radio station CFRB and two of its most famous alumni. Jack meanders about rather than following a logical outline, which can be annoying when he presumes knowledge that the reader won't get until a chapter or two later. I'll review

this book in more logical order. CFRB was founded in 1927 by Ted Rogers Sr, a radio manufacturer. Today, Rogers Communications is one of Canada's largest Internet service providers and cellphone network.



CFRB had no advertising except for Rogers's radios, and existed because Rogers couldn't sell radios if there was nothing to listen to. Like most stations it operated only a few hours per day, and went off the air during the noon hour while the control room engineer was at lunch.

Vaudevillians performed for free, happy to get publicity for their local theatre bookings. The producer let them go on as long as they liked, and occasionally some had to be physically ejected at three in the morning so the staff could get some sleep.

The Great Depression was a boon to radio because it was the only free entertainment where listeners could hear all the big-name stars. Canada was mostly rural at the time, and radio helped isolated farmers, housewives, miners, and lumberjacks feel

connected to the rest of the world. The first hockey -2- broadcasts began in 1931. Bill Baker was the engineer on those shows, and in later years liked to say that he had covered every sports event except a hanging. He usually worked with announcer Charles Jennings. The two had constant trouble with a programme of live orchestral music which always ran overtime into their show. They began fading out the show and going to their sportscast while the orchestra was still performing. The conductor found out about this and the next time he saw Jennings talking in the booth, he left his orchestra still playing and rushed into the control room. The men started fighting and for several minutes all the listeners heard was dead air punctuated by oofs, thuds, curses, and the occasional piece of furniture knocked over.

The Sinc in the title of the book is Gordon Sinclair, a journalist who started when it was still possible to meet oldtimers who had personally known Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first Prime Minister. He later became a panelist on the long-running television show FRONT PAGE CHALLENGE, a twenty-questions type of show where three journalists and a distinguished guest would try to guess the identity of a current newsmaker. Once they succeeded or didn't as the case may have been, the newsmaker would come on down and be interviewed by the panel.

Sinclair began in radio in 1923 when he was a reporter at the TORONTO STAR. Like many newspapers, the company got into

radio to protect itself, and owned CFCA. Sinclair was volunteered by his boss to be the Sunday morning engineer, which consisted of taking portable equipment to a local church and broadcasting the sermon. One Sunday he forgot to turn the power switch on and transmitted an hour of dead air, which brought his first bout in radio to a premature close.

Sinclair made a career of being a cranky old man, even when he was a cranky young man. In his radio interviews he asked questions live-to-air that others may have been thinking but didn't dare say out loud. He once asked an Olympic gold medalist how much her menstrual period affected her performance, this back in the 1960s when television showed married couples only sleeping in twin beds. During the 1965 flag debate, which gave Canada its maple leaf flag, one angry listener sent Sinclair a jar of urine. On his next show Sinclair advised the listener over the air that he had the urine analyzed and the listener should seek medical advice immediately.

Betty Kennedy was a pioneer female reporter and broadcaster in the days when a married woman's place was in the kitchen. Newspapers and radio stations tolerated the occasional spinster or widow within their ranks, but starting out was difficult for her because married women were expected to stay at home. In her thirties, she began in radio as an interviewer and news reporter. She later became a regular on FRONT PAGE CHALLENGE.

Always dignified and immaculately dressed, she reminded everyone of their favourite aunt. Work was spotty in radio at first but she persevered and built a reputation as a solid journalist.

I'M NOT WEARING PANTS (2006, trade paperback) by Kelsi Jordan is a collection of anecdotes by female radio personalities in Canada. These are contemporary stories, not the history of grand dames of Canadian radio such as Betty Kennedy, Barbara Frum, Vicky Gabareau, or Shelagh (pronounced as Sheila) Rogers. The female drive-time hosts and DJs who write about their moments in the sun are unknown outside their cities. They all work on commercial stations and since I quit listening to commercial radio years ago (except one late-night programme of OTR shows) the names are completely unknown to me even for the Cowtown hosts. Most of the stories in this anthology are fluff because the majority of writers are young women who have never done anything noteworthy. The anecdotes are mainly about open-microphone bloopers, live remotes that went wrong, or gushing about interviewing rock stars. But there were a few gold nuggets in the gravel.

I had no idea that Calgary had a radio host named Amber Lee Trudeau (VIBE 98.5 FM). This is a province where the surname is still mud, after Pierre's imposition of the National Energy Policy in 1979 that looted \$50 billion in oil to subsidize Ontario and Québec. However Amber's



biography says she is of the Edmonton Trudeau's, not the Montréal branch of the family. Her anecdotes are dull, one about hosting an on-air wedding, the other about the first time she played golf.

More interesting is how Ottawa DJ Sandy Sharkey (BOB 93.9 FM) convinced then-Prime Minister Paul Martin to call his friend Bono of the rock band U2 and ask him to add Ottawa to the band's schedule during their 2005 tour of Canada. The P.M. delivered, and in appreciation the station changed its name to PAUL FM for a day.

Melanie Risdon was working at CHQR 770 AM in Cowtown the year the Calgary Stampeders football team won the Grey Cup. She was sent to report on the homecoming, where she got so excited that she started giddily screaming on air about how the players were parading the Stanley Cup around and everyone should come on down and see the Stanley Cup. Finally one of the audience walked over and politely reminded her that the Stanley Cup was for the National Hockey League championship. What was really embarrassing for Melanie was that CHQR has the rights to broadcast Stampeders games and continuously bills itself on air as "The Voice Of The Calgary Stampeders".

RADIO LADIES (2012, trade paperback) by Peggy Stewart is a compilation of biographies in random order about the better class

of women on the air in Canada. From the beginning of organized radio broadcasting in Canada, women were there, albeit many fighting the usual male piggishness along the way. The earliest known female broadcasters all appeared with regular shows in 1922. They were Martha Bowes (CJWC Saskatoon), Elizabeth Wink (CKMC Cobalt), and Mary Conquest (CFAC Calgary).

Female broadcasters didn't just do household tips or recipes, but could operate technical equipment, produced shows from the control booth, read the noon-hour news, and interviewed politicians and newsmakers. It wasn't necessarily that the station owners were enlightened men but rather because stations operated on minimal budgets and everyone, male or female, did multiple jobs. The severe shortage of on-air broadcasters who could speak well meant that anyone could try out, from the janitor to the owner's nephew. An example was Jean Underwood, who started on the air at CKLN Nelson in 1941 at age 16. There was a shortage of men in radio since Canada entered the war in 1939, so she went from junior secretary to reading the news, spot announcing, answering the phone, and doing the station's books. She also signed the station onto the air Saturday mornings, mainly because she lived only four blocks away. Her father wouldn't allow her to do it Sundays because she should be in church, nor weekday mornings because she had school classes.

This book is a mixture of individual biographies and snippets of radio history. To select one, Martha Bowes began at CJWC Saskatoon as a secretary in 1922 and soon became an on-air personality. She began her day with a mixed programme from 08h00 to 10h00, with local news, weather, music, and event announcements. Today we call such a programme the morning drive-time show. After a couple of hours off, she returned with the noon-hour news, followed by a programme on local events and personalities. Evenings she co-hosted a religious show with a local priest, then a talent show, and a musical hour of local singers who would work for free. Bowes also did regular remote broadcasts from the Zenith Café or the Hudson's Bay Company department store. Radio stations on the prairies had larger audiences than many big cities because the flatlands allowed signals to propagate huge distances, so Bowes's fame was more widespread than most radio hosts in Vancouver or Toronto.

AS IT HAPPENED (1976, hardcover) by Barbara Frum is about a national talk show where she phoned out rather than listeners phoning in. The idea was copied from a West German radio show which was heard and enjoyed by the wife of a Canadian Forces Radio executive. She convinced her husband that it was a good idea, and when they returned to Canada, he talked the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation into it. Frum had worked for various television and radio stations as a talk show host, and when AS IT HAPPENS was created in 1971, she was tapped for the job. She

hosted AS IT HAPPENS on the national network of CBC Radio 1 from 1971 to 1982.

The format was to read a news item about some event and then telephone someone prominently associated with that event and do an interview. The show made it a point to telephone original sources, not a local reporter standing outside the police barricades. Once when there was a riot in progress in Belfast during The Troubles, she called a payphone on the street where it was happening. One of the rioters finally answered and she interviewed him to the sounds of rubber bullets and smashing objects. In 1975 she phoned Sandra Good, who was Squeaky Fromme's roommate during the Charles Manson era. As she tried to interview Good, it became evident that Good "*was as crazy as a bucket of frogs*".

Telephoning long-distance around the world cost the CBC \$2,100 per week for the show but that was considerably cheaper than maintaining foreign correspondents. And the CBC was cheap; Frum's broadcast booth was equipped with a used kitchen table and chairs bought secondhand from a charity store. The linoleum dated back to the last war.

Originally the show was broadcast nationwide as a roller-coaster show, that is, continuously live, dropping eastern stations as the night progressed and adding western stations.

This meant that easterners (the majority of Canadians live in southern Ontario and Québec) missed the later interviews and westerners the earlier interviews. The show finally went to a 90-minute version live to the Maritime provinces, then edited and fed back across the time zones so it started at the same local time. It was edited on the fly to later time zones, which occasionally caused problems when the sound engineer couldn't keep up. The producer would then throw on a Led Zeppelin record to fill in the time. When the tape was ready to roll, he would cut into the song with "*We interrupt local programming to bring you AS IT HAPPENS.*" The local stations never complained about being blamed for all those Led Zeppelin songs, which suggests that their managers never listened to the show.

Phoning directly to a newsmaker didn't always work. Frum was never able to get through to the Pope or Idi Amin. One advantage of her method of interviewing by telephone instead of in a studio was that she could cut off her guests by pushing a red button and be done with them since they were thousands of kilometres away. Studios were awkward because the guests were still there off-air, and could create problems if she had antagonized them as she often did over the phone.

Frum left the show in 1982; it continued on with other hosts. She died of cancer in 1992. As part of a Millennium series, Canada Post issued a stamp honouring the CBC. It shows Frum in the

foreground. I have no idea who the man in the background behind her is.



THE AS IT HAPPENS FILES (2008, hardcover) is by Mary Lou Finlay, a later host of the show. She began her new job on the day after Princess Diana was killed in a car crash, so Finlay certainly got a baptism of fire. Her first interview was with Dame Barbara Cartland, Di's step-grandmother.

By the time Finlay came on board, AIH had its own traditions and in-jokes. Whenever hosts interviewed someone in England, they always gave the location in reference to Reading. "*That was Dame Barbara Cartland speaking to us from London, which is 50 km east of Reading.*" The running gag began because one of the show's producers was an ex-pat Englishman who used to live in, you guessed it, Reading.



Much of this book is taken up by interviews and stories about the famous and obscure, the serious and the fluffy. The behind-the-scenes material is more interesting, such as the reason why the producers held on to tape recorders when CBC converted to digital recording and ran the tapes in tandem with the computer. AIH lost an entire show in the digital void just after it had gone live to the Maritimes but was able to reconstruct most of it on the fly with the backup reel-to-reel tapes, the kind that had to be edited with razor blades. Finlay mentions that every show of this nature should have production staff of different ages and experience. When a story about the aftermath of Tito's death was mooted, a young assistant thought it was about a singer in the Jackson Five, and didn't know the Tito in question was actually the President of Yugoslavia.

Political interviews became more difficult to do as politicians tried not to stray from their prepared texts. (This was before Twitter, today the world's leading cause of foot-in-mouth disease.) Finlay had great fun during the final years of the Liberal government, when cabinet members kept falling on their swords after being found out for something or other. The Adscam scandal was front and centre, after it was discovered the Liberal party diverted \$50 million of taxpayer's money into their coffers. At the same time, the opposition Progressive Conservatives were not only feuding with Alliance, the other right-wing party, but both were riven by internal feuds. Alliance members were actually suing each other

in court. The two parties eventually merged and became the Conservative party under Stephen Harper. Finlay notes that the reason he keeps such tight control of his M.P.s today as Prime Minister is because he knows how much chaos the Tory caucus can cause if he gives them free rein.

On that fateful day now known as 9/11, CBC Radio kept its regular morning local programming going for several hours, long after every other network had gone to full saturation coverage of the fall of the Twin Towers. Finlay found out why when she arrived at work later that morning. Over the previous few years, the CBC had automated its Master Control rooms at its stations across the country to save money on local station staff. The network executives in Toronto couldn't pre-empt the local shows because they couldn't find the computer codes to take control of the transmitters. They had to phone each local station's technician one by one and ask him to flip switches on his control panel. Someone in Toronto finally found an off-duty technician who knew the system codes and could put all the transmitters under central control.

## HUMAN EVOLUTION: PART 5.

### WE LEARN TO THINK DEEP.

by Dale Speirs

Evolution gave the human brain ability for abstract thought. The magnitude of this ability increased exponentially during a period of 3 megayears into the Pleistocene. Abstract thought became very useful when agriculture arose 10,000 years ago and human concentrations increased. In addition to the effect of the brain's increase in thinking, the effect of concentrating populations put thousands or tens of thousands of brains together and further multiplied the ability of abstract thoughts [3]. This appears to have been a two-phase evolution. First the brain physically evolved to be bigger and more energy intensive. This causes a problem with overheating but just at the point proto-humans would have been constrained by this, two things happened, climate cooling by glaciation, and the use of fire. Humans could therefore stay cool as they wanted, yet still keep from freezing by the use of fire [92]. Cooking food makes it easier to digest and kills germs, which therefore reduces the amount of energy needed to stay healthy and allowed that energy to be diverted into other things, such as brain work.

Once the environmental pressures eased for bigger brains, what remained had considerable spare capacity. At that point, evolution of intelligence shifted into memetic realms, where ideas

and thoughts formed in the brain enabled humans to advance faster than if they had to wait for the hard wiring.

The genus *Homo* evolved with the physical basis for abstract thought, but the species *sapiens* evolved not by physically rewiring the brain but by developing new patterns of electrochemical circuits in the brain [89]. To put it another way, first the hardware reached the point of surplus capacity and then the software evolved to make use of that space.

A study that tested orangutans, chimpanzees, and 2.5-year-old pre-literate human children showed that all three have similar skills for coping with the physical world but the toddlers were more sophisticated than the apes in dealing with the social world [61]. A signal of consciousness is the development of expertise [78]. Deliberate practice of skills is something that many animals do in developing expertise, but humans carry it further with performance evaluation, goal setting, and compiling various skills into a hierarchy of behaviours. Many mammals teach their young to hunt, but only humans trade their surplus meat with other humans far away. Monkeys are skilful climbers but only humans thought of making ladders as artificial replacements for tree branches.

Evolution historically relied on information transfer via the genes in order to cope with the environment. Humans have been for many millennia now relying on non-genetic transfer of



information, a faster and superior method of information transfer between generations [20]. It has been shown that natural selection favours language once it originates because information exchange enhances fitness in habitat, and the more reliable the information, the stronger the selection force [26]. The evolution of culture also gave humans more chances at learning opportunities, especially when they began to cluster in villages [82]. Individuals who have more opportunities to learn will succeed more than those who have few such chances.

It is common among many chemical or physical systems that if quantity is increased or decreased past a certain point, then qualitative changes will occur. Ice, for example, stays the same as temperature increases, but at 0°C suddenly undergoes a qualitative change into a liquid. The gradual increase in human population triggered qualitative changes at certain points. Anthropologists have long known that social relationships between humans varies with population density. People behave differently in rural hamlets than they do in a densely populated city.

As the population of a settlement increases, there are qualitative changes triggered at different levels. At a certain point, people can specialize in a trade and produce only pottery or baked goods, because the demand has increased to the point of sustaining them. Marketplaces develop when there are enough specialists to

warrant gathering in a convenient location to buy, sell, and trade. War-making develops when villages expand to the point where there is no more available land, and they must take from each other. As population increases further, some warlord will accumulate enough villages to foment the idea of nationhood [18].

### **We Learn To Co-operate.**

Many animal species have societies and co-operate in groups, but most are driven by instinct or immediate self-interest. Humans developed the ability to cooperate over vast differences and with many different groups. This was tied in to the evolution of the prefrontal cortex in the human brain in early species of *Homo*. The major effect is to inhibit defection from the group and to enforce social control by self-discipline. This means that humans will self-sacrifice and help each other even if there is no benefit to the individual doing the work. Co-operation is a necessary first step towards developing cultures, which then followed [56]. No human culture can exist without cooperation from the majority of its members. Those who don't are branded criminals or can only keep violating cultural norms by threat of force or, these days, corrupt political power. Lack of co-operation is the first step in the decline of a given culture.

Humans are obligate social animals; a lone human cannot survive indefinitely

without any kind of assistance from others and still pass on his genes. Hermits do not reproduce and thus the anti-social gene is removed from the gene pool. None of this precludes selfish behaviour, which is a basic instinct of survival. Where a group of humans is in a situation of scarce resources, such as food or females, then selfish behaviour takes over because immediate survival is more important than culture, which can always be restarted later. Abnormal behaviour such as slavery or infanticide is most likely to occur in such circumstances, such as differential access to resources [66].

Cooperation also allows humans to persist despite having a low reproduction rate [60]. Most mammals are adults after a couple of years and begin breeding, while humans are unusual for the long delay before females can reproduce. Humans colonizing an area can persist by cooperation because their care of children reduces the death rate considerably, and because they can share resources so that all get some. This breaks down in high population density areas but back when *Homo sapiens* was spreading out over the planet, there was always room over the horizon. But even in today's dense cities, cooperation ensures there are food stores, schools, and so forth.

Cooperation within a group is different than cooperation between groups. Small one-family units behave differently than villages with many families. As the size of the group increases to cities or

nations, human behaviour changes and so does the form of cooperation. The earliest humans foraged as families or very small groups. When violence broke out, it was aimed at specific individuals for specific reasons such as theft or rape. As humans learned to conceptualize ideas such as nations, religions, or politics, they also developed the habit of violence against others who had done no specific harm to them [67]. This led to cooperation not for the common good or to fight others for scarce resources, both of which are known in many animal species, but to forcibly impose ideas called memes on others. Ancient philosophers noted that no man would voluntarily leave his plough to kill others who worshipped a different god or spoke a different language, but he could be induced to do so by the pressure of memes imposed by his culture. This behaviour appears to be linked to the origin of agriculture, which allowed high castes to develop who spent their time thinking about memes instead of ploughing or hunting. Cooperation is a knife that cuts both ways.

[to be continued]

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## WORLD WIDE PARTY #20

2013 will be the 20th annual World Wide Party on June 21st at 21h00 your local time. Invented by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the idea is to get a wave circulating the world of zinesters, mail artists, and SF fans toasting the Papernet. At 21h00, you are requested to raise a glass to your fellow denizens of zinedom. Face to the east and toast those who have already celebrated the WWP. Then toast to the north and south for those in your time zone. Finally, face to the west and toast those yet to celebrate. Write it up for a zine or do some mail art. Have a party, or devise your own method of celebrating.





In my neighbourhood for many years was Assman's barber shop. In this photo, take a close look at the marquee on the building and the lower half of the street sign.

And yes, Assman was his real surname. He and his brother were listed in the white pages (back when they were still published) under that name.

He has since retired and the shop is gone. I'm glad I remembered to take a photo while I could.



# WARNING



This site is protected by  
Fahrenheit 451

VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM



## INSTRUCTIONS

PRESS # TO FIND NAME AND CODE.  
PRESS AND HOLD # FOR FAST FORWARD.  
PRESS AND HOLD \* FOR FAST REVERSE.  
ENTER CODE ON KEYPAD TO PLACE CALL.

PRESS # TO START OVER.

I was visiting someone in a condo tower in downtown Calgary and noticed this decal on the lobby intercom. I later looked it up and discovered the Fahrenheit 451 company originally began as a fire alarm installer before adding security cameras to its line of business. Evidently the owner read science fiction.

I also got to thinking that the Ray Bradbury story is now completely obsolete. Thanks to the Internet, it is no longer necessary to burn books. One simply deletes them. It is already happening, not from any government conspiracy, but due to inability to archive every Website and all of its variations. I found this out recently when I tried to write a history of the Calgary Philatelic Society Website, first established in 1997. That original site is gone. It was not cached by Google nor archived at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org), and no one in the club, least of all the Webmaster, thought to take a screen shot.

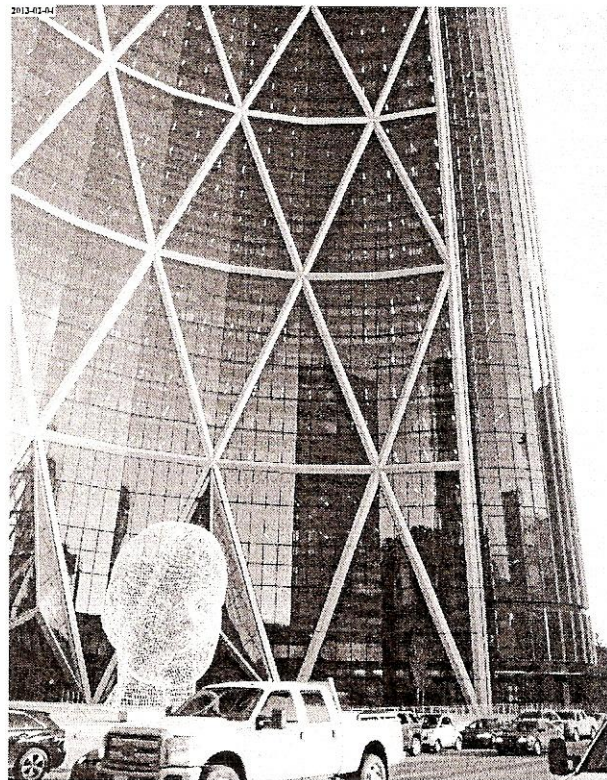
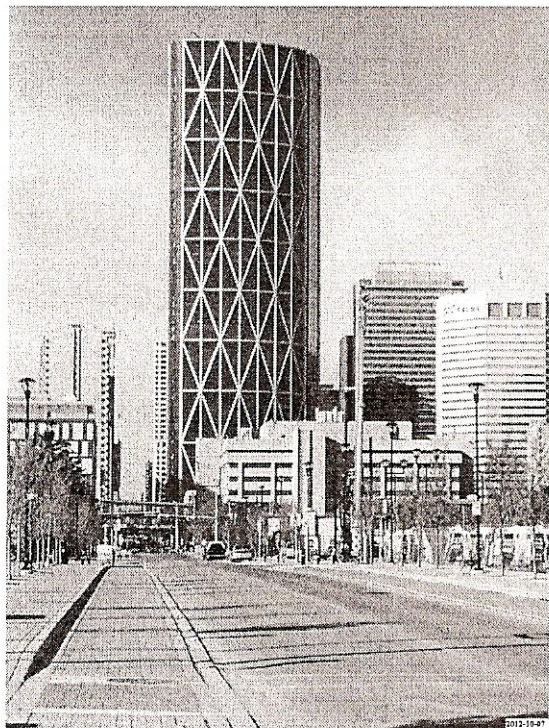
I do quite a lot of historical research on the postal history of Alberta. It is relatively easy to find data from a century ago, but there is no list extant of post offices from ten years ago, because Canada Post deleted closed offices and altered its Website beyond recognition many times, just like any other company. Many historians have already noted that the 1990s to date will be a black hole, a new Dark Ages because no one preserved the data.



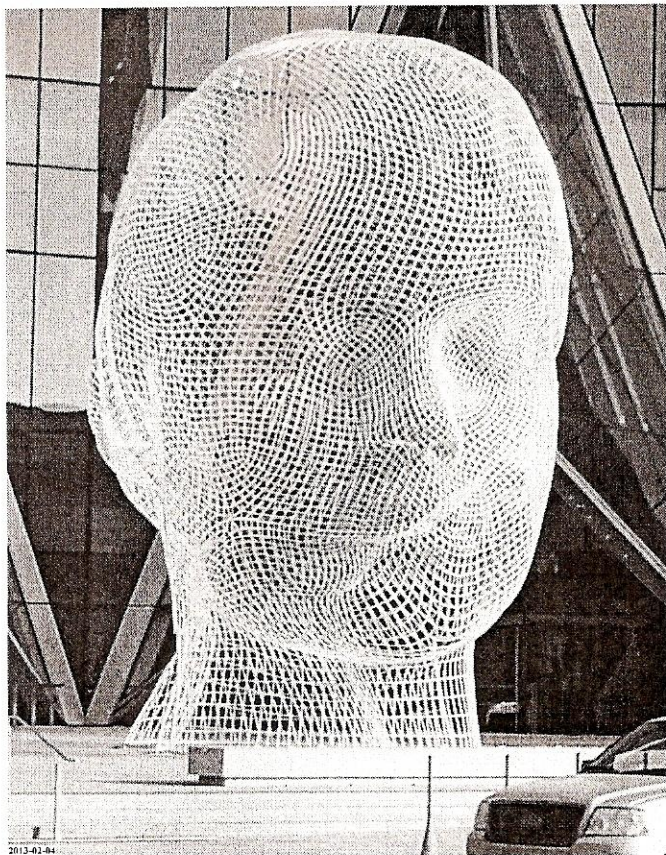
The Bow Tower on the northeast corner of downtown Calgary is the tallest building in Canada outside Toronto. The photo of it shown below was taken looking west from the edge of the downtown core. At the base of the tower is the obligatory public

art sculpture that all landlords feel they must provide to demonstrate they are good corporate citizens.

Instead of the usual scrap-metal abstract art, there is what Calgarians refer to as the Big Giant Head, although the official title of the piece is "Wonderland".







The neck has an opening so you can go inside the sculpture and look out from the inside.

