

# Crossing the Border.....



## ***Crossing the Border with Radio Relics*** *by Pete Petersen*

Back in the 1930s and early 1940s, when we lived in Oakland, CA and later in Portland, OR, my mother took my sister and me on the train once a year to visit our grandparents in Vancouver, BC. As we neared the border, coming or going, a uniformed customs or immigration officer would come through the passenger car asking each passenger polite questions, such as about their destination and purpose, and then tipping his cap and thanking them. Once an officer asked me with mock seriousness if I planned to smuggle any toys across the border. I took him very seriously and was sure that eight year old boys could be jailed for illegally hauling Tinkertoys. Now I cross the border in my car rather than on a train, but travelers still are asked the questions at the border. Things have changed, however. The polite, gracious officer has been replaced by a bored, gruff person in a cage who asks questions in a monotone while typing my car license number into a computer. Maybe I'd also be bored and gruff if I was confined to such a cage. I'm more likely to be hauling vintage radios than Tinkertoys. I visited the U.S. Customs Service web site to learn how many radios I can bring back, saw a screen that looked like it should contain what I wanted to know, and hit the print button. The printer finally stopped after producing 27 pages of lawyerly details. The crux of it all seems to be that Americans can bring home \$200 worth of radios (or other goods) without paying duty or taxes if they stay in Canada less than 48 hours and \$400 if they stay over

48 hours. When bringing radios into the US, possession of a receipt to prove to a customs officer the radio's value is highly recommended. The receipt should describe the radio honestly but modestly: "used radio" seems to work well.

Don't make the mistake of an acquaintance who was bringing home an ornate console and gushed to the customs officer about his good fortune in finding such a rare and valuable antique. He was detained an hour while manuals were read and supervisors were consulted about rules regarding importing antiquities and artifacts. Items mailed from the US to Canada must have a customs declaration attached. There are two kinds: form 2976 for packages under four pounds, and form 2976-A (with envelope 2976-E) for packages over four pounds. I hope the distinction serves a logical purpose. The recipient may have to pay the 7% GST on any packages valued at over \$200 so treat him kindly when you describe and price the item on the form 2976 (or -A). Also, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency site states that "All mail items are subject to a \$5 handling fee payable to Canada Post." The official word from the CCRS is that if radios and related neat stuff are brought into Canada to sell at a CVRS swap meet, everything is subject to the GST at the border. On the one occasion when I brought in a few things to sell I found, as with Ken's cement/cake mixer, that reason prevails. Ken's mention of Shakey's Pizza parlour cause me some reminiscing. I lived in Portland until 1960 and sometimes went to Shakey's for pizza and beer after skiing at Mt. Hood. We could have been there at the same time, and even shared a table. Shakey's was furnished with long rough wood tables and benches and it was common to share a table with another group when the it was crowded. In reminiscing about the past, or in trading radios, borders don't have to be barriers.

## *by Ken Allison*

In 1961, as a 20 year old, I noticed on my frequent visits to Portland Oregon all the great things that were offered for just a few "at par" Canadian dollars. I remember particularly sitting in Shakey's Pizza Parlour across from Marv Tonkin Chev/Olds on Southeast Foster Road gazing out at a new red Corvette Stingray for only 57.00 down and 57.00 a month. It was a super, nifty, cool *American* dream machine. I was driving a beat up English Ford at the time, but my mind was elsewhere. Two years later returning from Portland towing a cement

## ..... *with Radio Relics*

mixer that was bigger than my battered Ford Anglia, a gruff talking male Canada Customs agent declared sternly I was attempting to bring commercial property through the domestic terminal and that I would have to report to the commercial side forthwith. He made it sound like I was an international criminal. We pulled out of line and over to the commercial side. When we entered the building my wife approached the young female officer behind the counter and truthfully explained that the cement mixer had been originally purchased in Vancouver and was a part of her father's estate. The young woman expressed her regrets at her loss and declared it was a domestic mixer suitable for making cakes and could enter Canada as "settler's effects" without charge. "So that's how it works!" I said to myself.

But I still hadn't forgotten about that red Corvette. I was, even then, first, last, and always a Canadian, and standing in my way was a horrendous 45% import duty plus an impossible 5% provincial sales tax. That high tariff wall had been a part of Canada's "National Policy" since PM John A. MacDonald and there was no reason to believe it would ever disappear. Then..... years later along came PM Brian M and the Free Trade Act and over a nine year period import duties on goods made in the USA were reduced to nothing. Most goods manufactured in the USA (including old radios) could now enter Canada duty free although federal 7% GST and a provincial sales tax (where applicable) still apply.

You would think I'd be lining up to buy that cheap

Corvette, but the current 1.56 exchange rate plus 7% GST (plus an additional 7% provincial tax in BC) make most US purchases impractical... and besides... I grew up and got over it. True, there's an immense volume of "neat old radio stuff" available from American vendors on eBay "radios tube", but they are for the most part as unrealistic now as that 57.00 Stingray was then. But that doesn't keep me from clicking my way through fifteen or sixteen eBay pages each night just to see what's being offered in the Great Republic to our South. Never say never, but this new online economy doesn't really satisfy my needs. First of all, I like radio as a disembodied medium. Like this newsletter, it's made for the most part out of words. Secondly, because my passion is building furniture, I like the timeless craftsmanship of a superb wood console radio case. But big console radios bought on eBay can cost as much in shipping and handling fees as their purchase price, and as a result very few are ever offered. Finally, the thrill for me comes from going to a swap meet and swapping stories. It's the human contact that's important now, being part of a group. Sometimes I come home with a radio; sometimes I don't. As I turn 60 this year, it's the journey, not the arrival, I enjoy the most.

*When first my way to Fair I took, few pence in purse had I  
And long I used to stand and look at things I could not buy.  
But now the times are altered, if I choose to buy I can.  
The pence are here, the Fair is here,  
But where's the lost young man?"*

A.E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*



*Thanks to Elmer Rudolph for the idea and to Pete Petersen for this article. The pictures are from Canada Customs and Revenue Agency's website. The one on the left shows a big bust of All-American five tubes radios crossing the Canadian border not so cleverly disguised as several cases of Irish whiskey.*