

## The Spirit of Shirley by Leslie Ann Bent

Sooke is so much more than a town centre or a bedroom community. Sooke in the broader sense includes several tiny communities surrounding it who rely on it for essentials but each one has its own character and charm. Shirley is just one of those hamlets that lies in the folds of greater Sooke. With a famous lighthouse, Shirley Delicious and Stoked Wood Oven Pizza, plus French Beach Provincial Park, Sandcut Beach, and a hall, what more could one ask for in a community?

“Hi, Lo.” I called and waved as I neared the first mostly-vegetable booth. I could almost smell the onions and garlic calling me as I approached. ” Any pork yet?”

“Next week. It’s at the butcher. Next week for sure.” It had been our banter for the past couple of weeks. Lo glanced at the lush abundant greenery of his stand. A few rows were empty. “We’re out of summer salad but the kale’s fresh.”

I grimace. *Who likes kale?* “How about a few bunches of green onions?” We exchanged goods for cash and I proceeded on my little market route. I stopped. An old tune I recognized was playing from the stage. “Those Were the Days My Friends.” A live band that morning forced my shoulders to shimmy ever so slightly as I made my way to my next errand at the *Knead and Want* table. I hummed the old tune that Dad used to sing around the house decades past. Somehow, I knew all of the words.

While humming along to the band, Southbound and Friends, I ordered my weekly date square for my husband, Andy. I think Dan already was packaging it as he saw me approach. A whiff of fresh bread filled my nostrils.

“You’re lucky. It’s the last one. I should’ve baked more and you should’ve come earlier.” I handed Dan a toonie and two quarters, and added the sweet to my shopping bag, now bulging a bit. The aroma of fresh coffee called from my left.

“Hey Scott, I’ll have my usual – coffee with milk.” We chatted about this and that – the intimate jazz night at Shirley Hall, the number of people from out of province at this week’s market, and whether or not we’ll get some needed rain soon. A line was forming behind me and I stepped aside to let the next person order.

I mentally checked my list. Next is *Livin’ the Dream Farm*. The barefoot vendor was chatting with a couple, gesturing to the new line of mushrooms – black pearl, I overheard. Darryl’s daughter displayed her creative art work beside him, grinning ear to ear and also chatting with potential customers. Her smile was infectious and I caught myself grinning too. She’s her mother’s daughter but Katie’s not there today. She must have worked the Sooke market the previous day, so Darryl mans the stall.

I lingered and sat at an empty picnic table. I closed my eyes. I could feel the noon-time sun on my back. I took a long sip of my coffee. My heart rate fell. The aroma and music had a calming effect. For half an hour each week, this was the life away from the daily stresses, schedules and

commitments. I recognized the next tune - another from my parents' era. "Love Potion Number 9." Sherry and Shannon were awesome with this female rendition of the old Searchers number, projecting in harmony and capturing the snappiness of the original version. I noticed a few shoppers watching and moving closer to the stage. A few children were dancing. I couldn't help myself. Despite the items still on my list, I lingered, wanting to stay for just one more song. This versatile group didn't disappoint. Ray Charles would have approved. "Hit the Road Jack" was next and I sang the lyrics along with them.

Alas, I had a few more people to see. My hips swayed as I make my way to *Livin' the Dream* across this make shift grassy dance floor.

*Please have herb salad.* "Any salad left?"

"Nope, sold it all yesterday at the Sooke market. I do have some of Andy's spicy shoots, though." It's bagged before I even said 'yes.'

Maggie at French Beach Farm was next. I'd seen one of her potted floral arrangements and wanted to order one for Andy's birthday. Then around the corner to Sonja for a few boxes of blueberries and to Sharon Finney's Farm for some fresh herbs. I turned my head as I passed the art work, knitting and weaving. I bought more than enough stock the previous week. The colours are gorgeous and so tempting – better to pretend it's not there. No see, no buy.

Vivi, Alison, Susan, Shannon, and Jeff all had time for a short chat with tidbits of news as I made my way to the exit, strategically passing Jordan River's ice cream cart (Lavender was the flavour of the week, I might add - knowledge I have from personal experience).

The community spirit is alive and well and living at the Shirley Country Market. I love it.